

Introducing a Reading into our Discussion

Our learning in this seminar moves down several tracks simultaneously. We read about the topic scheduled for each week's session. We will have brief critical reviews focused on a selected article or chapter. Each seminar participant studies a particular organization or individual. The films offer different perspectives on and insights into the themes we address. Our seminar sessions address several domains of contested transition in post-apartheid South Africa. The online exchange permits continued discussion between our weekly seminars. And more.

As we proceed down multiple paths, an important skill is introducing into our discussion a reading or other source we have found useful. You already do that regularly ("Hey, I found this interesting article on . . ."). To help develop and refine that skill, each week a few students will comment on a course reading.

While it is essential to capture and communicate the author's major idea(s) or argument, the goal is not an extensive and exhaustive summary of the reading. Rather, the task is to focus the reading, which may explore many issues more or less directly connected with our topic for a particular week, on the issues we are discussing. That is, the task is not «here is a summary of this article» but rather «here is how this author addresses the topic/issue we are considering».

Accordingly, in your report on a reading you should:

- comment briefly on context: what is the source? who is the author? where did the article/chapter appear? for whom/to whom does the author seem to be writing?
- summarize briefly the author's major point (that may vary among readings and could be a key idea or insight, a systematic argument or analysis, the presentation or critique of a particular line of thought or methodology, a response to another author); as appropriate, explain important or unfamiliar constructs or terms
- indicate briefly how the reading relates to the major theme we are discussing (what does this reading add to our discussion?)

To introduce a reading into our discussion you need not only to read it carefully but also to think through what you plan to present. For that, you may find useful an outline or brief notes. A short focused presentation does not have time to refer back to the reading and its details. If you find yourself looking through the article as you present, your preparation was incomplete.

Note the emphasis on "briefly." Your comment should be focused and concise, requiring no more than 2-3 minutes.

Alyssa can assist with these reports. As well, support for oral presentations (and writing) is available through the Hume Center for Writing and Speaking. Oral Communications Tutors are available, both by appointment (<https://undergrad.stanford.edu/tutoring-support/hume-center/see-tutor>) and drop-in.

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