

Summary/Response Papers

Assignment: Write a one-page paper summarizing and then responding to the assigned essay (see syllabus). Roughly two-thirds of the page should be a summary of what the author says/argues (his/her claims and supports), the last third your response to what the author says. The paper must be typewritten and single-spaced. It is due the next class period (see syllabus). This assignment serves as a guide for all SR papers.

Explanation of Summary Section: The first two-thirds of the page should be a concise summary of the essay itself, an attempt to convey in your own words the main point/issue/thesis/argument the author is trying to get across. Stay as close as possible to the text. Quoting the author's exact words at times will not only help the reader become connected to the original text, but it will help you work through what is going on in the text. Phrases such as "(author's name) says/notes/states," and "According to (author's name)," etc., will help, but don't over use them. [Be sure to cite quotes with an in-text citation: "... (p#).] Also be sure to mark sentences that seem like main claims and the examples that support them as you read through the essay. This allows you to skim through the text and pick them out while you are writing your summary. Be sure to provide the examples that the author gives to support his/her main point, and to evaluate the text on a literal (denotative) and inferential (connotative) level. Ask yourself, "what is the author directly referring to?" and "what does this reference mean or imply?" In the summary, your aim is to hand over to your reader your understanding of WHAT the text actually says/means. Part of the point of this paper is to force a to-the-point approach to the essay. You will not have room to cover all of the points the author makes, so you will need to hit the high spots and zero in on what you consider to be the main point(s). The first sentence of your paper should state, "In (title), (author's name) says/does/argues _____": Get right to the main point/claim in the first sentence. Use that as a one-sentence summary of the argument as a whole, and then use the rest of the summary to explain the support the author provides for that main idea.

Explanation of Response Section: The last third of the page should be your response to the essay—your reaction to what you think the author is trying to do/say. Here your aim is to explain where you do and/or do not feel comfortable accepting the author's position, and to hand over to your readers your response to what the text says/means to you. The response section is not simply a spot to say, "Here's what I think." Remember, subjective opinions aren't enough—avoid saying 'I think', 'I feel', or 'I believe' *without giving sound reasons why*. You will need to make connections between what the author says, your own experience, your own prior knowledge, and to historical or cultural contexts and examples. This will keep your response from being strictly opinion. Your goal is to synthesize all of these "texts" into a new text. Remember, they are all interrelated already; it is simply up to you to find the connections. As you read the essay, it is also helpful to jot down in the margins any ideas or comments that come to mind. This will give you some potential directions for your response. Feel free to refer to sources outside of the text, including personal experiences, to EXPLAIN yourself. This section should generally form a reasoned argument, though it might, for instance, simply place the essay in a larger context, apply its ideas to another situation (look at it as if it were in a new rhetorical situation/historical context), associate it with other familiar material (your prior knowledge), or describe/define it in terms of your own perspective (your life or personal rhetorical situation). You may, however, choose to discuss HOW the author's text functions—how it means what it means—or examine/critique the writing itself. But again, you should watch using phrases such as 'I believe' or 'I feel'. That is, to a certain degree, what you will be expressing in this part of the assignment, but be sure to EXPLAIN WHY you take the position on the text that you do, and to give examples of your own that support your position. Giving your position on the text completely relies on you figuring out what the text says, so spend an ample amount of time focusing on the summary/exposition.

Note: At the end of each SR paper, also include a citation for the essay you discuss. See the MLA guide in the handbook for both the in-text format and the works cited format.

Grades: The SR papers will generally be graded across these criteria: 1) how well you capture the gist of the essay in the intro sentence; 2) how much detail you get in the summary section, and the relevancy of this detail; 3) the thoughtfulness and relevancy of your response; 4) the clarity of your writing and how well the ideas flow from one to another. (Obviously grammar is an aspect of clarity—if you write a sentence that is so scrambled it doesn't make sense, it's a clarity problem as much as a grammar problem.) SRs will receive formal letter grades.