

Essay #2: The Response Paper

The response paper is an essay form which is often used in the humanities and social sciences (history, psychology, anthropology, etc.). A professor will ask you to "respond" to one of the readings or to an issue raised in class. A response paper is also often the form used for blog posts -- having read a particular other blog post, article, or book, the poster responds. You can think of a response paper as a "review" of a particular text, subject, or issue.

Although many writers think of such an essay, post, or paper simply as a way to air their thoughts, feelings, or opinions, a proper response paper is structured like an *essay*: like other essays, it is an *argument*. It should, therefore, have a strong thesis statement and should present arguments to support that statement throughout the text. It should use evidence -- drawn from whatever it is responding to -- and cogent, well-structured arguments to convince the reader to agree with the writer's opinion.

Response papers, like blog posts, are less formal than traditional analytic essays (although it is not appropriate to be quite as informal as a blogger for a response paper for an academic class -- i.e. do not swear!). Response papers are expected to center around your reaction or opinion (which forms the core of the thesis), but again, as in a traditional essay, but you must present evidence and arguments in order to show the reader why you feel that way (and, hopefully, to convince your reader to feel similarly).

For this assignment, you should write a response paper centering on one of these readings:
Scott, Janny. 2005. "Life at the Top in America Isn't Just Better, It's Longer."
Eighner, Lars. 1998. "On Dumpster Diving,"
Newton, Esther. 2000. "High School Crack-Up."

Focus on your own reaction to the reading. What is your opinion, your reaction? On what do you *base* your opinion? Remember that you can use any part of your essay for your analysis -- any statistical facts presented in the essay, any events or occurrences, the language used in the essay, even things which might have been relevant to the topic which the author chose to leave out.

Remember to focus your opinion in the form of a thesis which you can then support with evidence throughout the essay. Here are some examples of responses to some material we read earlier in the semester:

"I found 'Indian Education' depressing because the hope of escape from poverty it offers is narrow, perhaps almost impossible." (This reaction piece would focus on what Alexie was attempting to convey in terms of hope or despair through "Indian Education.")

"'Soap and Water' seems like a dated piece, but also provides a window into the struggles of immigrant workers today." (This essay would probably provide data from other sources on current immigrant workers, to compare with the "Soap and Water" essay.)

"I found it difficult to react to Della Mae Justice as a middle-class person in Tamar Lewin's 'Up From the Holler,' and I believe this is due to her emphasis on accent and dialect words. Perhaps Tamar also had this difficulty." (This essay would examine the words used in the Lewin piece very closely and would try to analyze Lewin's attitude towards Della Mae Justice through that.)

You may note that reaction papers almost universally use the first person, as opposed to very formal humanities or science essays, in which first person is forbidden.

Create a thesis statement out of your own reaction to the Scott, Eighner, or Newton readings, and write an informal or semi-formal essay of four pages focusing on your reaction and why you had it (the evidence and arguments). Try to convince your audience that your reaction is a valid one.

This essay should be **four pages long**, exclusive of the Works Cited page.

Remember to do the following:

- Write a thesis that argues for your opinion coherently and convincingly.**
- Support your thesis with relevant examples drawn from your text(s).**
- Structure your essay in such a way that each point leads naturally to the next and provides not only a good flow for the reader, but a build-up of convincing arguments.**
- Use correct and clear language.**
- Use appropriate formatting and citation.**
 - All papers must be typed or word-processed *and printed out*. No email submissions will be accepted.
 - Three (3) copies of each rough draft must be brought to class for peer review.
 - Your full name must appear on the first page of the paper and your last name in a header or footer in subsequent pages.
 - All papers must be spell checked; they must have page numbers; they must use in-text citation; they must have a correctly formatted Works Cited page; they must have a title; they must be written in 12-point font and have margins of one inch; they must be double-spaced; **and all of these things are required for every draft.** (Please refer to the handouts on citation and essay style)
 - Every paper must have a *cover letter*. (Please refer to the handout on cover letters)
 - A peer review letter must be provided for every paper you review during the peer review cycle.
 - Written work submitted later than fifteen minutes after the beginning of class on the due date will be counted as a day late. Late papers are lowered by a third of a grade for each day late (i.e. a B+ paper will be graded B), except in cases of illness or emergency.
 - All sources MUST be cited.**

Your **first draft is due on 10/9**. Please remember to bring three copies (four if you wish to retain one) to class, and to prepare a cover letter for each one.

Your **final draft is due on 10/16**. You need bring only one copy, but do not forget the cover letter, your commented-on copies of the previous draft, and peer review letters.