

GNM 2261: Writing Good Response Papers

This document is meant to help you in your response “summaries” to the discussion items assigned in this class. Remember response papers (approximately 1 page long: could be longer or shorter depending on length of assigned papers) are due on WebCT by 10 pm every Monday. You are going to do 12 of these this semester. Every week I try to guide you in what you should concentrate on in your responses. However, if I do not highlight any specific issues, you should follow these guidelines to get full credit.

1. **FOCUS:** select a specific issue that you would like to address fully within your write-up. I have read the papers that I ask you to review a million times and I know them very well. Summarizing the whole paper (point for point) for me is unnecessary. Just highlight the main points to demonstrate to me that you can separate the important points from the trivial ones. After that, select one, two or three main points that you would like to address from the paper. Form a thesis (if possible) around the points you selected for your discussion.
2. **SUPPORT YOUR CLAIMS:** Do not just refer to particular passages in passing. Provide some (specific) evidence to show me where you are coming from. Personal experience, citations from local areas or something you have read in a journal article that I can verify would be acceptable here.
3. **Discuss SIGNIFICANT points:** Anytime I read your responses I say to myself, *So what?* Why should I care about the points you highlighted in your response? Does your discussion deepen everyone’s understanding of the article you are discussing? If not, you have done a lousy job in your reaction paper.
4. Write in proper English. Follow standard grammatical rules, spell check, **PROOFREAD** etc (see the article on [common mistakes on term papers](#)).
5. Do not copy other people’s postings. I will find out and make fun of you.

USEFUL TIPS:

Do not leave your reading or your writing until the last minute. It is easy to tell when someone is “rushed”. It makes for a bad summary (incomplete development, poor style, shoddy arguments etc) and bad summaries get you bad grades. Also you do not benefit from the process and bad writers do not do well at their jobs or graduate school. It does not hurt to be funny, but in a tasteful way!

REVISE. Look for passages you underlined, questioned, found amusing. Think about what might be behind your reactions, and use them as a possible starting point for your essay.

I must emphasize that I am not looking for a summary of the chapter and a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.” I am looking for you to highlight some aspect of the chapter. It does not impress me that people have opinions. What impresses me is how well people formulate, present and defend their views (“that is just my opinion” is not a valid defense for an opinion). I will be happy to help you if you are confused about anything. The point of these writings is not to complicate or make your lives tougher. I want you to get used to reading and extracting important information from texts, articles and other forms of media (remember this is a V class). One way to find out whether you are doing your responses the right way would be to come by and go through one with me.