

Your Guide to Writing a Reading Reaction Paper

A reading reaction paper is your opportunity to demonstrate that you've read the assignment and thought deeply about it; ideally, it should represent a mini-analysis of some part of the work that struck you as important or meaningful. I encourage you to *record and express any thoughts, questions, and/or concerns that come up as you read*, and thus develop independent ideas about a text. Furthermore, your response should *succinctly state what part of the work you see as significant and then explain its relationship to the work as a whole*. **Don't tell me what happened or summarize the text. I've read the material and don't need this information.** Instead, *your focus should be explaining to me as clearly as possible how and why a certain detail or incident shapes your analysis and is important to your overall understanding of the work*. Make certain that you support any generalizations with specifics and that you offer me some less-than-obvious insight as a reward for reading your reaction paper!

All I ask of you is a certain degree of care and focus as you pay attention to the text and choose something about which to write. The reading reaction paper is not a formal paper, so you do not have to produce a developed thesis and argument; however, make sure your writing is free of mistakes and that your style is interesting. Be clear about what you are saying, and communicate what fascinates or troubles you. Remember that a reading reaction is not just about what you like or don't like – you may *begin* with feelings, but you do not end there. **Try to make sense of the text.**

Reading reaction papers provide several valuable services for me: They help me insure that you do the reading and help me assess your level of understanding and the depth of your thinking; they help me monitor your writing skills; and finally, they improve the level of our classroom discussion.

I've provided you with a guide to get you started below. These steps to analysis are loosely adapted from *Writing and Thinking Analytically* by David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen.

Examples of possible types of responses (you can use one or more of these when analyzing the texts you have chosen—please let me know which tool(s) of analysis you have chosen):

1. *Focus* on a small part: Discuss one sentence or passage in detail and explain its significance for the whole or find two key sentences or passages and discuss their relationship.
2. Assemble pieces of evidence: Locate three “hotspots” from the text (passages that seem *important, striking, puzzling*) and suggest what they might show individually or together.
3. Formulate overarching *ideas, themes, or problems*: Devise a good question, explain why the answer is not so obvious, and then try to answer it by finding three appropriate passages or locate and define a theme or main subject of the text.
4. *Revise or complicate*: Give a raw response, then either analyze it for your own assumptions, values, expectations, or after rereading, give a second response complicating or refuting what you first thought.
5. *Define* significant parts and how they're *related*: Try to figure out what rhetorical tools the writer uses and how those tools help us understand the meaning of the subject as a whole.
6. Make the implicit *explicit*: Convert meanings that are suggested but not overtly stated into direct statements.

7. Look for *patterns*: Seek out repetitions or resemblance, contrasts, or anomalies. The latter are especially important for they help us refine our claims and keep us from ignoring evidence; they often lead us to new and better questions and ideas.

8. Keep *reformulating* questions and explanations; REMEMBER, uncertainty is a normal and necessary part of understanding.

A. Which details seem significant? Why?

B. What is the significance of a particular idea? What does it mean?

C. What else might it mean?

D. How do the details fit together? What do they have in common?

E. What does this pattern of details mean?

F. What else might this same pattern of details mean? How else could it be explained?

G. What details don't seem to fit? How might they be connected with other details to form a different pattern?

H. What does this new pattern mean? How might it cause me to read the meaning of the individual details differently?

Your reading reaction papers will be scored based on their focus and depth. You should attempt a variety of responses so you display critical thinking—thinking about things in a variety of ways and from different perspectives. Try offering new or unique considerations

Adapted from Amy Habberstad's "Reading Reaction Paper" from asdk12.org (Anchorage School District Online)