

## Understanding Response Papers<sup>1</sup>

### *Definition*

A response paper communicates your intellectual reactions to an idea in the articles and papers we read for class. Much like a book review, the response paper usually provides your overall point of view regarding the material read.

### *Steps to writing a good response paper*

Writing good response papers is demanding. You need not only to read the text but also to understand and express an opinion about it, including how different ideas relate to one another. Response papers require you to synthesize the intellectual work of others – that is, integrate the ideas.

1. As you write only highlight the most important points discussed in the article and think whether or not you agree with them. Why would it be important (or not) for other people to read this article? Who should read it? What are its implications for the subject at hand?
2. After you read, think about the argument you want to make in your response paper. Your response should cover the most important and most interesting ideas to which you will respond. Be selective.
3. In the response paper, argue convincingly whether or not the article:
  - (a) has a clear central claim;
  - (b) is good enough to be thoroughly analyzed;
  - (c) is coherent or ambiguous;
  - (d) is simplistic or fails to cover significant issues or questions, thus is irrelevant;
  - (e) is based on strong assumptions and/or does not present persuasive evidence to support the main assumption(s) or argument;
  - (f) is contradicted by other authors' theories or your own.
4. Write the response paper using the standards for any academic paper (i.e., excellent spelling and grammar, special attention to quotations and citations, double spacing, standard one-inch margins, and legible font size).
5. Do not just summarize the text(s). You are supposed to be reacting or responding to them, not repeating what they say. If there is no analysis involved, then you have not responded, only regurgitated.
6. If there are things in the article that you do not understand, do not gloss over them. Try to find out what the author(s) mean. If you still cannot make sense of an argument in a text, then it may be the case that the argument does not, in fact, make sense. If that is the case, point it out in your paper.

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<sup>1</sup> This text has excerpts from materials prepared by the Duke University Writing Studio and the University of South Dakota Academic Advising Center

### *Structure of a response paper*

1. Introduce the major theme in the first paragraph of the response paper and organize and unify your arguments around that theme. Do not just respond to the issues discussed in the paper's introduction and conclusion because this is a rather transparent strategy to avoid reading the paper. Instead, pay special attention to overarching themes as well as specifics.
2. In the following paragraphs (i.e., the body of your response paper), discuss the issues where you agree or disagree with the author(s), explain your position, evaluate the evidence the author(s) provides/provide, and give examples. Be specific and detailed. Connect the evidence to your major theme. If you are responding to multiple articles, you may compare and contrast the authors based on your major theme. Be sure to cite the page when you are using specific ideas or quotes. Your thoughts or beliefs, should you decide to include them in your discussion, must be supported by facts and logic. Consider both sides of issues at stake. If the author(s) is (are) on one side of an issue, consider the other side. If the author(s) offers (offer) both sides of an issue, consider where agreements and disagreements lie and what each side's strengths and weaknesses are. Indicate omissions, and raise counterarguments when you detect arguments that are not well-supported.
3. Conclude your response paper by summarizing your reaction and setting out your ideas about the significance of the article, as well as its implications.

### *Proper formatting, grading, and submission instructions*

Your response paper should be **two-pages, double-spaced** in standard Arial font, 12-point in size, 8.5" x 11" paper, 1-inch margins all around. Figures (not required but can be included) should not be included in this page count. References must be included.

Each response paper will be worth 5% of the overall grade. You should bring a copy of your completed assignment to class and be prepared to share your work with your classmates.

### *Use MIT writing resources*

This seminar requires that you have the ability to communicate your ideas effectively in writing. If you have difficulty writing in proper English, you should seek assistance at the MIT Writing and Communication Center. Meet with the instructors if you have questions about the paper, but we will not read a draft of the paper before it is due.

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