

Writing Expectations for Response Papers

It's generally easier to write long than to write short. Response papers to assigned texts are an exercise in brevity, clarity and substance (see syllabus for specific word count on assignments). Faculty have varying expectations on what constitutes a response paper. Mine are as follows:

- Three paragraphs
- Paragraph one: Your thesis or central question. This may or may not be the same as the author's. Choose one specific idea or quote from the author. Rewrite it in the form of a central question or thesis statement (see Writing Center resources for more information, www.evergreen.edu/writingcenter).
- Paragraph two: Support your central question or thesis statement. Use brief (one to two line) quotes from the text, paraphrasing, and your interpretation and analysis.
- Paragraph three: Conclusion. How did the assigned text for the paper in general, and your thesis/central question specifically, affect your thinking on the topic? Paragraph three is the only part of the paper that can be in first person. No need to relay how comfy you were when you settled in with the reading or parts of your life story that relate to it in paragraph one.

The following are guidelines for your response papers to assigned texts. For each element below, e.g. title, thesis or central question, etc., three examples are given – excellent, fair and weak. This should give you an idea of what level of writing skill you have/are aiming for, as well as the skill level of your peer editor at times when you are asked to exchange papers and critique your classmate's.

Content

	Excellent	Fair	Weak
Title of paper	Original title reflecting main idea of paper; invites reader interest/curiosity	Somewhat general matching with paper's theme	Same title as book chapter
Thesis or central question – what you found most interesting, puzzling, exciting from the reading, not necessarily the author's main point (although it could be)	Clear statement of an intriguing thesis or central question	General or vague thesis or question, including student's opinion	None
Identification of	Specific quoted	Broad	

support of your thesis or central question	examples of support, including page number from text	generalizations and stereotyping	None or mis-identification
Challenge to thesis or central question – what are some weaknesses in your thesis or central question or arguments you can think of against it?	Discussion of opposing views	Broad generalizations and stereotyping; no specific references to text	None
Overall faculty reaction to paper	Is so good it makes me forget that I evaluate student papers for a living	Gives me some pleasure, but I know I'm working	Agony

Mechanics

	Excellent	Fair	Weak
Thesis or question	Specific, well-crafted statement; needs to be supported by evidence – validity not immediately obvious	Broad, general, descriptive statement; validity of statement generally recognized without supporting evidence	None or doesn't relate to rest of paper
Introductory paragraph	Connection to and/or amplification of thesis or question; creative techniques used	Some connection to thesis	No connection to rest of paper or "it's all about me"
Organization of paper	Clearly organized; flows logically from one point to the next; creatively done	Basic elements present (thesis, support, conclusion); not particularly creatively done or well written (e.g. wordy, inconsistent order of elements, etc.)	Not organized or poorly done, e.g. jumps from topic to topic, no support of thesis
Concluding paragraph	Restatement of thesis + conclusions drawn from evidence presented and implications of argument	Restatement of thesis	None or weak conclusion
Citations	Thorough references with complete and	Some. Inconsistent punctuation,	None

	consistent information for each citation	information, etc.	
Spelling	Few if any errors. Obviously spell-checked and proofread	Several errors. Sole reliance on spell-check and not proofread	Numerous errors. No obvious attempt at spell checking or proofreading
Grammar	Few if any errors. Obviously grammar-checked, proofread; thorough effort made to research answers to grammar problems	Several errors. Sole reliance on grammar-check and not proofread; some attempt to research answers to grammar problems	Numerous errors. No obvious attempt to research and correct errors