

## ON READING AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

This handout will provide detailed directions for two assignments: the Reflective Journal and the Reading Response papers. It will also offer brief descriptions of our expectations for your reading and for your Reading Notes (listed on the weekly schedule). More detailed directions for the Notes and for the Integrative Paper will follow on separate handouts.

### CLOSE READING

In a skilful close reading of a text, you read to understand a writer's ideas carefully and deeply enough to follow a complex argument, to literally track the intellectual moves of that argument, to notice the practice of theorizing. If you are new to this kind of reading, good close readers typically do the following:

- Write margin notes as they read, identifying key ideas and questions
- Paraphrase key ideas in relation to examples given
- Read and re-read complex sections of text
- Summarize or map the writer's argument from paragraph to paragraph or from section to section
- Note puzzling passages (especially for use in Reading Response work)

### READING NOTES

As a way to strengthen students' abilities as close readers and also to deepen preparation for seminars, we will require that students take detailed notes on more difficult texts. You will see these assignments listed on the weekly schedule as "Notes" followed by the specific text for that assignment. In week #2 we will present a more detailed handout explaining how we want you to prepare these notes.

### READING RESPONSE PAPERS

(Note: These papers are abbreviated as "RR" on the weekly preparation schedule.)

The Reading Response Papers, informed by your written notes on the readings, provide a place for you to respond formally to what you have read. Here are some guidelines that you might consider:

- Choose a quotation that stretches your mind, a passage that is especially challenging or puzzling (as compared to one that reaffirms an existing viewpoint). One book described this choice in the following way:

"From your point of view as a reader, the sentences important *for you* are those that require an effort of interpretation because, at first sight, they are not perfectly intelligible. You understand them just well enough to know that there is more to understand."

"...Perhaps you are beginning to see how essential a part of reading it is *to be perplexed and know it*. Wonder is the beginning of wisdom in learning from books as well as from nature. If you never ask yourself any questions about the meaning of a passage, you cannot expect the book to give you any insight you do not already possess."

"...Many persons believe that they know how to read because they read at different speeds. But they pause and go slow *over the wrong sentences*. They pause over the sentences that *interest* them rather than the ones that *puzzle* them."

Excerpts from: Adler, M. and C. Van Doren. 1972. *How to Read a Book*. New York: MJF Books. First published in 1940 by M. Adler.

- Adopt the practice of being *in conversation* with the writer, and include the elements of any engaging conversation: we learn new things, seek connections between what we think and what we hear or read, question our own ideas, puzzle over statements made, and so on.
- Be conscious that a Reading Response paper is a conversation with the author whose work you are reading—there should be evidence of “turn taking,” back and forth—your thinking, reference to the text and to the writer’s thinking, your thinking, and back to the writer again.

These papers will be due four times during the quarter (due dates below and on the schedule). We will use this paper when we want you to engage with difficult or provocative texts. The Reading Response paper is designed to encourage you to explore one small piece of the assigned reading. As you read the texts assigned for seminar discussion, note passages that are especially interesting or challenging for you. These papers work best when you use them to figure out some difficult or puzzling or provocative ideas in the text, and when you apply this idea in your own thinking in valuable ways.

Your two-page paper should be structured in three parts:

A) A short quotation from the reading that captures the point you want to talk about. Note: Please *single-space* the quotation, and include the page number.

B) Your understanding of what you think the author means in the passage you've selected. Where possible, mention how the quotation contributes to the writer’s larger framework of ideas in that paragraph or section.

C) What significance the passage has for you. How do the ideas compare with your own experiences, beliefs, or political, moral or religious convictions? How might you apply the writer’s ideas in practice? Why is it important for you (or anyone) to think hard about these ideas?

These papers should be typed and brought to class in final form on the assigned dates. There are four assigned Reading Response papers. We will collect and comment on these papers.

Please note also that these papers will provide a major source of our awareness of what you are learning in the course. We make notes about these during the quarter (as well as comments on the papers themselves), and we rely on our notes and your papers as we write your evaluations.

Due Dates:

Length: two pages

Week #2 (October 7)

Week #3 (October 14)

Week #4 (October 21)

Week #8 (November 18)

## REFLECTIVE JOURNAL: DESIGN AND EXPECTATIONS

Because we believe that each person’s education is a complex, unpredictable, unique process, we have structured into this course as a major component a reflective journal. This journal will be a regular aspect of your work for the course, including both homework and in-class entries. These instructions will give an overview of the journal and its purposes, and it will provide structure and directions for the writing that you do for your journal outside of class.

The journal is *a place to explore your ideas*, not a finished statement of your ideas. We certainly do not expect you to revise or clean up journal entries, and we expect that there will be times when you will write something and then have a different—even contradictory—idea a few minutes or a few days later. That’s how thoughtful exploration works, and we hope that the journal invites you to try out and re-consider ideas.

### STRUCTURE:

We expect you to spend 60-90 minutes each week writing in this journal outside of class. We do not assume that you will write a single extended entry (though this is fine), but rather that you will probably write a few shorter pieces exploring various topics and questions that interest you. Sometimes a topic will take you into a longer and more complex exploration; at other times a topic may quickly prove uninteresting. Please use your own engagement as a guide.

We have scheduled journal due dates at two-week intervals throughout the quarter. This immediately raises a logistical problem: how can you write in your journal if we have it with us? To solve this problem, we would like to ask you to do your journal writing on loose paper, either lined paper (if you handwrite) or computer paper (for word-processed journals). Please keep these loose pages in some kind of simple folder that you turn in to us on the due dates. We will be happy to give you a beautiful colored folder, if you wish. You can then insert your new pages when we return that folder at the next class session. This way, you can keep writing at home even when we have your folder, and all of your journal entries (in-class and outside of class) can be kept together in a single collection. (Please do not use a substantial binder for your journal, as this will tax our aging bodies when we try to carry them home.)

Finally, it will be helpful to us if you title and/or date each entry, so that we can appreciate the development of your ideas.

### FOCUS:

As a reflective journal, we want you to use this space to reflect on your own education (past, present, future), your own engagement with our class, your experiences and vision of an Evergreen education, and your thoughts about certain central questions around which we have designed this course. You will find Guiding Questions in the syllabus, and the list below includes both those and additional topics that we believe are relevant.

- What is the purpose of education?
- What is worth understanding?
- What practices turn learning into schooling, and schooled experience into what Paulo Freire called the “restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other”?
- How has your own educational history influenced your understanding of yourself as a learner?
- How do your own educational experiences and beliefs connect to the current political arguments about public education?
- Use one or more of the Five Foci of Learning at Evergreen (attached) to explore your educational experiences both before and at Evergreen.
- Explore further your thoughts and questions on a topic from our work in class.

### TOPICS:

On each week’s agenda, we will provide topics for you to consider for your writing outside of class. As the quarter progresses, we will increasingly shift the topic list toward ones that the class (as a group) and you (individually) determine. Please take note of these topics each week; we will both announce them in class and post them on the website.

### DUE DATES:

We will collect your journals on the following dates:

Week #2: October 7

Week #4: October 21

Week #6: November (turned in at individual conference, or by other arrangement)

Week #8: November 18

Week #10: December 9

(Note: if you are absent on one of these due dates, please turn in your journal—by hand or by e-mail—to Gillies or Lester as soon as possible, and *before* the next class meeting.)

Learning and teaching at Evergreen are guided by two sets of principles, which you will find mentioned frequently in public documents that describe the college and in internal working pieces such as course syllabi and departmental mission statements. We offer these two sets of principles here as an opportunity to promote your reflections on the structure of Evergreen and its relation to your own educational history and goals.

The first set is referred to as the “Five Foci”:

## **What We Believe: The Five Foci of Learning**

We Believe...

The main purpose of a college is to promote student learning through:

**INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY:** Students learn to pull together ideas and concepts from many subject areas, which enables them to tackle real-world issues in all their complexity.

**COLLABORATIVE LEARNING:** Students develop knowledge and skills through shared learning, rather than learning in isolation and in competition with others.

**LEARNING ACROSS SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES:** Students learn to recognize, respect and bridge differences - critical skills in an increasingly diverse world.

**PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT:** Students develop their capacities to judge, speak and act on the basis of their own reasoned beliefs.

**LINKING THEORY WITH PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS:** Students understand abstract theories by applying them to projects and activities and by putting them into practice in real-world situations.

The second set of principles is the “Six Expectations”:

## **The Six Expectations of an Evergreen Graduate**

- \* Articulate and assume responsibility for your own work
- \* Participate collaboratively and responsibly in our diverse society
- \* Communicate creatively and effectively
- \* Demonstrate integrative, independent and critical thinking
- \* Apply qualitative, quantitative and creative modes of inquiry appropriately to practical and theoretical problems across disciplines
- \* As a culmination of your education, demonstrate depth, breadth and synthesis of learning and the ability to reflect on the personal and social significance of that learning