

How to Write a *Critical* and *Reflective* Reaction Paper

A reaction paper is a critical reflection on a course issue, reading, speaker, or discussion. If you are unfamiliar with this type of writing these prompts may help you.

Prompt A: Write a Critical, Reflective Reaction Paper Based Upon a Feeling

Consider the novel/passage about which you will write: how do you *feel*? Focus on articulating a specific feeling, a particular, precise emotion that this novel, passage, or issue within the novel brings up for you. What is the possible range of emotions? Why might readers respond with curiosity, anxiety, interest, fear, anger, confusion, boredom, disinterest, resentment, shame, or any other feeling that was evoked or could be evoked by the reading or discussion? Keep in mind that your feeling may not represent the only possible reaction to this novel or passage. Look both within and outside yourself.

When you have identified your emotion try to locate its source or cause. Why do you think you have this feeling about the issue/passage/novel? Try to identify the source as precisely as you can. Use specific passages from the novel or examples from discussion to support your analysis.

Prompt B: Write a Critical, Reflective Reaction Paper Based Upon Intellect

Now that you've identified your emotional response, what do you think? On a cognitive level, what do you *think* and *know* about the novel, passage, or issue raised in class discussion? This line of inquiry relies less on emotion and more on intellect. What do you believe, perceive, understand, remember, and connect to? What knowledge is most relevant or important for understanding this passage or novel? How important do you perceive this issue to be, why and to whom? Is it important personally or generally, nationally or regionally?

When you have identified a key issue or question that the text raises, consider: What skills do you have that will help you interpret this novel/issue/question? What information do you have that you think connects to this issue or novel? What things do you not understand clearly? Do you have historical perspectives that are associated? Are your current perspectives different from the ones you had previously? Did you have misconceptions about this issue/novel/character/etc.? If so, what were they? What additional information would you like to have? You could do some further research and read additional sources on your topic for your reflection to incorporate other perspectives.

Some Reaction Papers will focus primarily on Prompt A, others Prompt B. All Reactions Papers should begin with a clear focus. I strongly suggest that you place your thesis or argument in the first paragraph; however, some topics may benefit from an unfolding thesis (where the most explicit statement of your argument appears in the concluding paragraph). Remember you need to write at least one reaction paper of 1-2 typed pages (250-500 words) about each novel. You may write no more than one Reaction Paper per week. Your first five reaction papers are due by Oct. 21. Please include a title, your name, your instructor's name, the course name, and the date. Finally, don't forget to proofread your paper before printing and submitting it to your instructor.

When you put the answers to the above questions and others of a similar nature together in a coherent fluid paper, you have a reaction paper that is reflective. Happy writing!