

Reading Journals

In order to help you structure your readings in this class, you will keep a “reading journal.” Each entry should be typed, double-spaced, with 1” margins on all sides. You should aim for one and a half to two pages in length. They should never exceed three pages nor be less than one. You will be handing in roughly 10 sets of reading notes; one for every class in which we discuss specific readings. You’ll turn in a printout of each entry at the beginning of the class period in which we discuss the reading. Late papers will not be accepted and will receive a zero.

Entries will take one of two forms (each week, I will specify which you are to do). The first form is simply a response to a discussion question in the text; you can structure your answer in any way you wish (within the page constraints).

The second form is a response to an assigned article. In this case your response will contain three sections, which should be clearly identified in your writing:

Summary: Identify and explain briefly two or three of the author’s key arguments or main points. Ask yourself what the author is trying to convince you of and how. This summary is not meant to be exhaustive: pick out the more important points and explain them. It is often tempting to quote from an article when you’re summarizing, especially when you do not understand exactly what it is saying. With these argument notes, avoiding quoting from the text. Instead strive to describe succinctly and in your own words — paraphrase — what you see as the text’s underlying arguments. Doing a good summary is harder work than it may seem at first; give yourself ample time to complete it.

Integration: Pick one or two ways in which the author’s arguments or the assigned reading more generally relates to other course readings and in-class discussions. Look for points of similarity or difference and generate connections. Feel free to consider also the work you’re doing in other classes or other reading you’re doing right now. As the semester progresses and we’ve read more, you will naturally have more to work with.

Questions/Reactions: Identify questions the readings raise that we can discuss in class. If you are having difficulties with a particular reading assignment, this is the place to put your specific questions about what you did not understand. In addition, in this section you can raise objections (to content, style, politics, methods, etc), voice agreements or approval, or share any other reactions you might have.