

Essay 1: Responding to a Text

Topic: In this essay, you're asked to respond to a particular text: you can choose any of the essays or stories from our calendar of assignments (most are listed at right), and you can structure your essay according to one of the four options on page two of this handout.

In this essay, you will read "critically." That means, essentially, taking the reading apart to see how it works, and developing and expressing both your objective and subjective reaction to it.

Before you start to write or even to plan your essay, read and re-read your chosen text carefully. Ask yourself:

What do I notice? And why?
 What can I infer from my observations?
 What is the author's or artist's purpose?
 What is the structure of this text?
 Who is imagined as the audience for this text?
 How would I characterize the tone of the text?
 In what ways--and with what effects--is metaphor used in the text?
 What are the cultural assumptions behind the text?
 What are the historical circumstances behind the text?
 Where was this text published?
 Who wrote this text or produced it?
 What response does the text seek to invoke in me in relation to its announced subject?

(from McQuade's *Seeing and Writing* 9-24)

Audience: Address yourself to students who are less familiar with the text than you are.

Format: Use one inch margins and 11 point font. You do not have to use any sources other than our course texts for this essay. Cite your sources for the essay in MLA format: put a Works Cited list at the end of the essay, and put the author's name and the page number (if there is one) in the text after you quote, paraphrase, or summarize someone else's words or ideas. There are no minimum or maximum number of pages for the assignment; just write as much as you need to in order to make it a good essay.

Peer/Instructor: When the peer draft is due, that means that you have to bring a first (or rough) draft of the essay to class to use in peer review; another student will read it but it will not be graded. When the instructor draft is due, bring in the final draft of the essay to give to me; this is the draft I'll read, respond to, and grade. You must attach your peer draft and any peer review you've received; anything that led up to the final product.

Grade Weight: This essay is worth 11% of your grade for the course.

Important: Your essay must *say something*. When I finish reading your essay, I must know what you think about your chosen text.

- "A Homemade Education," by Malcolm X
- "Growing Up Gay" by Arnie Kantrowitz
- "Hispanic" by Richard Rodriguez
- "I'm Like a Bird" by Nick Hornby
- "Science Fiction: Imaginary Worlds and Real-Life Questions" by Noel Perrin
- "Somebody's Baby" by Barbara Kingsolver
- "Teaching Students to Swim in the Online Sea," by Geoffrey Nunberg
- "The Angel in the House" by Virginia Woolf
- "The God Who Loves You" by Carl Denis
- "The Merits of Meritocracy" by Kevin Finnernan
- "Why I Went to the Woods" by Henry David Thoreau
- "You've Got Blog," by Rebecca Mead

Essay 2: Your Options

(Adapted from John C Bean, Engaging Ideas)

Choose one of the following options for your essay's form.

Option 1: Write a literary analysis of your chosen text. What does your author achieve in the text, and what literary techniques does he or she use to get there? Integrate the ideas or work of Mortimer Adler ("How to Mark a Book") or Steven Johnson ("Watching TV Makes You Smarter") into your analysis, even if they play only a minor part.

Option 2: Write an analysis of your chosen text, but structure it in the following way: part one should be a 300 word abstract that simply summarizes your chosen author's text without injecting any of your own ideas or opinions. Part two should answer the following question: What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of your chosen author's views? Integrate the ideas or work of Mortimer Adler ("How to Mark a Book") or Steven Johnson ("Watching TV Makes You Smarter") into your analysis, even if they play only a minor part.

Option 3: One day you receive the following letter:

Dear Student:

I am in the process of collecting and reprinting major readings that have influenced college writing students this year. Your name has been recommended to me because of your participation in a recent college writing class.

Several articles have been nominated for my collection, from "A Homemade Education" by Malcom X to "You've Got Blog" by Rebecca Mead (see the attached list). Since you were asked to read these pieces for one of your classes, I am very interested in your reaction to any one of them. Did you think it was an important text? Would you recommend that other people interested in college writing read the piece? What connections can you draw between your chosen text and the ideas in Mortimer Adler's "How to Read a Book" or Steven Johnson's "Watching TV Makes You Smarter"? Any information you could give on your reactions to this article would be most appreciated.

By the way, your letter will be printed in the Keene Sentinel—please write in language that the average Monadnock Region citizen will understand and don't assume the reader has any special knowledge of the text you're discussing.

Sincerely,
Snavelly Snodgrass.

Write a letter to Snavelly answering his questions.

Option 4: Write a mini-play in which two or more students get in an argument over your chosen text. Choose any setting you would like for your play, such as a student lounge or a local coffee shop. If you want, you can have the author him- or herself make a cameo appearance in your play. Your goal here is to have at least one person who enthusiastically supports your author's views get in an argument with at least one person who thinks your author is wrong. You can have as many other persons as you wish in the play.