

Response Assignments

Response Assignments are meant to be opportunities for you to read original (a.k.a. “primary”) documents and to respond to them in a very personal way. You should read the assigned documents and reflect upon them from your own perspective. For example, you might wish to tell me what the document reminds you of in your own life, or connections you see between it and the contemporary world we live in, or maybe just how it makes you feel (sad, mad, amused, outraged, horrified, bored, etc.). I also, however, very much expect you to relate the ideas and themes you discern in the assigned documents to the ideas and themes that we are exploring in Sherman & Salisbury and in our lectures. In other words, when I read your Response Assignments, I will expect to see you reflecting upon the document in light of what you have learned in this class as well as in light of your own accumulated knowledge and life experience.

When you sit down to write your Response Assignment, keep quotes to a minimum and be sure to use plenty of concrete, specific examples from the text so that I know precisely to what you are reacting or to what you are referring. You will thus be demonstrating that you have read the document and you will be practicing a key component of writing in history: interweaving evidence from written documents together with commentary or analysis into a seamless narrative. Your Response Assignment should be two handwritten (or double-spaced typed) pages, so approximately three to six paragraphs. Each paragraph should discuss ONE main point that you wish to make about the text, so you will end up with three to six main points.

FYI, I do NOT want a history of the document I have assigned, nor do I want a history of the person who wrote it. What I want is your analysis of the assigned document, so, from your first sentence onward, jump straight into commentary, analysis and examples, providing explanatory information or elaboration as needed. You may never have done anything quite like this before, so please feel free to ask lots of questions, and then just do your best. I will give you feedback as we go along so you will hopefully gain a clearer understanding of what I am looking for, which is, again, YOUR take on, YOUR critical analysis of, YOUR informed view of the documents you are reading.

You will not need to provide end notes or references for this assignment. However, you must include copies of the pages from which you have selected your quotes or from which you have drawn your concrete, specific examples. NOT the whole document, just each single page from which you garnered a paraphrase, quote or specific example. I expect, then, to see several pages from the primary source I've assigned, or perhaps our textbook, or, if you must, a page or two from another text, stapled to your completed Response Assignment. Please also highlight or underline the sentences you quote or paraphrase.

Let's say that the following was the first paragraph of MY response to the ancient Greek philosopher Plato's work, *The Apology of Socrates*:

The first time I read Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*, I was really struck by what I perceived as Socrates' unflagging sense of mischievousness. Even after the jury has found him guilty and he is defending himself in the penalty phase of his trial, a point at which he should presumably be begging for mercy, Socrates insists that what he *should* be getting from the citizens of Athens is not the death penalty the prosecutor has proposed, but rather, "some reward, gentlemen, if I am bound to suggest what I really deserve." Rather than a sentence of death, the jury should grant him "free maintenance at the State's expense," he says. Too funny! The prosecutor (Meletus) suggests death, and Socrates counters with the equivalent of a big, fat raise. Realizing, of course, that this is HIGHLY unlikely, Socrates finally suggests a fine of one hundred drachmae, for the equally amusing reason that he could "probably afford...a fine of that amount." Of course, as funny and touching and utterly hilarious as I find Socrates to be, it makes me all the sadder to imagine what the world lost the day that Socrates drank hemlock in order to dutifully carry out the death sentence Athens had handed down to him. How COULD they??? I want to yell back in time at those nitwits, those close-minded, short-sighted SOB's, those all-too-human jerks. Their crime against Socrates makes me just want to cry. And maybe also to try and honor him by teaching about him and behaving in ways that live up to my own values and ideals.

I would then attach a copy of pages 70 and 72 from my Penguin Classics edition of Plato's text, with the sentences I quoted above highlighted.

By the way, if you would like to follow a very specific pattern to help you get started, allow me to suggest this five sentence paragraph from Jane Schaffer:

The first sentence is your Topic Sentence [your main idea or point, a.k.a. your basic argument, which you will then elaborate upon and support with concrete specific, examples; see my Topic Sentence above]. The second sentence should be a Concrete Detail: some fact or quote from the story or article. The Concrete Detail should start with the transition, "For example." You must use your own thinking in the third sentence, the Commentary Sentence. Complete the sentence, "This shows that..." by answering how the Concrete Detail supports the Topic Sentence. The fourth sentence, Commentary Sentence #2, should go on to explain the first commentary sentence further by answering 1 of 4 choices in sentence starters: 1. This also shows that...; 2. This is important because...; 3. This is because...; 4. This shows that... The fifth sentence is the Concluding Sentence. It should begin with the sentence starter, "As a result" or another concluding transition.