

## Professor Weinbaum's Reader Response Guidelines Spring Quarter 2022

### Preparation of materials

1. Read (or view) carefully; make marginal (or viewing) notes as you go. Don't just underline!
2. Reexamine your marginal notes (or viewing notes) BEFORE writing.
3. Take notes on ideas and questions as you REVIEW notes. Take notes on notes!
4. What are the main ideas addressed in this text? Summarize these for yourself in several short draft sentences BEFORE you begin writing your reader response.

### Writing responses

Bellow I list several types of responses. Strong responses stick close to the texts in hand and focus on specific quotes, extended passages, or scenes that illuminate key ideas. **If you include a quotation paraphrase it directly afterwards in your own words. Don't rely on quotes to convey your understanding of texts.**

**Before you raise questions and/or offer an analysis of a text, you must offer a summation of the major ideas that concern you.** Your questions and analysis of theoretical readings should emerge from specific passages that you are able to introduce, contextualize and paraphrase.

Always include page numbers parenthetically.

Avoid long quotations.

NEVER string quotations together.

Always paraphrase and parse quotations (see above).

NEVER simply drop quotations into your response.

### Editing responses

To get your response into the correct format, you will need to organize and edit. Consider the following:

- Does each paragraph have a topic sentence or clearly articulated focus?
- Have you chosen the best words (WC) to convey key ideas?
- Is there extra wordiness that can be eliminated?
- Are there sentences that are jumbled or unclear?
- Are there ideas that need to be expanded upon in order to be clearly conveyed to your reader?
- Are all quotations properly introduced, contextualized, paraphrased and interpreted?

As you complete your set of reader responses try out the different approaches that are discussed below. As the quarter proceeds, you will become comfortable bringing materials into conversation with each other, and evaluating one reading in relation to a previous one.

Many responses require you to “set theory to work” in relation to a cultural text (a short story or film). See the section at the end of these guidelines on interpreting literary and filmic texts..

## **Parsing theoretical texts by summarizing major ideas and raising questions about them**

### **1. Questions about meaning, new ideas, and new conceptual vocabulary**

This kind of response focuses on a new and/or perplexing ideas and concepts. What new idea came to you while engaging with these materials? Detail the new idea by first describing it as fully as possible and then exploring what is interesting, important, or consequential about it. If a particular passage raised a question or perplexed you, summarize the passage and then articulate the question or perplexity. If there is a new conceptual term that is used in a special way by the author and you want to better understand this conceptual term, find a passage that introduces it and unpack that passage. How and why is this concept important to the argument in question? How might new ideas and/or concepts be applied to the interpretation of cultural texts?

### **2. Questions about argument**

If you think you have understood the basic overall argument, give a précis or summary of it in a paragraph or two. After you have done this, raise a question about the argument or about one of its contributing parts. Are there aspects of the argument that are counter-intuitive or seemingly contradictory? What do you want to take away from this argument for future use? How might the argument or a particular part of it be usefully placed into dialogue with an idea or argument advanced in another theoretical text?

### **3. Questions about politics**

If you think you have understood the bulk of the argument, give a précis of it in a paragraph or two. What is this argument’s main political purpose? What is at stake in advancing this argument in this way? Who is the implied audience and how does this argument imply this audience? How might this argument be usefully applied to the interpretation of another theoretical or cultural text?

### **4. Questions about form, style, medium and message**

If you think you have understood the bulk of the argument, give a précis of it in a paragraph or two. Can you discern a relationship between the form in which the argument is made and its content? How do authorial tone and/or style contribute to the meaning of this argument and its effectiveness? If two texts make similar arguments in different ways, consider how and why one is more compelling than the other. If one argument is advanced theoretically and the other emerges from your reading of a literary or filmic text, consider how similar ideas can be conveyed differently based on form, genre, and medium.

## **5. Comparative questions**

Once you have discerned the political implications of an argument you may wish to place it into dialogue with related arguments with which it is explicitly or implicitly engaged. You will want to explore overlaps, differences, and examine how one argument supplements and/or reveals the gaps in the other. How does one text build on the other? How do these texts overlap? How does each carve out new or unique ground? If they are completely at odds or even antagonistic, try to pinpoint and examine the differences that you perceive. How do the differences point towards distinct political positions?

## **Setting theory to work in relation to literary fiction and film**

It is common in English classes to read literary theory and “apply” it to a text by using it as a road map of sorts, as a lens through which a cultural text becomes intelligible. In this class we will do this sometimes. And you may write a reader response that applies theory if you wish.

This said, one aim of this course is to disrupt too easy distinctions between literature/film and theory. To this end, we will read literature/film as offering theoretical ideas; and, we will read theory as a form of writing that is itself literary and can be “read” or interpreted using the “close reading” skills we will hone over the course of the quarter.

To this end, responses that place literature/film into conversation with theory might not only apply theory but also might examine how a text (literary or filmic) reveals something poignant or new about theory--something about theory’s explanatory power or limitations.

When writing ACROSS theoretical and cultural texts you will always want to keep two questions in view:

What can theory teach us about our world that literature/film does not or cannot?

What can literature/film teach us that theory either misses or dismisses?

When we ask both these questions we are moving along a two-way street. We are using theory to open up the text in hand, and we are using the texts to open up the theory. Ideally, by the end of the course you should be able to navigate such two-way streets with a bit more ease.