

TIPS ON RESPONDING TO READINGS

- 1) A response is your **structured reaction** to a reading. A response gives you the opportunity to respond to the ideas put forth by the authors of the piece you read. Responses are important because they form the most fundamental kind of communication in college. For you, however, and perhaps most importantly, they can also be useful to begin your essays.
- 2) To respond to a reading is not the same as summarizing a reading. You will need to include in your response a summary of the reading's main point and a summary of the specific part to which you are responding. However, a response requires that you **formulate your own ideas** in relation to the ideas presented in a reading.
- 3) To respond to a reading is to expand and speculate on the ideas about which you read. Accordingly, there must be an **obvious connection** between the ideas in your response and the ideas originally expressed in the selection to which you are responding. Here are some of the ways you might respond to a reading:
 - **Make connections.** For instance, if you have read several pieces on the same topic, try to connect the author's ideas with ideas from other readings. Or you may try to connect the author's ideas to your personal experience and/or observations.
 - **Extend the idea.** Rather than just saying you agree or disagree – not a thinking reaction really but just a reaction that requires a switch to be turned on or off on autopilot – look at one or more of the interesting ideas in the piece and “extend” it, that is, take it for what it is, try it on, and **see the world through this idea**, this lens. By doing this, you are having a more meaningful conversation with the author. Try not to simply nail it with the “Oh yeah, I did this too” kind of response.
- 4) A response can be **general or specific**. To respond to a reading doesn't necessarily imply that you have to respond to all of the important ideas put forth by its author(s). You may choose to respond to the entire selection, or you may choose to focus your response on one specific idea or point that for some reason caught your attention. You should **indicate the focus** of your response for your readers.
- 5) To respond to a reading means going beyond simply stating your opinion. It is never enough to simply state what you think/feel about the reading. You should always **substantiate your opinion**. Explain why your response is what it is and explore what caused you to respond as you did. Look into the thinking supporting your reactions.