

Critical Response Guidelines

For each critical response essay, you may write on any of the assigned texts from that unit. You may focus on a single text or provide a comparative analysis of two different texts. It is recommended that you *do not* write on more than two texts. Your response should provide a close reading of a specific passage from the text(s) in connection to any themes or contexts explored in the corresponding unit. You might also choose to respond to one of the available discussion questions, using the prompt to help focus your analysis. I don't expect you to discuss everything about the text(s), but your writing should be clear and concise, and you should demonstrate an understanding of the reading by providing textual details and specific, concrete examples that are directly pertinent to the unit themes, issues and/or contexts. If you only provide examples that are vague, general, and/or limited to your personal experiences or views, then this indicates that you have not engaged in a thoughtful, close reading of the text.

Each critical response essay should be a minimum of 800-1,000 words (approx. 3-4 pages); points will be deducted by **at least** one letter grade for anything that is significantly **below** this required length. I do not mind if you go over the required length if it's within reason (100-200 words max). **Secondary sources are not required, but if you do use any, please limit to no more than two; all direct references (quoted, paraphrased, summarized) to primary and/or secondary texts must be cited according to MLA guidelines.** I have provided several (anonymous) student samples in Pilot that demonstrate my expectations for a letter grade of A.

Grading Criteria (3x100 pts each = 30% of final grade)

A (90–100 pts) = Demonstrates advanced critical thinking skills, outstanding knowledge of course texts and content, and a superior understanding of the larger contexts. Depth of analysis is excellent, and student provides specific textual examples that illuminate key issues/themes and understanding of relevant passages. Thinking is original, and writing is clear, concise, focused, and easily followed.

B (80–89 pts) = Demonstrates solid critical thinking skills, familiarity with course texts and other content, and a full understanding of the larger contexts. Some originality is expressed, and the depth of analysis is above average. Student provides specific textual examples but without fully explaining how these are directly relevant to key issues or themes. Writing is coherent, concise, and easily followed, with minimal errors in basic grammar, usage, and mechanics.

C (70–79 pts) = Demonstrates a basic understanding of course texts and content, as well as of the larger contexts. Student's work effectively summarizes material but shows a lack of development and support for issues raised. Work contains little, if any, originality and suggests a superficial analysis. Provides some textual examples, but without direct relevance to the issues or themes. Writing is confusing, inconsistent and/or contains multiple errors.

D (60–69 pts) = Demonstrates a limited understanding of course texts and content. Work suggests a misunderstanding of the larger contexts; shows a lack of or a simplistic analysis and indicates failure to have completed the reading assignment. Textual examples are vague, minimal, and without relevancy. No originality is expressed. Writing lacks coherence and is difficult to follow. Errors are frequent.

F (0–59 pts) = Demonstrates a serious lack of understanding regarding course texts and content. Work indicates a failure to grasp the larger contexts and/or a failure to read the assigned texts. Writing is incoherent and demonstrates a serious lack of articulation and analysis. Missing any textual examples and/or provides examples without connection to the text or relevant themes. The lack of clarity and/or the frequency of errors disrupt or impede effective communication.