

Reading Journal Guidelines

Purpose

A reading journal helps students to pause and reflect, ask questions, and connect ideas based upon their reading. It is a tool to help you become a more engaged reader and critical thinker. It also acts as a focus for personal ideas you may want to remember for discussing in class, or exploring in more formal essays. Keeping a reading journal allows you to explore texts more deeply and to understand them more fully.

General Guidelines

After you've done the assigned reading for each week, you should spend *at least* half an hour reflecting on what you've read. Don't feel you have to come to any hard and fast conclusions; instead think of this as exploratory writing, a chance to record your initial reactions. This should, however, be developed prose. You'll find that the very act of putting your ideas into full sentences will make you see more connections and possibilities in the texts you've just read than merely jotting down scattered notes. If the reading has been very complicated, you may want to begin by bulleting some of the key points, issues, or themes in order to sort out the information covered. But you should not stop there. Go on to tell me what you think of what you've read. Try to make sense of it in light of things you've previously read or general themes and ideas that the reading evoked for you on a personal or subjective level.

For the poetry collections, you might select one or two poems that were especially evocative, interesting, or challenging for you; or, you might draw out shared themes, imagery, or a narrative arc that you see between the poems. For the drama and fiction readings, you might focus on the central conflicts in the texts or conflicts between various characters; think about character development, themes, specific historical or cultural contexts.

Specific questions you might answer:

- What did you not understand? Were there any unfamiliar words or references? What things do you hope will be explained further as you read more or hear more in class? Are you wondering what reactions your classmates have to anything in the reading?
- What connections to previous readings or information do you see in this material? Does it alter earlier opinions you may have formed? Does it deepen your understanding of the subject? What seem to be the major concepts or key terms in the reading?
- Have you had any personal experience with the subject that makes you see it in a different light? Have you talked with anyone else who has?

These are just a few of the many types of questions you can ask of your reading. The main point of this kind of writing is to use it to examine the assigned readings in a more thorough way than most people do when they simply close the covers of a book and go about their business. But also at the same time this should be freer, more creative than the focused, structured essays teachers may usually ask you to write. In this writing it may help sometimes to think of yourself as talking back to the author you've just read, or, talking to me or any of the other students in the class. This might be a useful strategy since you will be expected to use your journal entries as preparation for our Thursday class discussions.

General Advice:

The purpose of a journal is not to test your knowledge of the reading but to help you reflect personally and thoughtfully as you read. As such, there are no right “answers” or uniform expectations. Writing your ideas will help you to clarify your thoughts and will allow me to observe your critical thinking strategies. A journal should be something you keep as you read, or, immediately following a selection of readings (not something you go back and manufacture at some point when you’ve finished a text or already discussed in class).

- Be sure to write down your ideas freely and honestly. You will be graded on the quality of writing and critical thinking, not mechanics.
- Do not simply summarize the reading or the plot. I have already read the same texts and do not need a full summary. I want to see how you think about what you have read.
- You may respond personally, rather than with academic language. For example:
 - I do not understand...I noticed that...I wonder about ... A question I have is...
 - This (passage, scene, etc.) makes me feel/think...
 - I think the (passage, scene, etc.) is important because...
 - I really like/dislike this (idea, author, character, etc.) because...
 - What was the author thinking when he/she...
- You are encouraged to provide questions raised by the readings for your own reference and understanding and/or to discuss in class.

Summary of Expectations

To gain the most benefits from a reading journal, you should:

- Attempt and complete the assignment in good faith as you read.
- Respond honestly and energetically (even if responding negatively).
- Write an adequate amount (remember, this is a tool to demonstrate how well you read, and I expect you to write at least one single-spaced page for each week’s assigned reading in preparation for our Thursday class discussion).
- Ask questions and observe your responses as they develop (you should understand your own ideas and try to build upon them throughout the semester).
- Take some risks and be an active participant in your own learning process.
- See the reading journal rubric for grading criteria and assessment and use this to help ensure you are meeting the minimum expectations.

Formatting and Submission Guidelines

- Each journal entry should be at least one typed, single-spaced page in 12-point Times New Roman with 1” margins; you may use bullet points but sparingly and should provide at least two to three full paragraphs of prose writing.
- You will create one journal entry for each week’s reading and should submit to the Pilot dropbox by the start of Thursday’s class (Weeks 2-7 and Weeks 9-14, for a total of 12 journal submissions); I will check the timestamp to confirm you submitted on time.
- Journal entries will be graded weekly and given a point value based on the rubric below; your final grade for the reading journal will be the average of total points earned; you can keep track of your points through the corresponding attendance register in Pilot.

READING JOURNAL RUBRIC

Grade	Criteria
√+ 100 pts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates understanding of the readings by exploring key ideas and issues from texts. • Shares thinking about the readings through specific connections, questions, inferences, reflections, or in other ways, and shows active engagement with the material. • Supports thoughts or ideas grounded in the readings without heavily relying on anecdotes. • Information is organized in a way that is easy to understand (date, title/author, etc.); writing is developed and clear with minimal use of bulleted points. • Journal entry is appropriate in length and provides substantive, focused discussion.
√ 85 pts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows understanding of the readings by explaining a few (3 or 4) key ideas from the texts. • Shares a few specific thoughts (2 or 3) about the texts through connections, questions, inferences, reflections, and is generally engaged with the material. • Supports thoughts or ideas grounded in the readings but with minimal critical thinking. • Information is organized in a way that is easy to understand, while other parts are more difficult; writing not always fully developed and often relies on bullet points. • Journal entry is slightly less than the required length but has some substantive discussion.
√- 70 pts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates understanding of the readings by explaining only 1-2 key ideas from texts. • Shares only 1 or 2 thoughts about the texts with minimal connections and reflections, with superficial engagement with the material. • Supports thoughts with little evidence from the texts, providing only anecdotal discussion. • Information is not organized and difficult to understand and/or relies primarily on jotted notes and bulleted points without any developed writing. • Journal entry is approximately half of the required length and lacks focus or substance.
X 55 pts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates little to no understanding of the readings and explains almost no key ideas. • Shares minimal thoughts about the texts and/or engagement with the material. • Supports thoughts with no evidence from the texts and/or connection to the course. • Information is not organized and difficult to read; lacks any developed writing. • Journal entry is incomplete and less than half of the required length.
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal entry is missing.