

Background:

Over the years, like many of my colleagues, I have seen a decline in the writing abilities of our First Year students. It's not that they can't write; they simply can't write what we want. We ask them to argue a position with evidence gleaned from reading non-fiction in a variety of forms. But, they haven't read much non-fiction and they haven't learned to work with non-fiction as a source. To address the "writing problem," I begin by teaching students how to read non-fiction. Working within the disciplinary curriculum, assessment is built around the reading/ writing nexus and students write short pieces in response to questions about the reading. A primary aim is to place students into situations whereby they can build intimacy and an affective relationship with non-fiction: to feel a passion for logic and argument, evidence and method.

Prior to the first Reading Response task, the class has discussed what is meant by close reading, critical reading, summarising and paraphrasing. A lecture and tutorial have been dedicated to reading an essay together and talking through the rhetorical strategies, key points, writing conventions, and structure.

The questions are meant to require different kinds of reading, thinking and writing across the semester. Some are focused on a specific detail while others require students to synthesize information and comment on an issue or position. Overall they are meant to offer practice in a range of writing tasks that serve as models for components of typical university writing tasks like summaries, reports, position papers and essays.

Instructions to Students for Reading Responses in First Year Screen & Media:

A strong focus of assessment in this topic is to improve your ability in critical reading and written expression. This will be approached through a series of written responses to questions derived from our shared readings. The aim of these exercises is to improve your critical reading ability by learning to identify and restate the main idea and the author's argument in your own words, describe the type of evidence that the author deploys and assess its reliability, and to assess how effective the author has been in relaying the main idea and convincing you (the reader) of that position.

Each of your written responses will be workshopped in tutorial with a small group of colleagues in the week before it's due. Points toward your final mark are earned through participation in the writing workshops in addition to assessment of the final submission.

In tutorials dedicated to workshopping your written drafts, students will be marked for their contribution to the process. Please bring to these sessions three copies of your work in progress so that you can exchange with classmates to read and comment on one another's work.

Final written submissions will be marked for expression and content. Expression includes the structure and logic of paragraphs and sentences, punctuation, and word choice. Content includes how accurately and convincingly you answer the question with evidence from the reading selection.

Please respond to the following questions in 250-300 words each. The questions are designed so that you demonstrate a close reading of the text, judiciously using direct quotation where appropriate, but mainly using your own words to relay what the author has explained, proposed, argued or demonstrated.

1. Jenkins (2006) distinguishes between two senses in which the term “medium” is used: a) the technological; and b) the social and cultural (p.13). Define the two terms and explain how this distinction is important to Jenkins’ larger argument?
2. Explain why Singer (2011) compares WikiLeaks to the concept of a “panopticon”?
3. Drotner (1999) asserts that panic discourse “is basically a discourse of power whose stakes are the right to define cultural norms and social qualifications” (p.604). Across the article, how does she argue this position and what evidence does she deploy in making her case about media panics?
4. Discuss how the dance of surveillance and counter-surveillance between police and protesters during re-Occupy Sydney (Shaw, 2013) might have drawn mainstream media attention away from the economic and social concerns that protesters sought to highlight.
5. Lipkin (2013) explores how we define “indie games” and discusses the sustainability of indie games in the face of increasing co-optation by the mainstream. Explain how economics, ideology, and style are interrelated in the notion of “indie games” and conclude your remarks with your view on the future of indie games.

Critical Reading Guide

Reading for university study is meant to be “a close reading” of the text or a “critical reading.” Both of these expressions mean that the reader will attend closely to the detail of the text, the argument, and evidence presented. Critical in this context brings together several senses of the word. First it is to look for *critical points* in the text, whether these are assertions or arguments or evidence. It also means to bring a *critic’s eye* to the piece by paying attention to the detail of the scholarship. In conducting a careful (close or critical) reading, the reader might identify errors to do with data, analysis, logic and/ or argument; these should be noted and considered within the overall summary of the work.

Answering the questions below about an assigned reading will provide a framework for understanding scholarly writing and help establish a good set of notes from which a written or oral summary of the text can be fashioned and contextualized by prior knowledge of the subject area. Keeping a notebook of reading summaries will prove useful in essay writing and study. Although it might not be possible to answer all the questions immediately, it is useful to go back and answer them when time permits.

- 1) Author’s Background – What is the author’s profession or discipline? Is the author engaged in a debate within his/ her field? Is this work part of a body of writing on the subject by this author or a group of writers/ theorists? Is the work translated from another language?
- 2) What is the main point (or big idea) of the article?
- 3) What is the author’s position (thesis)?
- 4) Does the author hold assumptions that are crucial to the argument?
- 5) Describe how the argument is waged? (Historical, comparative, etc.)
- 6) What type of evidence does the author use to support the argument? (Historical, statistical, ethnographic, mixed etc.) Is the evidence reliable?
- 7) Does the evidence suit the argument? Is it appropriate to the type of argument being waged?
- 8) What is your emotional response to the work? (Don’t disregard feelings; they can inform critical and intellectual work.) Clarify unusual or unfamiliar vocabulary or terminology.
- 9) Are you convinced by the argument? Explain why or why not.
- 10) Any other responses that you may have to the work should also be noted.

n.b. When reading about a media issue or subject, jot-down media examples (films, websites, clips, etc.) that come to mind and illustrate a point by the author or your opinion on the subject. These examples will be handy when you begin to write your essay.