

ENGL 1102: Comedy and Composition: Spring 2016

Dr. Owen Cantrell

Reading Responses

MWF (Due Feb 1st; Feb 19th)

TR (Due Feb 2nd; Feb 23rd)

Assignment:

For this course, you will keep a digital journal of responses to class readings. The journal will consist of the responses to the readings that you turn in throughout the semester. Responses should be the equivalent of **350 to 500 words**. Collect your responses in a digital format (whether on a blog, Word document, or other digital deliverable) so they can be submitted to me via Lore on the above dates to be graded.

There are **ten (10)** reading responses, which collectively count as 10% of your grade. Journals will be **graded on the above dates**. I will provide feedback after the first due date which will help you to write better responses before the second due date. Responses will be graded on a **strict pass/fail** criterion. Passing responses **fulfill the word requirement**, have a **clear argument**, and **engage with the text** they are discussing, either by **quoting or summarizing the text's arguments** within their response.

Purpose:

Writing about what you have read will help you understand difficult theoretical readings and synthesize ideas. Writing will also help prepare you to do well on your final research paper. In addition, you will come to class ready to engage articulately in our discussions. I may ask you to read aloud from your Reading Responses, so do not think of them as private diary-type entries. Instead, be prepared to share your Responses with the class.

Guidelines & Some Tips:

Unless otherwise stipulated, your response may address all the readings or a single reading or one portion of a reading. Sometimes you may wish to "compare and contrast" ideas in more than one reading, while at other times you may wish to focus more closely on a single argument or concept. You may also use the discussion questions provided as a basis for these responses.

You should not summarize the reading(s) except as a brief, focused means of getting at the points or arguments you wish to deal with in your responses. Remember that **your audience is the rest of the class**, all of whom have read the same things you're writing about. Summary alone or extended summary will not fulfill the assignment or earn you a passing grade.

You might want to think of your reading as performing some of many possible critical thinking tasks: **analysis** (of the argument), **evaluation** (of its credibility), and **synthesis or comparison** (of its ideas with other theories, your experiences, or contemporary or historical events). You need not take up such writing tasks in the order presented here--indeed, you need not use this formula at all--but it may initially help you to get started to think explicitly about how to go about the task. Whatever mode you choose, critical thinking and engagement with the arguments and ideas presented in the readings should be apparent throughout your Response.

The use of **first person** is a plus so long as you do more than respond on a gut level to the reading (I hate this kind of writing; this angers me; I found this boring). Gut responses can be useful as they frequently help you identify points where you disagree or weaknesses in an argument and can lead you to greater understanding. But gut responses need to be incorporated into the kind of critical thinking that helps you to understand the theories we study as well as their histories and relationships to other theories. Whatever mental and rhetorical tools you use, your Responses should engage the readings and should be a kind of snapshot of your critical response.

Finally, a request that you engage in what we might call a **generous reading**: acknowledging that the authors whose works we read this semester will have thought through many of the more obvious possibilities pro and con and chosen not to include any number of possible ideas, points, and arguments for good reason; assuming that there are many viable perspectives on any issue; and giving credit for what authors--even authors from the past--have to offer and have taught us. No reading included in this course is without merit, and it's often good to begin by assessing what authors have contributed to the conversation rather than by figuring out how we can skewer them on our rapier-like pens. Combative reading produces struggles for power, fear, and terror, not the best atmosphere for learning. But generous reading can produce an atmosphere of respect and trust that encourages everyone to speak up, find a voice, and share insights and ideas, even if those insights and ideas are not yet fully formed arguments backed by an extensive bibliography of theoretical texts. In other words, consider critical thinking--and critical writing, and critical discussion--not a combative stance where your goal is to crush your opponents and their ideas but rather an engagement in a conversation that was going on for a very long time before we arrived to engage it. We all have a lot to learn from those who have already participated in the production of this branch of knowledge and from each other, as we add to that body of knowledge. A little humility and respect (as opposed to fear and power plays) is appropriate.