

# MUCH 624 Response Paper Guidelines

**Worth 15% of your overall grade (7.5% for each paper)**

**Due by 9:00 p.m. on the day before our class meeting**

**(if your paper is for Thursday, October 8, for example, it should be in by 9pm on October 7)**

**Submit papers electronically by email to [brooksem@potsdam.edu](mailto:brooksem@potsdam.edu)**

## Guidelines

- For each response paper, write a typed essay (in complete sentences with proper grammar) of around **500-750** words
- Please include your name, the date, and the associated class topic at the top of the essay.
- Your response must address one of the readings linked to your specific date—if one of the assigned readings is extremely short, it would be better to address the shorter reading AND a longer reading. Questions? Feel free to email me.
- Your response paper should address content or ideas you find intriguing, confusing, problematic, helpful, and/or contradictory in the course readings. Do **not** summarize the entire content of the reading. Instead, concisely give me a good idea of **what** the reading is about, **how** it is organized, and **the strengths/weaknesses** of the reading.
- **Below is a list of questions you should consider as you write your response.** You do **not** necessarily have to answer every single one, but a good response paper will address many of the following questions. Do **not** respond to these questions in a list or point-by-point approach. You are writing a short essay—the format should have a nice, well-rounded structure. Using a brief introduction and conclusion and concise, carefully edited writing will help improve your grade. You **may** use first-person in the response.
- If you consult other sources (web pages, reviews of the book, etc) you must cite those in the response (either parenthetically or as footnotes). You may use MLA, Chicago Manual, or author-date citation systems—just be consistent.
- **Please end your response/reflection papers with at least two questions to facilitate class discussion.** These are not counted in your overall word count, but are an important part of your grade on this response.
- **Do not collaborate with other students on the written portion of this assignment**
- **Make sure to be present the next day in class**—you'll be assisting as co-discussion leader

## Questions to Consider:

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- 1) With what scholarly discipline does this person identify? Is the author a musicologist? Popular music scholar? Historian? Journalist? Where does this person work? What kinds of topics does the scholar research? Use the internet to (quickly) check this out.
- 2) What argument is the author trying to make? **Identify the precise point in the reading where the author lays out the thesis or research questions.**
- 3) How is this reading organized? Is it chronological? Topical?
- 4) What sorts of evidence does the author use to prove their point? Does the reading, for example, include a lot of printed musical examples? Interviews? Citations from newspaper articles?
- 5) Does this reading introduce large theoretical concepts or ideas? If so, what are they?
- 6) **Important:** What theories about performance does this reading mention? Anything we've talked about already in this class (or other classes you've taken)? If the reading has footnotes, they can be very helpful in answering this question.
- 7) What **kind of music** does this reading discuss? Where and when was this music most important or most popular? Who listens / listened to it?
- 8) Is there a lot of extremely technical vocabulary? What level of musical knowledge does this reading require?
- 9) What kinds of conclusions does this reading come to?
- 10) Does the author suggest avenues for further research on this or related topics?
- 11) Be critical—does this reading have shortcomings? What worked well and made sense to you? What didn't? Was there a point when you found yourself disagreeing strongly with the author or questioning the argument?
- 12) How readable was this article or book chapter? Did you find parts of it easier to understand than others?
- 13) What interested you about the topic?
- 14) What did you learn from this reading?

# Believing and Doubting in Writing<sup>1</sup>

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How do we approach a piece of writing fairly, by assessing the writer on his or her own ground before criticizing? By playing believing and doubting, we have the possibility of:

- a) understanding the writer's approach
- b) coming up with additional ideas to support the writer's content and argument
- c) finding counter-arguments, disconfirming evidence, finding statements that don't work with the overall thesis, identifying weak spots in the writing

Basically, you respond to a piece of writing in two ways. Each way is assuming a specific role:

1. Pretend that you believe everything in the paper (even if you don't) and give as many reasons as you can why you agree with it.
2. Pretend that you doubt everything in the paper (even if you don't) and give as many reasons as you can why the writer's ideas are wrong.

Here's another way to think about it:

1. Mirror: What is the main point of the article or reading? (Try to summarize in your own words in 2-4 sentences).
2. Believe: Accept the writer's point of view and try to extend the paper's argument. Provide additional examples, suggest questions that might provoke further thought, discuss parallel situations that support the author's argument.
3. Doubt: Provide counter-evidence and counterarguments for the author. If you did not accept this argument, what objections might you raise? Are there other solutions or interpretations for this problem? Pursue one counter-argument at length or suggest several concerns more briefly.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from resources at [http://www.reed.edu/writing/paper\\_help/believing%20and%20doubting.pdf](http://www.reed.edu/writing/paper_help/believing%20and%20doubting.pdf) and <https://lpei4.wordpress.com/the-handout-bank/believing-doubting/>