

## LUC WRITING CENTER – “HOW TO WRITE A RESPONSE PAPER”

### What is a response paper?

Response papers, based on your reading of a text or texts, are frequently used to help refine your close reading and analytical skills. They should be narrowly focused and address specific parts of the text(s). Your response paper should neither be overly reactionary nor autobiographical. Explain *why* you had a certain reaction, don't compile a list of your feelings about a work. Although you may use “I” in response papers, always check with your instructor or prompt.

### Types of response papers: Single-text and Multiple-text

With *single-text* response papers, you only respond to one text; often, your instructor will ask you to situate your response within class discussions or homework. With *multiple-text*, you'll respond to several texts, examining their overarching themes, and similarities and differences.

### What is the difference between a response paper and a summary paper?

*Response papers* require you to engage critically with the text and ask *why* you respond in a certain way after reading it. *Summaries* generally ask for an overview of the text and the author's argument. Most importantly, summary essays do not require you to evaluate the text.

### How do you get started?

1. To begin, *carefully* read the text, which may require you to reread, annotate the text, or take notes about issues you notice. After reading through the text(s), free write a response to the text(s) and/or ask yourself the questions below to help generate some ideas.
2. Begin to organize your response. Although response essays are less formal than some other types of essays, they usually still require an Introduction, Thesis, Body Paragraphs, and a Conclusion. Check with your prompt or instructor for specific requirements.

### Questions to ask while reading:

- What is the author's thesis or main claim? Why are the author's claims important?
- What types of evidence does the author give? Are they convincing? Do you see any potential issues or biases?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the claims or the discussion?
- Do you agree or disagree with the author's claims? Why? Can you come up with any counterarguments?
- How do the texts relate to each other? Do you see any overarching themes?
- Do the authors disagree or agree with one another? Can one of the texts be used to weaken the argument of a different text?
- Does the text bring up any specific questions that you want to explore? Are there any significant or recurring words, phrases, or images?

**See the following page for an example of a strong response paper:**

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### Rhetoric: Inviting Discussion and Allowing Choice

Reading Erika Lindemann and David Fleming’s articles, I find myself considering the practical use of rhetoric as a pedagogical tool instead of a speech form reserved for political and religious arenas. Rhetoric in the classroom is ideally a means for discussion to provoke meaningful, thoughtful debate, but sometimes it is used to demand conformity to the status quo. Didacticism, monologue, and any other self-occupied form of rhetoric excludes response and ignores the hearer’s faculty to respond or be convinced. I believe that kind of rhetoric has no place in the classroom since it effectively stifles students’ intellectual engagement.

I appreciated seeing a nuanced view of rhetoric appear in today’s reading matter, Lindemann highlighting rhetoric’s misunderstood reputation as “skillful, but often deceptive, eloquence” employed to cleverly sway an audience to a certain point of view (35). Historically, orators like Cicero, Aristotle, Plato, Quintilian, and Longinus acknowledged the scurrilous successes lawyers and politicians achieved through employing excellent diction, humor, and emotional appeals. Rhetoric is a tool that can be put to many political and ideological uses depending not only on the intent of the rhetorician, but also the motivations of the audience. After all, Shakespeare’s Marc Antony eloquently swayed a Roman crowd that was already determined on revenge. One of Lindemann’s points particularly struck me: “Rhetoric implies choices, for both the speaker or writer and the audience. When we practice rhetoric, we design the message...” (37). Emphasizing the hearer’s choice to accept, Lindemann rejects rhetoric as constituting undue emotional or psychological dominance, insisting that in a free society the audience willingly participates in being convinced or influenced by a speaker.

However, Fleming would argue in response to Lindemann that teachers often occupy a position of power in relation to students, and can abuse this privilege by dictating belief without proof or discussion. He claims, “Unfortunately, school tends to reduce and flatten argument. Students are frequently asked to make an argument without being part of a situation that actually calls for one” and notes that outside school, argument is associated with attack and defense (249). For students, hearing someone state an opinion requires either passive assent, or violent counterassault. Intellectual debate simply does not appear at all in this kind of negative rhetoric, which instead of helping people “compose, deliver, and respond to public discourse,” effectively hinders their development (Ibid). Fleming’s statements recall rhetoric’s educational agency as a practical tool for imitation, practice, and even, divergence, once the pupil has acquired knowledge and confidence (254). From reading the history of rhetoric as explained by Lindemann and Fleming, I believe that objections to rhetoric as a high-flown linguistic bullying mechanism would disappear if teachers used it as a tool for simple investigation, structuring and delivering arguments to teach students how to intellectually respond to new concepts.

#### Works Cited

- Fleming, David. “Rhetoric and Argumentation.” *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*. Edited by Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper Taggart, et al. Second Edition. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Lindemann, Erika. “What do teachers need to know about rhetoric?” *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. Second Edition. Oxford University Press, 1987.