

## Critical Questions

For each class session in which there is an assigned reading, you will need to submit a Critical Question. These questions will serve as the foundation for our in-class discussions.

Questions should be submitted at the beginning of class. You should come along with the question already written, to avoid wasting class time.

## Formulating a Question

As you read, you will naturally have reactions to things in the readings. These might be moments where something strikes you, puzzles you, bothers you, or makes you want to push back. These reactions are the raw material for your questions. Make a note of them as you go, and afterwards transform them into questions. The question is just the articulated form of a reaction you already had; it isn't something you generate separately, after the fact, by staring at the reading and trying to think of something to ask.

This means the orientation you bring to the assignment matters more than anything else. You are *not* writing these questions to impress me (the professor), and you are not writing them to impress your classmates. So, don't ask yourself "what does the professor want?" or "what would sound clever?" Ask yourself: *what am I actually curious about here? What did I genuinely wonder about as I read?*

If you find yourself stressed about this assignment, or spending a long time on it, that is a sign you're approaching it with the wrong orientation. A genuine question about something that struck you should not be hard to produce, since you already had the reaction; formulating the question is simply a matter of getting at what generated that reaction. If it feels like hard work, you have probably slipped into trying to manufacture an impressive question rather than reporting a real one. Stop, go back to the reading, and notice what you actually responded to.

In short, your questions should stem from the assigned readings and/or our discussion of them. They should demonstrate your personal attempt to engage with the material and think through the concepts presented. While there is no specific framework for engaging with the reading, it is essential that you show a genuine effort to understand and reflect on the material in your own way. Avoid submitting questions that are unrelated to the reading or that indicate a lack of proper preparation. Questions that merely rely on the title or a brief glance at the text will not be accepted.

## Questions and Class Discussion

Critical Questions become the candidate questions for class discussion, and the class votes on which to discuss. If you ask about something you are truly curious about, you have a real chance of having the thing you actually want to think about become the main focus of the class. The assignment is, in a quite direct sense, your opportunity to steer the course towards the questions that matter to you.