

Scaffolded Response Papers

Over the course of the semester, you will submit a number of approximately 500-word responses to assigned readings. These responses fall into three categories:

- Summative
- Argumentative
- Critical

You will complete a mix across the three types, starting with Summative and ending with Critical. This is designed to be a flexible assignment that students can tailor to their interests, in which you can choose which readings to write on. You will fill out a form at the beginning of the semester indicating your selections.

Summative Response

For the Summative Response, you should summarize the argument of the reading. This means:

- Identifying the question the author is responding to.
- Identifying the author's position on that question.
- Identifying the specific argument the author offers in favor of this position.
- Articulating the position and the argument in a clear and direct way, i.e., that gets right to the point and cuts out anything that is not necessary to understand the author's core argument.

IMPORTANT: It is essential that you summarize the *argument* of the reading and not the *article itself*. That is, do not write "The author says *x*, then *y*, and then they talk about *z*." Rather, get at the core argument of the reading – that is, the reasoning that the author offers in support of their view – extract it, and then present that argument in your own words.

Additionally, it is essential that you summarize the *author's* argument, not other arguments being presented in the paper. In philosophy papers, the author will usually present competing viewpoints at length, and in a sympathetic light, before arguing against them. When summarizing the paper's argument, you need to be clear about the difference between what the author herself is arguing and the views that she merely presents but then argues against.

Argumentative Response

The Argumentative Response should, as in the case of the Summative Response, identify the author's view on the particular question they're addressing, as well as the argument for this view. However, in addition to this, you should also point out a possible response to this argument, i.e., somewhere where the author's argument might be weak. This means:

- Identifying the question the author is responding to.
- Identifying the author's position on that question.

- Identifying the specific argument the author offers in favor of this position.
- Articulating the position and the argument in a clear and direct way.
- Identifying a weak point in the argument, i.e., somewhere the author's argument could get things wrong.

Because you have the same amount of space but more to do, you will need to be more focused and succinct in your summary for the Argumentative Response. Approximately half of the response should be summary, and half should be identifying the weak point and explaining why the author should be concerned.

IMPORTANT: Responses that do not provide *both* steps will be considered to have not met the basic requirements of the assignment. For the Argumentative Response, the *main* focus is on the second part. Therefore, your second part *must not* be less detailed than the argument summary. It should not be a short response tacked on at the end, but must be developed in detail. Ideally the two sections should be approximately the same length; the most important thing is that the second section – the response – is developed sufficiently.

Critical Response

The Critical Response should do everything that the Argumentative Response does. But in addition, you will need to think about how the author can themselves respond to the argument you've raised against them and articulate that response. This means:

- Identifying the question the author is responding to.
- Identifying the author's position on that question.
- Identifying the specific argument the author offers in favor of this position.
- Articulating the position and the argument in a clear and direct way.
- Identifying a weak point in the argument.
- Thinking about, and articulating, how the author might respond to the weak point that you have identified.

As with the Argumentative Response, since you have more work to do with the same number of words, you need to be even more succinct and focused with your writing. Approximately one third should be devoted to a summary of the author's argument, one third to a response to the author's argument, and one third to the response to this criticism on behalf of the author.

IMPORTANT: Responses that do not provide all three of these steps will be considered to have not met the basic requirements of the assignment. For the Critical Response, the *main* focus is on the third part. Therefore, your third part *must not* be less detailed than the first two parts. It should not be a short response tacked on at the end but must be developed in detail.

General Note

It is essential that the structure of the responses meet the instructions above. The responses are not about your own views on the topic. That is, you will be expected to point out a weak spot in

the argument for your Argumentative Response, *even if* you personally agree with that argument or position. Similarly, even if you *disagree* with the author's argument, for the Critical Response you will nevertheless be expected to defend that argument against the problem you've raised. Hence, unlike an ordinary essay (where you would typically argue for what you personally believe), there is no place for "*I think*" or "*I argue*" in this assignment.