

Guidelines for Reading Memos

For most of the readings in this course, you will be responsible for preparing a reading memo. You should consider the preparation of the memo as part of your reading process. That is, you should work on the memo as you pre-read, read, and re-read the course texts. Afterwards, you should edit and proofread the memo to make sure that it clearly and accurately represents your thinking about the texts.

What is a reading memo?

A reading memo is really a set of organized and analytic notes about a reading that you prepare for yourself. Think of the memo as a resource to return to in order to refresh your memory of a particular text. This will prove helpful when writing essays and when returning to texts read previously to see how they connect with freshly read texts.

What should a reading memo include?

Your memos should include a clear **analytic summary of the argument** being presented (this should be approximately 150-200 words). To identify the overall argument of a text, it might be helpful to focus on determining the conclusion of what is being presented--this will allow you to then focus on the claims that are necessary for that conclusion to hold true. If you find weaknesses or faults with the argument you should include these here. You will also want to identify important sub-arguments that the author uses to make their larger case. In order for your summary to make sense, you will need to **clarify technical terms** that the author uses. Be sure to do this in clear, everyday language. Be sure to portray the sense of how the author is using these terms, which might be quite different than you will find in a dictionary. It is not necessary to clarify all technical terms, focus on those that are central to the argument. You should also include a few pieces of supporting data (in our case, **passages of text**) that help to illustrate, clarify, and/or question the overall argument. (In presenting the passages, be sure to **explain why you are including** them.) It is also often useful to provide some **framing device** (such as a question or concern) to help illustrate how you are approaching and making sense of the text. This framing will also allow you to be clear about any weaknesses or gaps that you identify in the argument. A framing device might be a question, or it might be a sense of how you might apply the theoretic insights to make sense of a problem. As your group research project develops, the concerns and focus of this project should become your framing device. That is, you will want to show how the course readings apply (or do not apply) to the thinking and research that you are conducting with your group. All work submitted in this class should include full and proper **citations**.

How are Reading Memos Graded?

Each reading memo is worth a possible 25 points. Points will be awarded according to the following guidelines:

Citation:	0-2 points
Framing Question/Concern	0-2 points
Analytic summary of the argument	0-7 points
Clarifying of Technical Terms	0-2 points
3 passages and explanations for inclusion	0-12 points (3 x 4 points)