How to Write a Reading Response Journal

Choose a reading that interests you. It may be from this class, another class, or your own personal reading. It may be a newspaper article, a magazine article, an advertisement, a web page, a book, poem, etc.

You may respond to its content and how well or poorly it was written. You may also respond to the rhetorical strategies used, if appropriate. Your response should be at least ten sentences. Here are a few questions you may ask yourself:

- What effect did the reading have on you?
- What emotions were generated and how did the reading generate them? Was it the descriptive language? Was it the kind of writing (narrative, argument, reflective)?
- What was the writer trying to do? Do you think he/she was successful?
- Think about the craft of writing—the types of words used, the length of sentences, the tone of the writing. Was there anything the writer left out or should have left out?
- What kind of rhetorical strategies were used in the reading? Quotes? Anecdotes? Statistics? Appeals to emotion, logic and/or reason? Were they used effectively?
- Was there a specific tone used: sarcastic, sad, humorous, serious, etc.?
- How did the writer use these rhetorical strategies to serve his/her purpose? Did it work?

You may not be able to answer most of these questions for some readings. Newspaper articles that report on something that happened aren’t usually written with these things in mind—they serve a purpose to inform their audience of an occurrence. However, you may have emotions attached to the happenings and thoughts that come from this and they will serve just as well as a response. I would like you to choose many different kinds of readings, however, so that you have the opportunity to answer most of these questions.

Here’s an example of a reading response with an appropriate length:

“This weekend, I finished the book She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders by Jennifer Finney Boylan. It was very well written, overall. It was a memoir of a woman who was born a man, who lived as a man for forty plus years before finally recognizing that his feeling of being a woman was not ever going to go away and that he wouldn’t be truly happy in life until he did something about it. He was married and had two sons, so transitioning to a woman was not something that was easy for his family and loved ones. I think Boylan wanted to get her story out to show what it is like for a transgendered person—to show that they aren’t freaks. I think she did well in that purpose because I am now aware that there are probably a lot more transgendered people out there than I may have thought, and their lives are a struggle. What I really wanted to respond to, though, was her use of humor in the book. She is a comedic novelist, and that came through in this book. Though the subject is not necessarily a funny one, she shows that life is humorous, despite the struggles we go through. She doesn’t make fun of herself for being transgendered, but she does make fun of herself as a person along with a few other people she knows or knew. I think that by being humorous a lot of the time, it makes the reading easy and fun, so she gets her message out in a way that isn’t depressing or creepy. I highly recommend this book.”