

We are enormously grateful Laura Dison from University of Witwatersrand for sharing this material with us for the *Enhancing Postgraduate Environments* project.

## EDUC 5154: Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

### Reading responses / Reading Journal

A reading response is a short paper written as a response to a journal article or book chapter. The writer of the reading response expresses his/her thoughts, ideas, questions and particular points of interest which arise from the journal article/ book chapter. A reading response provides an opportunity for students to make their thinking-in-process- in relation to new concepts, ideas and issues- visible to themselves. In other words, a reaction paper encourages engagement with the readings. It is a way of recording students' responses, interests, difficulties- a way of 'forming meaning and attaining understanding'.

What the reading response is **not** is simply a summary of the main ideas of the reading (although it can contain a brief summary of the main ideas as a starting point).

For most sessions of the course (perhaps 7 of the 12 sessions) students should write a one-to-two-page reading response to one of the assigned readings for the following week. There will generally be a prescribed reading and at least one additional reading to choose from. Two students will present their reading responses in each session. Students should arrange with the coordinator/ lecturer ahead of time in which session they will present their response papers. Presentations should last **no longer than ten minutes**, with **an additional five minutes** for answering questions from the group.

#### Guidelines for reading responses

Note that these are *guidelines*, not rules. Students do not have to follow this format or sequence, or address every single question. However, they should aim to a) grasp the basics of the text, b) reflect on the issues, concepts, the author's position, and so on, c) offer examples to illustrate ideas or concepts, and d) integrate the reading across texts and lecturers.

Students should present the reading response in paragraph form for formative and summative assessment. Drawing a diagram or mindmap may be a useful starting point for clarifying ideas and the relationships between them.

#### Grasping the basics of the text

1. What issues are explored in the reading?
2. What questions/ dilemmas do you think the author of the paper is trying to address?
3. What position is the author arguing for or against?

4. Summarise the author's argument in a few sentences.
5. What are some of the key concepts introduced in the paper? Explain them briefly.
6. How does the author link the concepts together to make his/ her claims?
7. What issues and concepts are new to you, and how do they connect with issues and concepts you have already explored?
8. If you have read more than one reading for the session, what are the links between the readings? (For example, look for similarities and differences; are they discussing different issues?).
9. How do these ideas link to themes and issues we are exploring in the course as a whole?

### **Thinking about the author's argument, the issues and their implications for learning and teaching**

10. Which concepts/ arguments do you find particularly interesting or illuminating? Why?
11. Are there any ideas you disagree with? Why?
12. Can you give examples from your experiences as a student or lecturer that illustrate some of the issues or concepts in the paper? Do you have experiences which contradict them?
13. If you could speak to the author of this paper, what would you tell them or ask in order to prompt deeper reflection on these issues (for you or the author).
14. What has this paper contributed to your understanding of what it means to be a lecturer in a university?
15. Has the reading provoked new questions, dilemmas or uncertainties?

### **After the session which relates to the reading**

16. What concepts or issues relate to what you have learned so far?
17. If concepts or issues become clearer (or more confused) during sessions, add in notes, key words, questions, links to issues and concepts we have discussed before. Add references to other relevant readings.
18. If interesting questions/ examples were offered during your presentation, add them to your notes. You may raise or develop further questions and examples of your own.
19. Add another paragraph or two which bring together your reflection on the issues and concepts addressed in the session.
20. Presenters, and others who choose to do so, may submit their response paper to the coordinators/ lecturers for comment and feedback ([not marks](#)).