

Summary and Response Paper

The Assignment. Select a recent critical article that treats some aspect of nineteenth-century American poetry. Write a three- to four-page paper (800-1,000 words) that summarizes the article's primary argument and responds to the article by speaking back to it.

In your summary, strive for clarity (making sure that your readers understand exactly what you are saying) and accuracy (making sure that what you are saying about the critical article is true).

In your response, use your own critical thinking, your own interpretations of nineteenth-century poems, and even perhaps your knowledge of the nineteenth-century cultural contexts to start a conversation with the article you've selected. You do not need to oppose the author's view, but you do need to think critically about what she or he has said, analyzing, examining, and evaluating the article's argument carefully.

You may separate your summary from your response, if you like, or you may combine your summarizing with your responding. Organize the paper in a way that makes the most sense to you. The paper should have a title. It should be typed and double-spaced.

Due Dates. Before you write a complete draft of this paper, I would like to take a look at your article. I just want to make sure that the article you've selected is appropriate for this assignment--I wouldn't want anyone to select an article that makes the writing of the paper unduly difficult. Select and sign up for your article sometime before Tuesday, March 3.

The paper itself is due on Tuesday, March 17. On that evening, please bring to class two copies of your paper and one photocopy of your article. To respond to your papers, I will need to read the articles you've selected. I also thought we should collect all of the articles and all of the summary-and-response papers into a binder that everyone in the class could use a resource during the second half of the semester. We could put this binder on reserve at the library, or I could check it out to students from my office (whichever way you think works best).

Advice. Ideally, this assignment and your final critical paper will overlap. For instance, if you want to write a final critical essay about the representation of Chinese workers in nineteenth-century American poetry, then please consider writing your summary-and-response paper on article about the representation of Chinese workers in nineteenth-century American poetry. This kind of connection or overlap between these two papers is highly encouraged.

Before selecting your article, go to the library and find at least three articles that seem as if they are good possibilities for this paper. Read all three articles carefully, before you commit to your final selection with me. I recommend this article selection method because it will give you some choices, at least two fall back possibilities, and a headstart on research for your final paper.

The summary-and-response genre of writing is ubiquitous in a variety of professional fields--law, science, business, literary and cultural studies. First-year undergraduates do this type of writing in Expository Writing courses, and tenured professors do this kind of writing in book reviews and manuscript reviews for journals and presses. Thus, I thought I should give you some of my own summary-and-response writing as examples of the genre (see the Examples of Summary & Response Writing: Two Book Reviews handout). Unfortunately, neither is precisely the length I've asked for, and neither is on an article (both are about full-length books). On the other, they do provide you with an example of an everyday kind of summary-and-response writing (plus you get to read about three of the most recent books in the field).