

Brief Guide to Reading Response Questions

This page will lay out the basic requirements for writing, submitting, and receiving credit for these questions.

It may be helpful the first few times you do this to think of reading response questions as those that might be asked on an exam. This is because we are interested in **analytical** questions rather than **descriptive** ones.

How can you tell if a question is analytical or descriptive?

One easy way to determine whether the question you have in mind is analytical or descriptive is to pay attention to the question word or words that it contains. For example, analytical questions generally ask **how?** or **why?**, while descriptive questions may ask who?, what?, or when?. Analytical questions will also interrogate the **causal relationship** between things—in other words, how one act or combination of acts lead to a particular consequence or effect. They may also be concerned with the **meaning** or **purpose** of something. Lastly, the answer to an analytical questions will require an **explanation** rather than a statement or list of facts.

Aside from being analytical, your reading response questions should address the readings due that week. This may be done in two ways:

1. You may ask about the specific arguments or claims that a given author makes, or
2. You may ask a broader question about the implication of the author's arguments and claims.

Consider the following examples (written by former students):

1. Edmund Morgan writes that "To a very large degree it may be said that Americans bought their independence with slave labor". Do you agree with Morgan, if so what support does he give that leads you to agree and if not how does he fail to persuade you? What business(es) may have been lucrative enough to keep the colonies afloat if any, other than the business created by slavery?
2. Masters welcomed signs of money-saving self-sufficient and "Old world" skills from the African Americans, that would be beneficial to the economy of the plantation. Skills such as shaping metals into tools, cooking, herding cattle, making pottery and much more were among the numerous talents of African Americans. If African Americans were so skilled in domestic and agricultural work, and possessed other useful skills, then how can it be justified that African Americans are "pagan, uncivilized, inferior human beings"?

Logistics:

To receive credit for your RRQ set each week, you must hand in a typed sheet with two questions you have written that are based on the weekly reading assignments. Submitting your RRQ sets each week will count toward your participation.