

How to write a response paper

History 201: The Western

What it is:

A well-written, mistake-free critical 500-word essay that responds to a novel or film that shows a student's original interpretation of the works in question. These papers should also demonstrate familiarity with the interpretations of other scholars (Nash Smith, Tompkins) for example. The response should place the works in question within larger contexts and should explore a particular theme that the student finds interesting or explanatory. Hows and whys are much more important than whats, whos, and whens (but these need to be included for context). The paper will also analyze the author's or filmmaker's points using specific examples.

What it is NOT:

A summary of the books and films in question. A commentary on how you "felt" about the work in question; your opinion about the quality of the book or film is all but irrelevant.

What to ask yourself as you prepare:

How does this work reflect the time and place in which it was produced?

What is the "message" of the work?

How does the artist make this message clear?

What were the crucial moments in the film or novel?

How does this film or novel rely on the past (both the historical past and the history of their genre) to make their point?

How does a particular work reflect the themes of western mythology?

How can I make my point clearly and succinctly?

Typical format:

Hook/Introduction:

1. In one paragraph, draw the reader in and explain the point/s that you wish to make in your response. Do not leave this first paragraph without explaining your

main point.

2. A paragraph or two on the background of the novels or films in question including the historical context in which they were produced.
3. In three to five paragraphs provide your analysis of the films and novels in question. Always keep your points in the forefront of this section. Do NOT slip into too much summary. Use examples to demonstrate your points.
4. Conclude with by universalizing your points.

Your response must be free of grammatical, organizational, and spelling errors.