

Assignment: Summary Essay

Text: *Rereading America*, “Introduction: Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths”

Essay Length: 4 full pages (minimum)

Your first short formal writing assignment is a summary of the Introduction to *Rereading America* entitled “Thinking Critically, Challenging Cultural Myths.” This introduction lays out the major themes used to construct the book and it reviews some key active reading techniques I want you to use as you approach all of the readings this semester. You should read the introduction carefully, more than once, annotating your text with questions and marginal comments as you go, glossing paragraphs for key points and examples that are advanced by the editors to emphasize their most important points and arguments.

Summarizing is an important skill – we need to learn how to articulate what we think we are reading *before* we are able to effectively critique it, and you will be using your summary skills throughout the semester in your analytical essays. When you summarize something, you are forced to pay close attention to *everything* that is said as well as *how* it is said and *who* is saying it and *why* he or she is saying it – knowing these things helps you as a reader understand a text well enough to begin questioning it, challenging it, understanding it. It is also important to know how a summary is different from an analysis: when you summarize something you **do not** evaluate it or analyze it: you only report what you see, without any editorial comment or opinion. This summary essay is a chance for you to practice your summary skills, slowly and methodically. It should also help remind you of the kind of formal writing I always want from you: honest, academic, thorough, and detailed.

Write your summary in the **present tense** throughout, and use only the **3rd person point of view** (he, she, it, they, the reader, the editors, the text, etc.). **Do NOT** use “you” or “your” or “I” or “me” in this assignment, as that is language used in personal narrative writing that we will not be doing in this class. Also, remember that you are *not* to “analyze” the introduction – I do not want your evaluation of the writing or opinion about its ideas, nor do I want you to quote the text in your essay at all. Use **your own words** to summarize what the introduction is about, and remember not to write about yourself but rather the text and only the text. Read the **Summary Guidelines** document carefully, and follow the rules it lays out. Read the **Sample Summary Essay** carefully to see what a good summary should look like – it is written by a composition student like you.

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After rereading the introduction to *Rereading America*, write a 4 full page summary of the chapter, *in your own words*, moving through it slowly, section by section from start to finish. Read the sample summary documents (**Guidelines for Writing a Summary** and the **Sample Summary Essay**) so that you will be adequately prepared for the assignment. You’ll need to cover all of the major themes and details in the chapter. Below are some tips to help you with your work – please read them carefully and follow them as best you can. Remember the primary reason I am asking you to write this assignment is to give you practice assimilating someone else’s ideas and summarizing them in your *own* words.

Type up your summary in Microsoft Word or a similar word processing program. Make sure you spend adequate time proofreading it for clarity, spelling, and sentence construction – work that is not formatted properly and/or is not error free at the sentence level will be returned ungraded and marked as late until it is resubmitted. Read your work aloud to yourself in a quiet place, or have someone else you trust read it to you – these are very good ways of catching mistakes your eye can easily miss when rereading your draft work on the computer or on the page. Please make sure your paper formatting matches exactly the model I have provided in the **Sample Format Page** provided separately.

Good luck. Remember to start on this assignment early and feel free to come to me with questions and draft work – I'll be happy to look it over with you and give you feedback.

Here are some guidelines to follow as you write this essay.

- **DO NOT quote the text in these summaries** – summaries are a place for you to **explain** what you have read **in your own words**, not the words of the editors. The whole point of a summary is to simply report what you see, what has occurred in a piece of writing but NOT to advance or argue an opinion about it (that's the kind of evaluative work you'll do later in your analytical essays).
- One way of approaching this assignment is to notice that the Introduction you are summarizing is broken into separate sections; you might build your own summary essay by dedicating one of your own summary paragraphs to each section in the Introduction. That way, you will be sure to cover all the important points that are dealt with by the editors who wrote the Introduction.
- Report every *important* point: You should work very hard to imagine an ignorant audience for your paper, one that will not know what is in the book introduction until you physically report it to them.
- DO NOT evaluate or analyze the text here – just explain what the text *is* and what and how it talks about it.
- Use only **3rd person speech** (e.g. *he, she, it, they, the authors, the reader, etc.*)(DO NOT use *you, your, or I*), and write only in the **present tense**. I will return papers that use 1st or 2nd person speech or are written in the past tense, mark them as late and ask you to redo them.