

UNIT 1 CLASS NOTES

Below are some clarifications and reminders in anticipation of this unit's first essay work, your summary writing assignment. Please read carefully, as the explanations found here may well answer many of your questions as you move into the real work of the course.

Per **using quoted text in your summary essays**: although I opened the course with a review of plagiarism rules, it is quite important that you understand that for this first essay assignment, a summary of the complete Introduction to *Rereading America*, I do not want you to directly quote the text anywhere in your essays. This will not be true for all of the other essays you write this term, but it is true for this one, and this point is critical to the assignment. You are only to summarize the text, not analyze and/or quote it. A "paraphrase" is a fancy word for "summarize," which is done *entirely* in your own words. Please reread the assignment description as well as the related summary instructional documents within the unit module items and note that *summary work only reports what you have read, it does not seek to evaluate or opine about the ideas in the text, nor does it quote the text directly*. For this essay, you are a reporter only, writing to an ignorant imaginary audience who has not read this text. Your task is only to describe, completely in your own words, the text, from start to finish and in all its rich details. Report specifics: the who, what, where, when, how, why of the "Introduction" to *Rereading America*, but without critiquing it or agreeing/disagreeing with its ideas. And, most importantly, do this work ***entirely in your own words: do not quote the text at all in this assignment***, use only your own summary language that talks about and paraphrases specifics from the text *but does not quote them directly*.

It is extremely important that you understand the basic intent of this first essay assignment: I want you to learn how to condense or distill the most important features of a text so that your reader or listener will be able to know what you are talking about without actually having to read the text him or her self. This summarization skill will become vitally important in all the critical analysis work you'll do throughout the rest of the course: summary will always set the stage for your analysis because you always need to supply your reader with an understandable *context* before you embark on a detailed analytical discussion of a text. Summary does that for your reader. It sets the stage with basic background information for your audience – but it only works if it's done in your own words, not the text's. I know that elsewhere in my assignment instructions within the course (in discussion forum and reading journal work, for example) I have made clear that you must directly cite the text by quoting it in order to receive credit for your work. Not true for this summary essay though. Do your summary work in your own words. For this first assignment, summary essay work that *evaluates* the text rather than simply summarizing it, or essay work that *quotes* the text rather than simply describing and paraphrasing it, will not receive credit: Essays that do not meet these guidelines will not be read or graded, and will be returned for revision with a full letter grade reduction, even if they are submitted on time.

Per **essay length and language**: Please don't submit under length drafts or final versions, not even by a few sentences. Drafts must be **3 full pages** of double-spaced 11 or 12 point text with standard 1.25" margins and no additional paragraph spacing in order to receive credit. Final versions must follow the same formatting guidelines and be a minimum of **4 full pages**. The language you use in your essays is also extremely important: put all your verbs in the present tense, and eliminate 1st person speech (*I, me*) and 2nd person speech (*you, your*). Essays that do not meet these guidelines will not be read or graded, and will be returned for revision with a full letter grade reduction, even if they are submitted on time.

Per your **essay file names**: Please pay very close attention to the File Naming Guidelines sheet I've included in the unit module items. Note from the assignment instructions and from the File Naming Guidelines sheet that you must name files correctly, exactly according to my instructions, or your work will not receive credit, even if it's submitted on time. Please review how to name your essay files and follow those guidelines precisely when you name your essay files, both draft and final versions. The reason I am so very, very strict on how you name your files is that I have over 150 students submitting

essay work to me simultaneously. All of those essays end up on my desktop before being put into their different course folders. If you do not name your file exactly as I've requested, I won't find your essay on my computer and it will not then be read or graded. When you begin to get annoyed with my file naming guidelines, remember that I have 150 of you to manage, not just you, and these file naming rules make it possible for me to do that effectively.

Per **my feedback on draft work**: I do not comment on draft work, nor do I return it to you. Drafts submitted by the standard Wednesday deadline are not returned with comments, as is made clear on the submission description page for the assignment. This is because I simply don't have enough time to read your drafts and return them to you with enough time for you to digest my comments and then apply them to your final versions before you submit them. However, if you want my informal feedback on your draft work, you may have it – but you'll need to email your full drafts to me by **MONDAY** of each week at the latest and tell me in the body of your email that you'd like my feedback on your work. Then I'll be happy to give you my informal feedback response to your draft work that you may then incorporate into your final version.

Per the **essay rewrite policy**: Although I do not routinely comment on draft work, remember that as long as you complete and submit the final version of your essay by its deadline, you may revise and rewrite and resubmit it for a higher grade, as many times as you'd like. So, do your best to proofread your work to the best of your ability, then send me your work. Whatever the grade outcome, you will have a chance to redo your work if you wish to. So, try your best, and then send me your work. You'll only know where you stand once you get my feedback, so don't overthink it or paralyze yourself with fear. Although I state in the assignment descriptions that I want "error free" work from each of you, I still expect some errors – you are students, after all. Error free writing is something I want you to strive for, but it's not something I expect you'll necessarily achieve the first few times around, and that's fine. As long as you turn in your final version on time, you'll be able to revise and rewrite your work no matter what grade you receive.

A few **proofreading tips** before you submit your work: Proofread to the best of your ability, moving through the work sentence by sentence. Use the Proofreading Notes sheet I've included in the unit module items to help you, as it contains descriptions and corrections of the most common student writing errors at this level. Some additional proofreading tips:

Read your essay to yourself aloud, or have someone else read it to you as you read along (sometimes we hear errors that our eyes miss).

Proofread on paper, not on the computer screen - your brain tends to fill in errors you scan on the screen as you read, whereas we tend to read a bit more carefully and methodically on paper.

Make all your verbs the same tense - present.

Eliminate 1st person voice (*I, me*) and 2nd person voice (*you, your*) completely from your writing.

Do not quote the text at all in this first assignment - this is a summary essay where you only report and describe what you write, not quoting it.

Make sure every sentence has a subject and a verb.

Per your **Reading Journal submissions** (if they're required for your course): Please be sure to type your work directly into the text box rather than attaching a separate file. I will not be able to read or grade journal submissions that are attached as a separate document.

Lastly, per your **Discussion Forum grades**: Please remember to adhere to the discussion guidelines by using the text directly for support and illustration in your posts, by creating posts that are the required length, and by keeping your posts sufficiently academic in nature, all while extending the textual conversation as you go. Keep your focus on the text, remember: we're not here to engage in debate on

the issues raised in the things we read, we're here to engage in debate and discussion that considers the strengths and weaknesses of the writing itself. I want you to weigh and critique the form of the language, not the ideas. As you read, ask yourself if the writing works – does it communicate what you think it wants to communicate, and how does it do that, and does it do it well or not well? This is the kind of formal textual discussion I want you to have in these forums.

*You receive 5 points for individual posts that meet or exceed the assignment criteria outlined above. If you receive 3 points for a post, it's because you didn't cite the text directly or sufficiently in your response. If you receive 1 point for a post, it's because, in addition to not citing the text sufficiently, you did not effectively proofread your post for sentence-level errors before submitting. Note that these partial credits will only occur this first week of textual discussion. Thereafter, insufficiently supported or poorly proofread posts will receive no credit.

I hope these clarifications help. Good luck as you all move through this first unit, and remember I'm always available to help and support you in the Virtual Office and via email as well if need be.