

## How To Write A Reaction Or Review Essay

As part of your course, your instructor has asked you to attend a lecture, concert, or play. Likewise, they may have assigned a book, journal article, or poem to read or a movie or video to watch. These are referred to as prompts in this handout. Your assignment is then to “write about your experience” upon being exposed to the prompt (a reaction essay) or to write a critical review of the prompt (a review essay). These types of assignments follow all of the general rules of academic writing except one: in these cases, you are usually allowed to use the first-person singular pronoun (*I*). Rather than creating neutral space between the text and the writer, you become a part of the text. Some academic review essays may require third person pronouns (*he, she, it, they*); check with your instructor if you are unsure. (See BU Writing Centre *Academic Writing Conventions* handout.)

### Reaction or review essay introduction

The first paragraph of a reaction or review essay includes a complete and concise general\* summary of the prompt ending with a thesis statement that includes your response to the prompt. The summary should include all of the key points of the prompt with enough information so that the reader understands the background for your thesis statement.

\*Specific information contributes to the development of the body paragraphs.

If your prompt is a live event, such as a talk, your summary should be written in the past tense and include the date, time, place, and circumstance of the event:

- *On Monday evening, November 21, 2022, holocaust survivor Eva Kuper spoke in Centennial Theatre about her miraculous survival as a Jewish child in Nazi Germany.* (The rest of the summary would follow.)

Summaries of other prompts, including articles and works of art (i.e., novels, movies, or paintings), are generally written in the present tense and include the title, the author/performer/producer, and proper in-text citations and reference page in accordance with the style required by your professor:

- *In “Walk well, my brother,” Farley Mowat (1975) recounts how two apparently mismatched plane crash victims survive in the bleak arctic.* (The rest of the summary would follow.)

In either case, the objective summary is followed by a subjective thesis statement that includes your response to the prompt.

- **Reaction essay thesis example:** *Eva Kuper’s presentation showed me how human connections and courage can overcome hatred.*
- **Review essay thesis example:** *In a story of transformation and redemption, Mowat uses strong characters to illustrate how stereotypes and prejudices held by one culture melt away when viewed through the lens of another culture.*

## Reaction or review essay body paragraphs

The body paragraphs of your essay support the response that you present in your thesis statement. Your response may include one or more of the following, depending upon the assignment:

- What is your emotional reaction to the prompt?
- What surprises you about the prompt?
- What is your interpretation of the prompt's main claim or claims? Do you agree or disagree with them?
- Are there any counter-arguments to the prompt's claim or claims presented? Do you have any?
- What is the best or most disappointing aspect of the prompt?
- Does the prompt relate to events or conditions in your life or in the greater world?
- Does the prompt support or refute ideas you have learned in class or by researching?
- Are any solutions offered to the problem presented in the prompt? Are the solutions presented by the prompt viable? Can you propose better ones?
- Does the prompt cause you to view the world in new ways?
- How does the prompt relate to other works created at the same or different times?
- What is the author's/artist's/speaker's purpose for the prompt?
- For a theatrical event or film: how do the characters, setting, acting, stagecraft, directing and/or script affect your response to the prompt? What is its visual impact?
- For a novel or short story: how does the author's use of language, characters, setting, and/or narration affect your response to the prompt?
- For a work of art: how does the artist's use of materials, color, form, texture, setting, and/or imagery affect your response to the art?

As you craft your essay, plan on at least one body paragraph for each of your points. You must always support your claims with quotations, paraphrases, or examples from the prompt or citations from reliable sources. You can also include ideas that you have learned in class as support. Depending on the essay, you might even include personal examples.

As always, you need to follow your professor's guidelines for the essay.

## Reaction or review essay conclusions

The conclusion wraps up your essay and is your last opportunity to present your claims to the reader. You should first either paraphrase your thesis or summarize your supporting ideas in new ways. Do not simply repeat the thesis verbatim or list your claims. In addition, no new information should be included in your summary. The final thought of your conclusion is a sentence or sentences that bring a sense of closure to the reader. You might link your claims to a wider context in your own life or society. You might offer a warning, a prediction, a recommendation, or a thought-provoking insight. Your reader should be left with something to think about.

