

Due by Tuesday’s class period each week: You don’t need to submit one in the week in which you submit your biographical essay. Submit analytic reading responses by email as an attachment. PDF, DOC, and RTF are all acceptable; DOCX is not. Don’t ask me how I feel about Microsoft making DOCX the default format in new versions of MS Word.

Essay format: Your essay should be in a normal font and size (for example, 12 pt. Times New Roman). Word count should be 400–700 words. Please include word count somewhere at the beginning of the first page. Format in some standard, readable way.

Citations and secondary sources: Do not use any secondary sources. As for the primary text, any intelligible style of citation is acceptable.

Academic integrity: Keep in mind that using someone else’s ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement is plagiarism. See the course syllabus for more details. In short, don’t do it.

Assignment: I will ask for two types of reading responses. Both are based on the reading that you will be doing at the same time. I will let you know each week which type I expect for the following week.

Type 1: argument analysis: Identify a key argument in the reading. It can be the one main argument (if there is one) or one of numerous key arguments. By all means feel free to pick one that you find interesting. But I do ask that it be an argument that plays a significant role in the reading. Then do two things in the reading response: (1) Spell out as precisely and as concisely as you can what the argument is. That means both saying what the conclusion is and what the premises are that are supposed to support the conclusion. (2) Provide a succinct but critical evaluation of the argument. For example, you might explain why one of the premises should be rejected. Or you might show that the conclusion does not actually follow from the premises. Or you might give an independent argument for the contrary to the conclusion. Obviously, this will have to be brief; but I do want you to say something more interesting than merely “I didn’t like the argument” or “The conclusion is wrong.” I imagine that (1) will typically require more space than (2), but that may depend on the argument in question.

Type 2: Explaining the seemingly crazy: Find a statement in the reading that strikes you as crazy, strange, or puzzling. Then do three things: (1) Say precisely what the putatively crazy claim is. (2) Say exactly what it is that we ordinarily think that conflicts or leads to a conflict with the putatively crazy claim. (3) Try to suggest reasons for why the author might have made such a statement. Try to make the claim look less crazy than it initially looked. (You may want to consult the prompt for Essay 2 to get a better sense for the sort of thing that I am looking for.) As for ratios, again, they may depend on the claim that you pick, but I imagine that usually (1) will need the least space and (3) the most.

Grading: They will be graded on a coarse scale of A (good), B (acceptable), and F (fail). The idea is that it should be easier to get full credit with these than with the longer papers, but I still want to see some effort. The lowest three grades will be dropped.

Commenting: I don’t plan to give extensive comments on these. But if for some reason you would like a fuller response (especially if you think you might want to develop an idea in it into a longer paper), just include a note saying that so. You can also ask for more detailed comments after the fact (say, if you realize a few weeks later that you’d like to develop it into a longer paper). If you ask me for detailed responses every week, I’ll start thinking that you’re a bit demanding and annoying, but I’m happy to provide them a few times.