

Unit 3: Introduction



Now that you've summarized the article objectively, it's time to carefully analyze it. In this unit, we'll be drafting the critical response, the section of this assignment in which you get to engage the article critically. Is "Working at McDonald's" an effective piece of persuasive writing? Why or why not?

Unit 3: Reading

Though the content is very similar, the specific page numbers of your reading assignment may vary depending on your edition of the textbook.

11th Edition Reading Assignment:

The St. Martin's Guide to Writing, Chapter 12, from the bottom of page 512 (starting with the section entitled "Synthesizing") through page 522. Also, re-read "Working at McDonald's," from the bottom of page 247 through the top of page 250, as this is the article you will be using as the basis of your Summary & Critical Response assignment.

10th Edition Reading Assignment:

The St. Martin's Guide to Writing, Chapter 12, from the bottom of page 533 (starting with the section entitled "Synthesizing") through page 543. Also, re-read "Working at McDonald's," pages 260-262, as this is the article you will be using as the basis of your Summary & Critical Response assignment.

Older Editions:

The page numbers listed above are for the two latest editions of our textbook. If you have the 9th edition, please read from the bottom of page 588 (starting with the section entitled "Synthesizing") through page 598. Also, re-read "Working at McDonald's," pages 280-283, as this is the article you will be using as the basis of your Summary & Critical Response assignment. If you still have the 8th or 7th edition, please read pages 598-608.

Unit 3: Assignment -- Summary & Critical Response (Part II)

Major Paper #1—Summary/Critical Response

In the last unit, we focused on crafting the summary. In this unit, we will focus on the second half of this paper: the critical response. The paper (including both sections--the summary and the critical response) will be due at the end of this unit.

The Assignment:

This assignment has two parts:

In this unit, we will be focusing on Part 2, the Critical Response.

Critical Response

Write a two page (minimum of 400-500 words) response to the article your instructor has chosen from the assignment. Please use "Working at McDonald's" from the bottom of page 247 through the top of page 250 on your 11th edition textbook (or on pages 260-262 of your 10th edition textbook, or pages 280-283 of your 9th edition book).

Before you even begin drafting, you will want to decide on the terms of your response. Once you decide on the terms (or grounds) of your response, you'll want to figure out how you can support your points—using logic, outside evidence—whatever is appropriate. Your response cannot be based on simply your opinion about the issue.

Please be sure to review the Submitting Your Assignment of Unit #3 section for specific instructions on how you should turn in your work for grading. The Summary & Critical Response Essay with both required sections is due at the end of Unit #3.

NOTE FOR THOSE WITH OLDER EDITIONS: If you have the 8th edition, please use "Working at McDonald's" on pages 283-286. If you have the 7th edition, please use "Nickel and Dimed" on pages 270-273.

Unit 3: Lecture Notes

A Sample Critical Response

The following is an example of how one student responded to the article "Sticks and Stones and Sports Team Names." (Again, remember: "Sticks and Stones" is not the article that you will be reading and responding to. However, this example does provide a good example of how to craft the critical response, in general.)

As you read this example, ask yourself what you notice about the critical response—in terms of purpose, focus, tone, organization and formatting.

Sticks and Stones and Contradictions

I found Richard Estrada's article, "Sticks and Stones and Sports Team Names," unconvincing, and also a bit confusing. Estrada's language seems inflated, exaggerated, and even contradictory. His evidence is entirely anecdotal, and as a result, we receive very few concrete facts to support his claims. In addition, Estrada's credibility is unclear throughout the article.

To begin with, Estrada uses many exaggerated and contradictory phrases. For instance, Estrada claims that using ethnic sports teams names and mascots is "dehumanizing" to Native Americans (280). To "dehumanize" is to deprive someone of human qualities, yet Estrada never proves that this is actually what ethnic sports names actually do. In fact, he completely contradicts this notion of "dehumanization" in the previous sentence, by discussing why these mascots were chosen in the first place. "The noble symbols of the Redskins or college football's Florida Seminoles or the Illinois Illini are meant to be strong and proud" (Estrada 280). Noble. Strong. Proud. These are all human qualities; indeed, they are qualities many people aspire to attain. So how can such symbols be dehumanizing?

In addition, the title "Sticks and Stones and Sports Team Names" itself seems to contradict Estrada's claims. By invoking the children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," Estrada seems to imply that mascots and team names don't matter at all. I had to read the article several times before I finally grasped his intentions. Estrada is trying to be ironic. Although his title alludes to the children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," Estrada is actually trying to prove the opposite: Words can hurt us, and deeply. While most people are probably familiar with the original children's rhyme, I don't believe that most readers will know that they should be reading Estrada's title ironically. This is particularly true when we consider Estrada's intended audience. This column was written for the *Dallas Morning News*, not for the classroom setting. How many people really critically read their morning newspapers? How many people study such articles carefully, rather than skimming, and read them several times?

Next, Estrada's lack of concrete evidence is problematic. Other than references to particular teams, his evidence is entirely anecdotal and often hearsay. For example, overhearing a father's complaint on the radio about a largely unrelated incident—a school dress-up day—does little to prove the real harms of ethnic sports names and mascots. This story only shows that one person was offended by an irresponsible decision made by a few insensitive teachers. What Estrada needs to prove is real harm done: Perhaps interviewing or surveying a group of Native Americans to hear their thoughts on this subject. Perhaps citing a psychological or sociological study that proves the lasting impacts of mascots in social development. How does seeing these mascots affect the way people of other races view Native Americans? How does seeing these mascots affect the way Native Americans view themselves? Do most Native Americans feel offended by mascots such as the Braves and the Redskins? These are all questions Estrada needs to answer with more concrete evidence.

Finally, Estrada's credibility and investment in this issue are unclear throughout his article. Is Estrada Native American? He certainly doesn't have to be to care about this issue, but either way, he should make it clearer *why* he cares. If Estrada is Native American, does he presume to speak on behalf of all Native Americans? If Estrada is not Native American, how does he know any Native Americans are actually offended? (Other than the father who called the radio station, of course.) What Estrada thinks about this issue is clear. But what does he really *know* about it?

Before I read this article, I already believed that ethnic-based mascots *could* be degrading. But Estrada does nothing to actually prove this degradation. His article includes exaggerated and contradictory language, but no concrete facts, and no clear evidence of the author's credibility. In the end, sticks and stones may break my bones, but Estrada's words cannot convince me.

Again, what did you notice? What does the critical response include? How is it formatted?

The first paragraph of this section defines the terms of the response and the student's claims. In the example above, for instance, the student is focusing on exaggerated language, lack of evidence, and the author's lack of credibility. You will want the terms of your response to be clear in the first paragraph as well, so that your reader will know where you're going.

The last paragraph of this section provides a sense of conclusion and restates the student's claims/terms of response. You will also want your closing paragraph to wrap things up, and reemphasize your points.

Between the first paragraph and the last paragraph, however, what's happening? The student is devoting at least one paragraph to each of his claims. For instance, paragraphs 2 and 3 offer examples and explanation to support the student's claim that Estrada uses exaggerated, contradictory language. Paragraph 4 offers examples and explanation to support the student's claim that the article lacks evidence. Paragraph 5 offers examples and explanation to support the student's claim that Estrada's lack credibility. I recommend you use this 1-2 paragraphs per claim structure, which should help keep you organized and the reader on track.

Finally, perhaps you also noticed the funny little (280) things dispersed throughout the response. Those are known as *parenthetical citations*. They tell us the page of the article from which the student is paraphrasing ideas that are not his own (and/or places in which he is directly quoting the author, though the direct quotes also need to be in "quotation marks").

But how do I get from here to there?

As with the summary, I recommend you consider the materials in your chapter as a guide in crafting your critical response. In particular, the last five reading strategies in Chapter 12 offer a helpful guide to determining the grounds of your response.

However, unlike the strong response in Comp I, in which you were allowed to reflect on your own views of the issue at hand, you may not do much of that in the paper. You want to talk about the successfulness of the writing, not your opinions or beliefs.

While you may not just focus on your personal beliefs, you do have the following options in terms of the grounds of your response, all of which are discussed in our reading:

*EVALUATING THE LOGIC OF THE ARGUMENT

- This includes questions of "appropriateness," "believability," and "consistency/completeness."

*RECOGNIZING EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION

- This includes questions relating to emotionally manipulative techniques such as overly emotional or tear-jerking language, exaggerated statistics, scary stories, doomsday-type imaginative scenarios, and other over-the-top emotionally-laden moves that the writer may be using to manipulative the reader.

*JUDGING THE WRITER'S CREDIBILITY

- This includes questions related to the writer's "knowledge," "fairness," and use of "common ground."

To determine your grounds, you may want to ask yourself the following questions:

- 1.) Do you want your response to focus on evaluating the logic of the argument? In other words, do you want to critically analyze whether the reasoning and support offered in the article is believable and sufficient?
- 2.) Do you want your response to focus on the issue of emotional manipulation? In other words, do you want to discuss areas in the article where the author seems to be exaggerating or using other tools inappropriately to gain your sympathy or compliance to his/her point of view?
- 3.) Do you want your response to focus on the credibility of the author? In other words, do you want to consider whether the author seems appropriately knowledgeable and fairly considers other arguments or points of view?

You may be able to focus your entire response on just one of the above issues. Or you may decide to discuss two or three issues that seem related. (For instance, in the sample strong response, the student chose to discuss emotional manipulation—number 2 on this list, lack of evidence—number 1 on this list, and the author's lack of credibility—number 3 on this list.)

Please keep in mind that while the strong response must be "critical" in some way, this does not mean that it has to be negative. Despite the example above, a critical response may discuss the ways in which the article is successful and convincing.

Unit 3: Example

A Sample Critical Response

The following is an example of how one student responded to the article “Sticks and Stones and Sports Team Names.” (Again, remember: “Sticks and Stones” is not the article that you will be reading and responding to. However, this example does provide a good example of how to craft the critical response, in general.)

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