



OWLS Writing Guides: RESPONDING TO READING

Summary, Reflection, Analysis, and Argument

SUMMARY: WHAT DOES THE WRITER SAY?

The summary response to a reading—an article, a chapter, or a book—relates as clearly as possible what the author says. *When you write a summary, you strive for objectivity and accuracy as you relate the main ideas of the original.* A summary omits details and examples that are not needed to convey the "gist" of the original, and it does not include any ideas not found in the original. It is written entirely in your own words, with few, if any, direction quotations, and using present tense. A summary does not analyze, evaluate, or argue a position; it simply restates the original material in a much more condensed form.

REFLECTION: HOW DOES THE WORK RELATE TO YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES?

This kind of response explains your personal reaction to the work. *When you write a reflective response, you explore how the work relates to your own experiences, beliefs, and values.* Is the writer's claim validated by any of your own experiences? Did the reading confirm, challenge, or change in any way your original viewpoint on the topic? Because the reflective response often involves discussion of your own experiences, beliefs, and values in relation to what you read, this response is usually written in the first person.

ANALYSIS: WHAT DOES THE WRITER DO?

Another kind of response to a reading is a critical response. Critical analysis examines how the author says what he/she says. *When you write a critical analysis, you examine the various elements of the work to discover how they function together to form an effective whole.* The elements you examine depend upon your specific purpose for analysis. For example, an analysis of an argument might look at the argument's claims and reasons, supporting information (evidence), and logic. An analysis of a short story might focus on how the setting relates to the story's meaning.

An analysis includes only as much summary of the work as is needed for a reader to follow the analysis and understand how it relates to the original argument. The analytical response avoids personal reflection on and agreement or disagreement with the ideas.

Often, critical analysis also evaluates the work, making judgments about how well it fulfills its purpose. In that case, your analysis would support a judgment about the overall effectiveness of the work, such as the credibility and persuasiveness of an argument: Is the thesis built on reasonable and valid claims and reasons? Are these claims supported with convincing supporting information and sound reasoning? Is its argument persuasive?

ARGUMENT: WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON THE TOPIC OR ISSUE?

This kind of response asserts a position on the topic, supported with reasons and evidence. *When you write an argumentative response, you explain why you agree or disagree, in whole or in part, with the writer's claims and ideas.* You may agree with the claim by elaborating upon the main points of the argument with original support (your own ideas and evidence), or you may disagree with the claim by challenging and questioning those points.

EXAMPLES. Here are some paragraphs that respond in different ways to the argument made by John Ellis in "The Consequences of Carnage as Entertainment." Note: While the sample analysis paragraph concludes that the target argument is poorly argued, your evaluation need not be a negative assessment. Approaching a work "critically" does not mean "criticizing" it in the usual, negative sense, but rather, analyzing it and making a reasoned judgment about its quality.

SUMMARY: In "The Consequences of Carnage as Entertainment," author John Ellis argues that youth violence results from watching violence in the media. He attributes the rash of school shootings happening at the time to the effects of TV violence on young viewers. He accuses the news media of playing a part in making violence attractive, a way for a troubled youth to become a celebrity. According to several studies, a significant percentage of television programs contain violence. This violence affects children by making them more aggressive and by desensitizing them to real-life violence. Ellis claims that the entertainment industry has done nothing to curb this problem and that societal violence spurred by media violence will only worsen. Serious youth violence, such as school shootings, will become more and more frequent and less and less shocking. He warns that if society continues to do nothing to curb the violence in our media, our very civilization is threatened.

REFLECTION: John Ellis's essay "The Consequences of Carnage as Entertainment" claims that exposure to violent media causes an increase in youth violence. Growing up, my friends and I played violent 'shooter' video games, but none of us turned out to be a violent person. We thought the games were fun and never imagined taking that violence into the real world. Therefore, I believe Ellis goes too far in blaming societal violence on the media. Still, his article made me wonder about why some children do turn violent. New Orleans has a very high rate of violent crime committed by young people. Is the city the way it is because its youth are watching violent movies? Or is it because many of them see friends, family, and neighbors cut down by violence almost daily? Based on my own experiences, I have concluded that children are influenced more by the example set by their parents and other adults in their community, than by what video games they play after school.

ANALYSIS / EVALUATION: In "The Consequences of Carnage as Entertainment," author John Ellis does not present a strong argument for his claim that youth violence results from watching violence in the media. He gives evidence about the amount of violence on television, citing university studies. He also includes credible expert opinions from the American Medical Association and another researcher that conclude that watching violent media may increase a child's aggressiveness and his tolerance toward images of violence. However, Ellis gives no evidence to prove the causal connection between violent media and serious, deadly violence committed by children. He provides several examples of school shootings, claiming that these are the fruits of consuming violent media; but without evidence linking media to such extreme behavior, these examples are mere scare tactics. This lack of credible support undermines the claim, and the scare tactics make the author seem desperate.

ARGUMENT: I agree with the position taken by Ellis in "The Consequences of Carnage as Entertainment," especially his warning that society will continue to become more and more violent if our entertainment continues to glorify violence. Ellis mentions the recent school shootings, and it is a fact that at least some of the school shooters were fans of dark and violent music, and video games like *Doom*. Perhaps their interest in this entertainment did not lead directly to their actions, but I believe it helped form their attitudes about violence and how to treat others. Young people are committing more and more crimes in recent decades; can it be just a coincidence that the entertainment enjoyed by the young has also gotten more violent? Children learn from what they see. If we accept that TV shows such as *Sesame Street* can influence children positively, should we deny that movies depicting violence influence them negatively? Children who are vulnerable enough to be profoundly affected by violent media probably already have some emotional or psychological problems, but we should not add to the problem by allowing them access to irresponsible media depictions of graphic violence.