



Example Reading Diary Handout [English]

Note:

This material was produced at Leuphana University of Lüneburg and is included as an example in the CREATES Toolkit for Co-creative Learning.

For more information and additional educational tools, visit: <http://europe-creates.eu>

The Reading Diary – Instructions for Students

Students who take notes on readings and who do reflective writing about readings have been shown to learn more, enjoy reading more, and to earn higher grades in assignments and classes. **If you don't take notes on your readings already, you should start now!** To help you make the most of your readings, in this class you'll contribute regularly to a personal reading diary. The reading diary serves four purposes:

1. It helps you process and document readings.
2. It encourages connections to be drawn from and between individual readings.
3. It provides a forum for honing synthesis and critical thinking skills.
4. It helps to demonstrate that you are doing the required readings.

Reading Diaries (following: RDs) mean:

- a form of written assignment
- especially in reading-based seminars
- an alternative option where normally an academic paper or essay is required, or other forms of combined types of assessment including a written part.

In the following I would like to explain how academic teachers and students can proceed with reading diaries, aspects of content and form, and what might be regarded possible criteria of quality and of grading.

The method

During the seminar that runs over one semester, you will write three RDs about three texts of your own choice. I.e., you identify and choose three of the compulsory weekly readings. Each RD comprises approx. 2-3 pages. Thus, three reading diaries of 2-3 pages each result in 6-9 pages of the final paper. After the last seminar session, you will write a final reflection that comprises approx. 6 pages. Thus the whole written paper consists of 12-15 pages.

The texts must be written unassisted and uploaded to the provided folder at mystudy at least 2 days (or as agreed) *before* the respective seminar session. The lecturer will give you short written feedback and bring it to the seminar meeting. I will do this in the form of comments on the printed reading diary. To my experience, the RD offers a good basis and preparation for a lively discussion in the seminar sessions and helps all of us to enjoy the seminar the better and understand the seminar as co-creative learning.

It is important that the RD is written *before* the respective seminar session. It is not a protocol and must therefore be written before the discussion in the seminar meeting. The RD does not have to follow strict citation rules. It may be written from a first-person perspective. Moreover, there is no claim to completeness, as it is not a summary or a review, but deals with the relationship of the reader to her*his text.

It is important that you find your own voice and that you use the reading diary to start with your own active engagement with the text!

Questions of content

There are different possibilities for writing the RDs.

On the one hand, it can concentrate on the content of the text. The reader may use the RD to summarise, explain or discuss a passage considered most important or most interesting or most difficult. Though, it is important to bear in mind that a simple summary of the selected passage would not be sufficient. The RD should result in a deeper engagement with a part of the text that appears important to you as the reader. It is also desirable to ask questions about the text or to name gaps in understanding that should be discussed in the seminar.

On the other hand, the RD might deal with the personal reading experience. New insights, moments of surprise and personal examples can be part of the content. If questions arise, it may be helpful to record what helped in answering them.

Judgements about the structure or comprehensibility of the text ("easy to understand", "poorly structured", etc.) are NOT desired.

Concluding reflection

The concluding reflection is written at the end of the semester. The three RDs written before serve as its basis. They are not revised after the feedback; they are preserved as documents of the learning process. The subject of the final reflection is the process that may have resulted from the discussion of the text in the seminar, the writing of the RD and/or the feedback of the lecturer. You should refer to the previously written reading diaries and record possible processes such as experiences, developments or advances in knowledge. If suitable, a central theme or thread can be worked out across the three diaries: What are the connections? Are there contradictions, which ones? While the Reading Diaries were perhaps written in a free form, in the final reflection arguments and quotations should be used to support one's own statements. Formally, the usual rules for writing academic papers should be followed. A central question of final reflection could be:
How do I understand the texts at the end of the course?

Grading

The grading of the final product (3 reading diaries plus final reflection) is based on the concluding reflection. The finished document should have a length of 12-15 text pages. Both the reading diaries and the final reflection are submitted in one document (including cover page, table of contents, references and bibliography).

Possible structures of the whole document

Example A:

Introduction
Reading Diaries
Concluding Reflection
Upshot and Outlook
Bibliography

Example B:

Introduction
Concluding Reflection
Upshot and Outlook
Bibliography
Appendix: Reading Diaries

Other ways of structuring the final product, such as the interweaving of passages from the Reading Diaries and a commentary, are also conceivable and have already been successfully presented. We intentionally do not add any example, as this could encourage mere imitation. What is desired is a facilitation of scientific writing that means more freedom. Experiments with content and form are welcome as long as the work deals with the seminar texts and a process is reflected.