Reading Response Guidelines

For this class, you will write reflections on five of the ten readings, précis on the other five readings, and a final reflection. In this document, you will find guidelines for writing reflections and précis.

**Reflections**

Your reading reflections ought to be your reaction to, rather than a summary of, the reading. In other words, you will be recording your own thoughts on and questions about the reading rather than restating what the author wrote. You may want to comment on one or several things you found particularly interesting, compelling, confusing, or frustrating. Because I will be responding to your reflections when I return your packets, this is the place to raise any questions you might have about the reading.

An important aspect of your reflection should be explaining *why* you chose to comment on some particular aspect of the reading. If you write that you found something especially interesting, compelling, confusing, or frustrating, explain why. Rather than just writing “I found this sentence confusing,” I’d like you to write “I found this sentence confusing because…” Often, processing why you may have reacted strongly to something leads to particularly interesting analysis.

I ask that your reading reflections fill 1-2 well-written pages.

**Rhetorical précis**

In contrast to the somewhat free-form reading reflection, your rhetorical précis will be a highly-structured, four-sentence paragraph. Although you will be writing about a different piece and making different points in each précis, it will always follow the same format, which is as follows:

Sentence one: include the following elements:

-name of the author, title of the work, date in parenthesis;

-a rhetorically accurate verb (such as "assert," "argue," "deny," "refute," "prove," disprove," "explain," etc.);

-a that clause containing the major claim (thesis statement) of the work.

Sentence two: explain how the author develops and supports the major claim (thesis statement).

Sentence three: state the author's purpose, followed by an "in order" phrase.

Sentence four: describe the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

Here is an example précis (note that it is on an article we will not be reading in this class):

Charles S. Peirce's article “The Fixation of Belief” (1877) asserts that humans have psychological and social mechanisms designed to protect and cement (or "fix") our beliefs. Peirce backs this claim up with descriptions of four methods of fixing belief, pointing out the effectiveness and potential weaknesses of each method. Peirce's purpose is to point out the ways that people commonly establish their belief systems in order to jolt the awareness of the reader into considering how their own belief system may the product of such methods and to consider what Peirce calls "the method of science" as a progressive alternative to the other three. Given the technical language used in the article, Peirce is writing to a well-educated audience with some knowledge of philosophy and history and a willingness to other ways of thinking.