

# What is a Response Paper?

After reading an instructor-assigned essay students will write response papers that analyze some aspect of the essay. At times, the instructor may suggest a particular direction for the paper. At other times, your instructor may not suggest where to start. It will be up to you to decide how you are going to respond to what you have read.

## A response paper is....

- An analytical essay that may include a brief summary of article in your introduction
- An analysis of the reading, based upon critical questions you ask about the reading
  - why things are the way they are; the causes
  - how they happened; the effects
  - what makes them work; the consequences
- Your reaction to the reading, linking it to your own experiences
  - Explain how you react to or interpret what you have read. You don't need to discuss all your reactions.
- Written in a variety of modes: description, narrative, comparison/contrast, exposition, or a combination, based on how you choose to respond.
- A first person response. Use of "I" is good.

## A response paper is NOT....

- A summary of the article
- A random stream of consciousness listing of every one of your reactions.
- Not just a demonstration of your comprehension (what happened), but your critical independent thought. Extend the essay beyond the world of the essay to the wider world of the readers.

## Different techniques for getting a focus, generating ideas:

### 1. Key-word Response

Choose one or more key words that describe your initial response, such as "angered, amused, surprised, confused, annoyed, curious, or shocked."

After reading the essay I was \_\_\_\_\_

After reading the essay I felt \_\_\_\_\_

### Example of **Key word Response** to "The Boor War."

After reading "The Boor War," I felt encouraged, but worried and concerned. I felt encouraged because I was glad that someone, particularly an older person, had both the gall and the common sense to tell someone to stop doing something, but I wonder what would happen if Mrs. Seigel were confronted or even attacked by a person she corrected. Once I was tempted to shout at a person in the car next to me to turn down his blaring radio, but he looked like a person I would not want to meet alone on the street, so I decided to do nothing. But I am concerned about what a person can do safely to control unacceptable behavior.

### 2. Annotation

Annotating is a way to keep track of your impressions, reactions, and questions as you read. You jot down ideas about what you are reading. This is your personal response; the ideas that come into your mind as you read. You might question, agree with, or express surprise at those ideas. Write your annotations in the margins of the essay.

Annotations can be:

- questions that come to mind
- personal reactions
- brief phrases that summarize important points
- sections about which you need further information
- sections in which the author reveals his/her reasons for writing
- ideas you agree or disagree with
- inconsistencies in the writer's arguments

## Example of Annotation

That may seem like prudent advice, but Axelrod (who lives in Ann Arbor, after all) has never tried getting New York's government to enforce a norm. For the last word on the egg question, I tracked down my role model, Mrs. Seigel.

"If there's someone out there on the street making noise," she said, "what I would do is just go right out and talk to him."

"What would you say?"

"I'd say: 'Hey, cut it out. You're annoying people. You don't have live alone in this world.'"

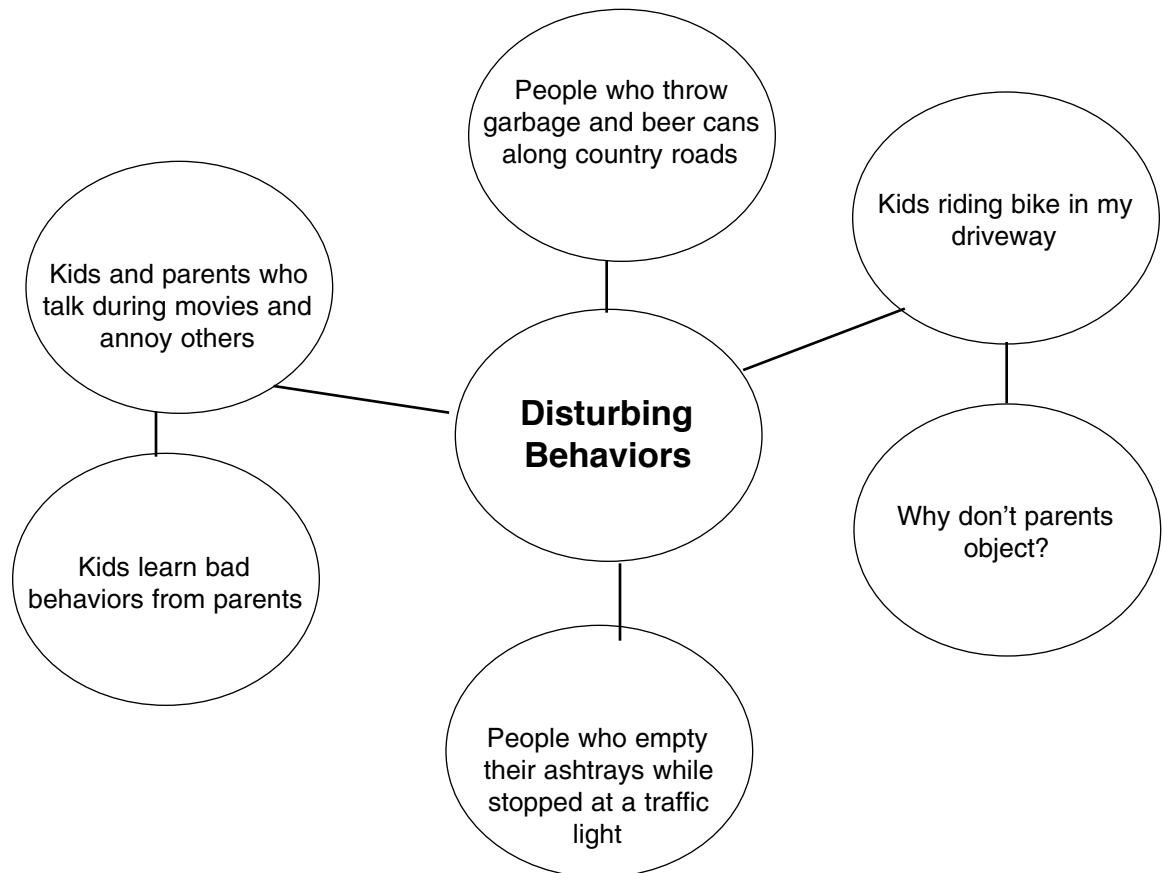
I don't know—somehow an egg works better for me. We can't all be as brave as Mrs. Seigel, who turned 92 on Friday. But let's not quibble about strategies. We cranks are too busy to waste time arguing among ourselves. Defectors must be punished! New cranks must be mobilized! At this very instant, people are wasting time reading while norms are being flouted out on the street. Cut it out! put down the magazine and get out there right now. You don't live along in this world! Have you enforced a norm today?

Mayor Guliani seems to want to enforce norms.

Be cooperative

But one hostile action can lead to another. Also, the person with the car alarm may not know why the egg was thrown. Could be dangerous.

## 3. Example of Mapping



#### 4. Example of Two-column Journal format:

##### Quotations:

“She seemed to be experiencing a novel sensation—shame— and it occurred to me that New York might be a better place if more of us emulated Mrs. Seigel.”

Was there a rational case to be made for cranks?

We need to find new ways to encourage the enforcement of useful cooperative norms.

##### Reactions:

Someone once wrote about New Yorkers’ “glassy-eyed stare”—the way they learn to ignore unusual behavior so that the person exhibiting the behavior won’t notice them. Also, city dwellers are often too busy or too distracted to notice bad behavior.

Yes, there is, if you can be sure the person you are confronting is sane and doesn’t carry a concealed weapon. But you can’t always be sure. It’s not worth losing your life over an empty bottle.

By “new ways” does he mean that “old ways” no longer work? Was Mrs. Seigel practicing one of the new ways? What could these “new ways” be? He doesn’t say.