

English 680G
Spring 2004
The Reading Note

The reading note is a 2-4 page paper (single-spaced) on the week's assigned readings. It asks the writer to clearly articulate the main points of the text and to critically engage with those points. We have a total of five reading notes this semester, one on each of the main texts of the course.*

The first half of the reading note should be a summary of the text. The note should not worry about being exhaustive in its summary, but it should be as clear and detailed as possible. The note should attempt to convey an understanding of the major concepts, concerns, and nuances in the text using the language of the text. That is to say, the note deals with the text on its own terms, turning it around and making it reflect back on itself.

As the summary comes to its end, an analysis wants to follow, which constitutes the second half of the reading note. Ideas always call for a response, and the second half of the response heeds this call. Perhaps a specific claim was made or a general concept/sentiment conveyed, which calls for a response. The note might seek to place the text in relation to other readings for the course, or even connect them to other courses. There might even be an application of the text, which emerges in the writing of the note.

Occasionally, we may draw on these responses in class. Therefore, these notes should be considered forms of "public discourse"—rhetoric that will inform, entertain, and delight the intellectual sensibilities of the class.

I will provide a grade for these responses, along with notes to help you improve on your writing as we move throughout the course. However, I will abstain from providing a grade if the paper is not what it can be, and the paper will have the opportunity to rewrite itself.

*The fourth reading note on Judith Butler's excerpts is the one exception.