

**University of Ottawa  
School of Political Studies**

**INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN POLITICS  
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**How to write a REACTION PAPER**

**You have been assigned the task of preparing two critical reaction papers. Reaction Papers are due in class on the day the reading is being discussed.**

A critical reaction entails the examination of the article on more than a superficial level. It should describe the main points of an article or chapter. What is being argued and why? What is the substance of the argument? How is this demonstrated? And what are the conclusions? The first part of your reaction acts a summary of the article or chapter that can both refresh your memory of its contents and give a good introduction for those who have not read it.

Reaction papers must not exceed two-pages per reading. They must be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. They must use 1-inch margins on all sides. The paper must include the title of the chapter or article and the names of the authors in single spacing. You do not need to reference the journal or book. Finally, the reaction should include your student number and not your name. **Assignments that do not follow these guidelines will not be marked and you will receive an INC (incomplete) grade.**

There are seven steps to critical summarising:

1. **Skim read** the article or chapter at least once, without taking notes.
2. **Think** about the article or chapter. Is there something that sticks in your mind? Is there something that does not sit well with you? Is there something that interests you? Does it bore you? Initial reactions to the article provide a useful framework for you to write your article review.
3. **Read the article/chapter again.** When reading the article a second time, keep in mind those aspects of the articles that struck you during the first read.
4. **Write a brief summary** of the article that highlights the author's argument, supporting evidence and conclusion. No more than **one-third** of the reaction paper should be dedicated to summarising the article.
5. **Start to write your reaction by answering the following questions:**
  - (i) What do you remember most about the article?
  - (ii) What did you find most interesting?
  - (iii) Why did you find those parts/aspects/elements interesting?
  - (iv) What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of the article?
6. **Keep in mind** that a critical reaction does not mean that you have to tear the article to shreds. You can be positive in a critical review. Simply keep in mind the six steps of critical reading listed above.

7. **Develop your argument.** Aim to discuss the following:
  - (i) What is the author's argument?
  - (ii) Of what is the author trying to convince you? (Normally found in the Intro)
  - (iii) What are the elements of the argument? (How does the author address the question s/he is considering?)
  - (iv) Is the argument convincing?
  - (v) Is the argument well researched and documented?
  - (vi) Are there elements of the argument that you would have included? Or excluded?
  - (vii) Could you reach another conclusion based on the evidence the author presents?
  - (viii) Is any evidence left out? Sometime author's leave out convincing evidence if it is detrimental to their overall argument. Is this the case (or not)?
  - (ix) Are there any case studies that would add additional support for the author's argument? Any case studies that would refute it?
  - (x) Do you know of any other authors who have the same (or different) opinions as this author?
8. **Pay special attention to the Introduction and Conclusion of the article/chapter.** The Introduction and Conclusion of any article or chapter are important. Be sure to read them carefully. The body of the article will provide the supporting evidence while the Introduction and Conclusion often contain important guidance on the author's argument and conclusion.
9. **Consider the author and his/her biases.** You can also analyse the arguments of the author by examining the author and considering his/her biases:
  - (i) Does the author have an institutional affiliation? Does this potentially affect his/her opinion?
  - (ii) Did the author leave out anything of importance?
  - (iii) When was the article written? You cannot criticise an author for not considering the impact of, for example, the events of 9/11 on his/her arguments if the article was written prior to 9/11!
  - (iv) The nationality, sex and mother tongue of an author may be of importance.