

How To Write a Review Essay

Review essays are critical reviews of at least 2 (usually 3 or 4) readings covered in the course. Often they will be from the same week, but students are free to choose readings from different weeks if they believe they can be usefully contrasted. The purpose of these essays is to allow students to show that they understand the arguments or main points of several readings and can analyze them in a coherent, integrated, and thematic fashion.

You should not do any additional research or make reference to any outside works in writing these papers. The aim is to develop your writing and analytical skills, not your research skills. The readings form the raw material on which you are to make a coherent and critical argument.

Course readings even from the same week are rarely on exactly the same topic, or rarely do they discuss a topic from exactly the same point of view. Therefore, the challenge is to find and make connections, to make the readings speak to each other by reorganizing them and selectively focussing on certain aspects of them. Ask yourself: What would author S say to the arguments of Author T? Review essays present an argument based on the readings so that they are in constant and full dialogue with one another. This requires imposing your own intellectual framework on the readings. Do not just say "Article A focusses on X, but Article B focuses on Y". The aim is to get a theme that runs through the entire essay so that in "reviewing" the readings you are really interpreting them. This is an interpretive, exegetical exercise. You might want to briefly introduce what the authors talk about in general, but very quickly you need to impose some intellectual order on all the information. The reader needs to know at every page where you are going and how it all fits together

A good rule of thumb to follow is to pose a question at the outset of the paper that you intend to answer. This gives the paper a coherence and allows you keep a focus on your question and its answer, using the readings critically for this purpose.

Review essays should be 8-10 typed double-spaced pages. They should contain the following elements:

Title

Course Number

Instructor's Name

Your Name

The titles of the readings under review.

Part 1 (about 1-2 pages)

- state a question you wish to answer or a theme you wish to address using the readings
- state your answer to the question or conclusion about the theme
- give a road-map for how you are going to make that argument

Part 2 (about 6 pages)

- introduce the question or theme you wish to address -- why is it important?
- engage in a sustained review of the readings, comparing and contrasting them, as a means to addressing your chosen question or theme
- make the argument for a particular answer or conclusion

Part 3 (about 2 pages)

- respond to likely criticisms of your answer or conclusion
- what are the policy implications of your view?
- what further research questions are important to answer?