

CMSC 304 - Fall 2013

Reading Journal Guidelines

Completing assigned readings, and participating in the online and in-class discussion on these readings, is a significant part of the work that you are expected to do for this class. This handout probably seems a bit detailed, but the quick summary is: Do the reading, and participate meaningfully in the online discussion for every reading assignment, and you'll be fine. Just to be clear, I don't really expect even your "high-quality contributions" to be more than a paragraph or so (though I expect you will occasionally have a lot more to say, and will sometimes have something meaningful and substantive to say in just a few sentences).

You are expected to contribute to an online discussion by writing in the group "reading journal" as part of *each* reading assignment. (The reading assignments that you need to post on are marked by an "RJ" in the Homework column of the class schedule.) Your grade in this area is worth 15% of the overall grade for the class, and will be determined by two components: participation quantity (50%) and participation quality (50%).

Participation quantity. This will be a simple count: Did you contribute something *substantive* (a question, a comment, a suggestion, a response) to the discussion associated with each assignment, by the deadline? Substantive means that saying "yeah, that's what I think" or "this reading was dumb" don't count as contributions—but any comment that shows some thought, even if it is fairly minimal, will count.

Participation quality. I have provided a rubric in this handout to indicate what I consider to be a high-quality contribution to an online conversation. After every six posts, you will be required to tag your two best posts with "HQ" (for high quality) and include a note that grades them according to the rubric in your own view. These two posts need to be taken from different dates. We will review these posts and grade them against the rubric ourselves, but it is useful for students to think about and evaluate their own work—and to understand where an outside evaluator might see your contributions differently than you do.

How and when to participate. We are using an online course website, at piazza.com. If you haven't already, you will need to go to piazza.com and join the class "CMSC 304" as a student. (You should have received a welcome email inviting you to join the site.) The process is fairly straightforward.

Posts should be made using the Question facility of the Piazza course website.

Every post should be tagged with the appropriate numbered “RJ#” tag (e.g., the first reading journal posts, due next Wednesday night at midnight, should be tagged with “ReadingJournal1”). You may also use the topic tags I’ve created, and may create your own topic/author tags.

You may respond to posts/questions that other students have posted, or you may start your own thread. Note that Piazza has three different posting types: Note, Question, and Poll – be sure you choose the right type.

Your initial post for each reading assignment (that is, the one that counts in “participation quantity”) must appear no later than midnight the night before the class for which the reading was assigned (i.e., 19 hours before class). You may continue to post after this time (if you’re a night owl or an early bird), and in fact, later posts may be used for the “participation quality” part of the portfolio.

Grading rubric for high-quality contributions. A high-quality contribution to the online discussion should demonstrate substantive content, effective organization and presentation, relevance and context dependence, and correct English usage.

Substantive content (10 pts). A high-quality contribution should do at least one of the following:

1. Demonstrate your own understanding and analysis of the reading.
2. Clearly identify and ask (or answer) questions about gaps (missing information) in the reading.
3. Respond in a meaningful way to another student’s comment or question.
4. Bring in new and related material that enhances the group’s understanding of the topic area.

A high-quality contribution should also be technically thorough, and should include examples from the reading, other students’ posts, or related outside sources.

Effective organization and presentation (5 pts). A high-quality contribution should be well structured and organized, and should clearly state the point being made.

Relevance and context dependence (5 pts). A high-quality contribution should be relevant to the topic at hand, and if posted as part of an ongoing discussion, should be responsive to the comments and questions posted by other students.

Correct English usage (5 pts). A high-quality contribution should be free of spelling, grammatical, punctuation, and usage errors. Longer contributions should use paragraph structure appropriately.

Each of these areas will receive a score from 0 to 5 or 0 to 10, using the following scoring guidelines. (I really don't expect to see any scores below a 3/5 or 6/10, but have included a few just in case somebody really wants to be difficult.)

- 5/5 or 10/10: Very high-quality contribution with no weaknesses.
- 4.5/5 or 9/10: High-quality contribution with only very minor weaknesses.
- 4/5 or 8/10: Average contribution with no major weaknesses and few minor weaknesses.
- 3.5/5 or 7/10: Slightly below average contribution with at least one major weakness, or multiple minor weaknesses.
- 3/5 or 6/10: Significantly below average contribution with little or no attention to detail.
- 2/5 or 4/10: Halfhearted contribution that misses the point or is a "me too" post with no content.
- 1/5 or 2/10: Technically a post, in that it appears on Piazza, but has no relevance or meaningful content.
- 0/5 or 0/10: No post.