

Writing a Response Paper

- 1. Format and references
- 2. Argument and approach
- 3. Bibliographic dialogue
- 4. Criticism

1. Format and references

- **Format:** Two-page response paper. Times New Roman 12. Double spaced.
- **Footnote/references:** Write the author and page number you are citing in parentheses in the text at the end of sentence. E.g., (Malm, 17-19).

2. Argument and Approach:

- **Identify** the main argument and the approach of the author you are reading!
- **Normally stated at the beginning of the article/chapter or in the conclusion.** Look for words such as “I argue...”, “my point is...”.
- When reading a book, **DO NOT SKIP THE INTRODUCTION.** It is a very important part!
- When writing your response paper, devote the first paragraphs to let your reader know the author’s argument and approach.

2. Argument and Approach:

- **Identify the main argument and the approach:**
 - Example: Myrna Santiago, “Class and Nature in the Oil Industry of Northern Veracruz, 1900-1938” .
 - Approach: Environmental and labor history approach. Focus on the interplay between class power and nature/environment.
 - Argument: She argues that class position shaped how people view and experience the natural world around them (Santiago, 173).

Do it yourselves!

- When writing your own essays start by letting your reader know what is your main argument and how you are going to prove it. This is valid for any class in any discipline!
- Example: ““I argue that rubber was the principal cause for the deforestation of the Amazon in the nineteenth century. I take an environmental and labor history approach to explore how rubber impacted the Brazilian economy and how it modified the environment and the labor structure...”.

3. Bibliographic dialogue

- **Make the readings have a conversation!**
- This means to compare the arguments of the different texts and try to see what they have in common, and in which aspects they differ.
- You may find that they share the same approach. Or perhaps, they are completely different and criticize each other.

- When writing an article or chapter, the scholars tend to review their historiographic precedents. That means, the people that wrote about their topic in the past.
- Example: Malm criticizes in his book the works of other historians and authors (Wrigley, Wilkinson, etc) that explored the substitution of water mills for steam engines.

4. Criticism

- **Your opinion is important.**
- After having read and understood the main points and approaches in the readings, do you agree with them or not? Why?
- Do not be afraid to be wrong and dare to criticize what you read.