



WRITING SEMINAR PAPERS

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What struck me most from the article we read this week, “Making Friends with the Seminar Response Paper,” is the claim that “sem papers” can be seen as empowering examples of Evergreen’s educational philosophy, offering an informal space to process and digest personally meaningful and relevant ideas without the need to refine them into pristine essays.

OK, fine—that article doesn’t exist. But if such an article did, here are some claims that I would highlight:

- Expectations and requirements for seminar responses differ widely between faculty and programs; some are open-ended, while others have particular prompts.
- Faculty usually expect a response that goes beyond a reaction (such as “I liked” or “didn’t like” something) and thoughtfully engages with the assigned text (book, film, guest lecture, etc.); the response often explores the text in relation to the guiding questions and themes of the program
- Responding to the text as a whole in a short paper is meant to be challenging. Consider starting by exploring a specific idea or a sentence that stood out to you. Often starting with what interests you will lead you to the broader themes.
- Seminar responses invite personal reflection. What is significant to me about this text? What connections are there between the text, the program themes, and my interests and values?

For more ideas, check out Calen Swift’s “Seminar Papers: Conversations with your Mind” in *Inkwell*, Vol. 3 (2008), which is available in the Writing Center.