

Responding to Sources:

Getting Started by Introducing the Author, Work and Idea

When you are summarizing and/or responding to a text, you enter the *conversation* about an idea, topic, claim, issue or concept. Think about it—you call your friend and the conversation goes something like this: “Last night Sara and I went to see the latest movie, and she said that she thinks the book was better because the characters were more developed! I think she’s right! The book gives the reader more background about the characters’ lives!” An academic essay is similar, you relate your source, what he or she ‘said,’ your reaction to it (supported by analysis and perhaps further evidence), and give your conclusion or recommendation based on your analysis. **A necessary convention is to introduce the author, the work, and the claim or idea you are responding to in your introductory paragraph, often in the very first sentence.** The following is an ‘all-purpose format’ for jumping into the conversation when you are dealing with an academic text. Use it *as is* or modify to suit your needs.

In his/her essay, “Title of Essay,” [Author Name] claims what’s his/her point?.

Some more verb choices: *states, argues, concludes, persuades, compares, narrates, analyzes, justifies, offers, proposes, illustrates, suggests*

Avoid: *says, talks about*

Always does the trick: *writes*

Keep going by adding what you think: *I think, I agree, I disagree because ...* You can always go back and cross-out the “I think” to remodel your response into a more ‘academic’ third-person statement. This will lead you to your thesis.

Give it a try below:

In his/her essay, “_____,” _____
(circle one) Title of the essay—copy from your source to avoid errors Author’s first name and last name

claims *Talk it out and fill in the blanks* _____
Paraphrase the author’s main idea; what’s the point of the essay?

_____.

Here is a sample of how the summarizing and responding process might go:

Just get it down: In his essay, “Food that Travels Well,” John McWilliams talks about ‘food miles.’

Better: In his essay, “Food that Travels Well,” John McWilliams argues that ‘food miles’ are more complicated than people think.

Now be more specific: In his essay, “Food that Travels Well,” John McWilliams argues that ‘food miles’ are more complicated than the distance a food travels from its source to its final destination, and intensive farming methods may make ‘local food’ far less responsible than its far-flung counterparts.

Add the response: In his essay, “Food that Travels Well,” John McWilliams argues that ‘food miles’ are more complicated than the distance a food travels from its source to its final destination, and intensive farming methods may make ‘local food’ far less responsible than its far-flung counterparts. I think that this is true because of the example of New Zealand beef he uses.

Add your thesis, state your position, or make a recommendation: In his essay, “Food that Travels Well,” John McWilliams argues that ‘food miles’ are more complicated than the distance a food travels from its source to its final destination, and intensive farming methods may make ‘local food’ far less responsible than its far-flung counterparts. I think that this is true because of the example of New Zealand beef he uses. People should eat locally, except if it makes more food miles, then that’s worse for the environment.

Clean it up: In his essay, “Food that Travels Well,” John McWilliams argues that ‘food miles’ are more complicated than the distance a food travels from its source to its final destination, and intensive farming methods may make ‘local food’ far less responsible than its far-flung counterparts. McWilliams’ example of beef farmed in New Zealand and beef farmed in England illustrates his point, making it difficult to deny the ‘bigger picture’ when it comes to calculating the impact of different foods on the environment in terms of how far they travel. For this reason, thoughtful consumers should still try to ‘eat local,’ but not as a universal rule, since some foods actually have less of an impact on the environment when they are not produced locally.

Note: When first introducing the author, use his or her full name. After that, you may refer to the author by his or her *last name only*. Don’t refer to the author by his or her first name only.



Don’t worry if you’re not sure *what* you think when you start writing. Use the template on the other side to conquer the blank page. Freewrite—imagine you are telling a classmate who didn’t do the reading what it was about and what you think. Often it’s helpful to draft using the phrase “I think.” Cross it out when revising.