ESSAY 3
WRESTLING A TEXT

Writing connects, to our own memories and experiences, to the people who become our readers, and to the other texts that give us information and inspiration. Being able to connect and respond to the writing of others is a crucial skill, both in academic and "real-world" settings.

READ: First access and print out one of the articles listed in course blog under entry for Readings for Text-Wrestling assignment. Scan the article first, then read with your favorite pen in hand, marking important points the author makes, places you agree or disagree, questions you'd like to ask him about what he's saying or why, personal experiences you've had that connect to his ideas, observations you've made of your friends, family, society that relate, counterarguments that spring to your mind. You may wish to underline sentences, but also try to write your own words in the margins. What seems to be his main point? What evidence or examples does he use? Look at how the article is structured. What are its main parts and how do they connect to each other?

SUMMARIZE: Using the notes you have made in the margins, try to write a 400- or 500-word (or so) summary of the article, including the author's main point and evidence, his purpose and intended audience (as close as you can guess). The general format of an academic summary usually begins something like this:

In <title of text>, <author's full name> <verb expressing purpose of writing> that <main point> <something about structure, method, evidence used>.

For example,

In "The Internet and U," Sarah Gordon argues that prolonged exposure to Internet chatrooms results in diminished literacy skills as shown by her groundbreaking study following fifty adolescents throughout middle and high school.

Points to remember:

• Be sure to include the author’s full name and the title of the work summarized. In order to remind your reader that you are summarizing someone else's ideas, mention the author by name throughout the summary (after the first time use only the author's last name).
• It is conventional to use the present tense ("the author argues" not "the author argued") in referring to the text.
• You may wish to use several quotations in your summary, either because you want/need both the author's ideas and his/her words or you wish to convey something of the author's style. Do not overdo it with quotations. Two or three are plenty in a 400-word summary, and they should probably not be longer than a sentence apiece.
• Be sure to use quotation marks and copy the author's words exactly. **For this assignment** you do not need to use parenthetical notation since the source will be clear.
• For the rest of the summary, when you are not using direct quotations, be sure to use both your own words and sentence structures.

**CONSIDER YOUR RESPONSE:** First you might want to step back to think generally about the issue discussed. Do you have any personal experience that relates?

**Possible Ways of Responding or Getting Into a Text (from UMass-Amherst’s website):**

**Agree/Disagree:** What part of the essay’s main point do you agree or disagree with? Why do you feel the author is right or wrong in her/his opinions?  
*Example:* “Although the author makes strong points, I do not think the essay is entirely accurate and, in fact, disagree that X is true based on my personal experience.”

**Reflection:** What did this essay make me rethink or reconsider that I may not have thought about before? What impact did it have on my thinking about key ideas?  
*Example:* “Before reading this essay I had assumed X, but now I see Y.”

**Conversation:** What might my experiences add to the argument? How might they revise or alter the author’s ideas to be more accurate to what I know and think?  
“While I agree with X, it seems to me it’s even more complicated than the author recognizes.”

**Extension:** Where else could the essay’s argument go? Can it be applied to other examples? To other kinds of analysis? What “other parts of the world” did it make you think about? Find it relevant to?  
“The essay offers an intriguing look at X, but I wonder if what he/she says could apply equally to Y.”

**Tempering the Position:** Are there other aspects of this topic the author didn’t consider? Ideas that readers would be wise to think about before being convinced by this author? Implications the author didn’t consider?  
*Example:* “Before you think this essay tells the whole story, it’d be wise to consider that this argument raises more questions than it answers.”

**Rhetorical Analysis:** How effective was the essay for its intended audience? What was its purpose? Did it work? Where did the essay succeed or fail most obviously?  
*Example:* “Although I ultimately agree with what the author argues, I don’t think he was successful in getting his point across to his intended audience. I would have been much more easily swayed if the essay had done X”
**Strength of Argument:** Did the author support his argument? Where did he fail to develop his thinking? Where did she lapse in logic? Could the author’s own argument be turned against him/her? e.g., “My agreement or disagreement aside, it’s important to see if the author can actually objectively support his/her views. Since he/she does not, the argument is both flawed and should not influence others to change their opinions.”

Now, with these musings percolating in your brain, imagine entering into a dialogue with the author. Look over the marginal notes you have made. How would you connect or extend or contradict or question or analyze or complicate or qualify or applaud (or probably several dozen other possible responses) what you have read?

**DRAFT:** Now sit down (tie yourself to a chair, if necessary) and write a three-page (or so) essay that both summarizes and responds to the article. Instead of just jumping into your summary, begin your essay with a general paragraph that introduces the issue involved. You may want to use some facts you’ve learned from the article or some personal experience (real or hypothetical) that ties to the topic. Your second paragraph will probably be the summary, which may take several paragraphs to complete. **In your first draft you may wish to keep the summary and response as separate sections, or you may choose to alternate back and forth.** In either case, make sure your reader can tell which points are the author’s and which are yours. The due date for the rough draft is indicated on the course blog/syllabus.

**REVISE:** In revision, pay particular attention to your paragraph structure. It is often a helpful strategy to outline your first draft, particularly if you compose without too much of a plan ahead of time, in order to see the main points you have made. Make sure you can list the main "chunks" of your response; then check to see that your paragraphing corresponds. Consider the best order for these chunks. Does one idea logically follow and develop another? Is there any time sequence to follow? If you have several reasons for your position, remember that the beginnings and endings (of sentences, paragraphs, and essays) are positions of emphasis.

**CRITERIA FOR GRADING:**
- How accurately and completely you've summarized the article
- How deeply you've considered your response
- How well you've developed that response through specifics
- How carefully you've structured your paragraphs (each paragraph = one main idea)