

## Short Written Response Assignments

In 21G.221, you will write six short, written responses to specific prompts. The prompts vary from eliciting personal reflections to comparing two or more authors' perspectives to speculating about the future. They are designed to (1) motivate you to read the materials and engage with the content, (2) help you synthesize information from different sources, including yourself, (3) give you practice in writing efficiently and concisely in a relatively low-risk environment, (4) and provide opportunities for plenty of feedback on your communication over the semester.

Each response is worth 2.5 points.

**Model of personal reflection response.** This sample written response below demonstrates the length, level of detail, and thoughtful content that I expect.

Prompt: Scholars of linguistics have noted differences in the ways men and woman engage in "conversation rituals." Have you noticed any differences? Comment.

*Conversation rituals between men and women differ in several important aspects, including giving praise, thanking others, making small talk, complaining and apologizing.*

*Men and women differ in the frequency and type of compliments. Men rarely give praise to each other directly, as it could be taken as a sign of weakness. For example, if I tell a male friend that I like his shirt, I am making myself vulnerable to a sarcastic retort. However, when a woman compliments her friend, there is the implicit pressure to reciprocate the sentiment. This is especially obvious when women are discussing their outfits of the day.*

*Perhaps because it puts them in an emotionally disadvantageous position, men avoid explicitly recognizing that they are in debt to another man; whereas it is customary for women to reciprocate feelings of thankfulness, especially at the end of a conversation. I commonly hear statements like "Thanks so much for lunch!" "No, thank you for taking the time out to help me with this problem!"*

*Another conversational difference lies in the fact that women are more likely to talk about their personal thoughts and feelings in small talk than men are. There seems to be an implicit understanding of trust and secrecy among women. However, in my experience at MIT, men mainly talk about sports, politics, and girls during small talk—topics which are not inherently personal. Men also like to poke fun at each other during small talk, whereas I have noticed that women rarely directly verbally attack the other person, even in jest.*

*Men complain in order to pool ideas with their peers in order to strategize and solve a problem, while women more often complain to one another in order to feel reassured and understood. I have also noticed that men often find ways to boast while complaining about their problems, e.g. "I am involved in so many activities, I barely got any sleep last night." In a related area of communication, men see apologizing as a direct act of taking blame or responsibility, and as such they often avoid it unless it is unavoidable. On the other hand, women often insert the words "I'm sorry" into conversation even if they are not at fault.*

*In my experience, conversation rituals between men are less direct, less personal, and more inherently competitive, whereas rituals between women are often supported by underlying trust and rapport.*

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