

# CHID 480 Midterm

---

chid 480 / sec. F / spring quarter 2011-12 / chang

William Gibson's 1981 short story "Johnny Mnemonic" opens with some useful advice: "If they think you're crude, go technical; if they think you're technical, go crude. I'm a very technical boy. So I decided to get as crude as possible. These days, though, you have to be pretty technical before you can even aspire to crudeness" (1). It is the spirit of Johnny's advice that will inform your take-home midterm exam. In other words, we have spent the past five weeks reading a lot, talking about a lot of different ideas and artifacts, and playing with different identities and technologies. We have spent a great deal of time being very technical, and by their nature, written exams are "crude" because they are designed for you to demonstrate in a limited way your knowledge and understanding. But, as Johnny points out, however partial and imperfect your answers will be, they must still articulate what questions inspire you, what you have learned, and what connections you have made.

## Goals and Outcomes

The form and shape of your midterm exam is as follows (make sure to follow the directions carefully):

- You will write three short critical response papers. Each critical response paper is a maximum of 2-3 pages.
- Essay #1 must address *Neuromancer* and the theories, critical interventions, and readings of Week 1 or 2.
- Essay #2 must address *Neuromancer* and any other of the first weeks' theories, interventions, and readings.
- Essay #3 must develop, expand, and revise one of your Identity Logs, drawing more fully and specifically on relevant readings.
- Each essay should follow MLA manuscript format, citation, and must include a bibliography.

These critical response papers are modeled after a common academic genre and practice across many different disciplines — writing an abstract, an annotated bibliographic entry, a project proposal, an academic book review, a business memo — and share similar conventions: **exigence, concision, precision, and analysis**. In other words, critical response papers ask a single question, make a single provocation, articulate a single intervention (into or about a text or matter) and provide a well-thought out answer. Since you only have about 500-750 words per essay, you must have a very clear goal in mind, a narrow argument, and telling detail and evidence. **Every word and idea must do work**; there is little room for digression or over-generalization. Do not let the brevity fool you. It's very easy to write a short paper full of sound and fury signifying nothing; it's much harder to write a short paper makes a substantive claim and analysis. These responses will be graded on clarity, focus, coherence, analysis, argument, support, and your ability to concisely formulate a precise claim.

- Outstanding critical responses will articulate a clear idea and argument, draw on textual support and close reading, make connections between sources and perspectives, and offer a thoughtful intervention.
- Successful critical responses will demonstrate your understanding of the course goals, each week's critical and theoretical frames, and how to apply these conversations and analytical lenses to a text.
- You must do more than summarize and describe. Use quotes strategically. Reflect and analyze as you go. Be specific.
- Do not simply regurgitate class discussion or online commentary. These can be the raw material of your critical response, but you must transform, expand, and revise your ideas.

## Guidelines and Due Dates

**Format:** 3 Critical Response Papers (2-3 pages each), formal, academic paper  
MLA citation and bibliography, use 12-point Times Roman, 1" margins, standard double-spacing, proper heading and name block, page numbers, and single-sided printing, neatly stapled together

**Due:** Wednesday, May 2, at the start of class

# Response Paper Dos and Don'ts

---

chid 480 / sec. F / spring quarter 2011-12 / chang

- 1. Begin *in media res*.** Dispense with a formal, "five-paragraph" variety introduction. Get to your argument right away, then support it. Your first paragraph will begin right away with your overall point and claim. Be specific. Develop your exigence for the 'response' from the get go. Be immediate. Your claim will identify a single interrogation, point of entry, or analytical desire, and the rest of your paper will expand, explicate, critique, and articulate it.
- 2. Keep your eyes on the prize.** Your essay should begin with a focused claim and then develop equally focused support, analysis, and discussion. Topic sentences and subclaims should support the overall claim. Evidence, quotes, and commentary should support subclaims. Do not drift away from your main idea, wax too philosophical or esoteric, over-generalize, or resort to banal platitudes, criticisms, or opinions. Organization is key to shaping and maintaining a useful, tasty, specific, and neat paper.
- 3. Between a rock and a hard place.** One of the challenges of writing a response paper is keeping things short and sweet and making an interesting and useful argument or analysis. By definition, response papers should be very focused, very specific, and very narrow in claim, scope, evidence, concern, analysis, and conclusion. Again, develop your paper around only one main idea or one critical question.
- 4. It's all about your ideas.** Response papers are a window into your ideas, analytical processes, reading practices, reactions, and critical thinking—tidied up and nicely framed, of course. It is your moment to shine, to ask a sharp question and make a witty, relevant, well-conceived, and well-timed response. Make sure that from your first sentence to your last, it is your argument and analysis that is being heard and developed. Be sparing and strategic with quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing. Introduce quotes and ideas from the text. Quotes should be brief and illustrative and properly cited. Then provide your analysis, commentary, why the evidence is important. Support should be just *that* and should not supplant your writing.
- 5. It's not all about you though.** The corollary to the last piece of advice is that your response paper should not be simply your own personal opinion. A response paper is not a simple reaction to the question, "How does the text make you feel?" Your response paper must be more than your visceral disagreement with or vituperation of the text. Likewise, it must be more than just an empty agreement with or celebration of the text. And your response paper must be more than just your summary or retelling of the text. In other words, your reactions and opinions matter, of course, but they must be clothed in your best fitting, most appropriate, and well-tailored argument and analytical and academic writing.
- 6. The bigger picture.** You might find it useful to read the introductions provided with a text, to do a little bit of outside research, to historicize or contextualize the text, to find a current, relevant article, to investigate other people's responses to the text. Though not necessary to write a response paper, this additional background information and material may help narrow, clarify, and support your argument (and not serve as an excuse or unexamined complication to broaden or fill your paper).
- 7. Get in and get out (but with a flourish).** As with the introduction, your response paper need not end with a formal, generalized conclusion. You might not reach a hard-and-fast conclusion at all. Rather, you should articulate the stakes of your argument or leave the reader with a final, specific provocation or end by establishing connections to other readings or concerns of the class. You might see your response paper as the proposal for a larger paper or project and your conclusion would be a further development or refinement of your initial argument.
- 8. Take risks.** Just because a response paper is a formal academic assignment, it does not mean that you cannot be experimental or challenging or creative. Response papers are opportunities for you to expand and explore your intellectual comfort zones and to try to formulate arguments that are a little bit ambitious, a little bit of a stretch, a little bit out-of-the-box. Of course, this isn't license for wild speculation, pure supposition, or unfounded claims. Rather, you can use the space of the response paper to pursue a line of inquiry new to you, to draw surprising connections, and to offer a further alternative or counter perspective.