HANDY-DANDY GUIDE TO WRITING A REACTION PAPER

Even though there is no guarantee – 100% proof plan – for a perfect reaction paper, you must be prepared to write one. You will more than likely be assigned one in college. Here is a guide to what teachers or professors may look for in a reaction paper.

I. SUMMARY/SYNOPSIS GOAL: Show that you understand the thesis, main ideas, and supporting ideas in the piece you're writing about.
   Identify all of the "basic information: about the book/article/document, including:
   • the author of the piece or the title of the piece;
   • the topic or subject of the piece— In other words, explain what the piece is about in a word or a phrase;
   • the author's purpose or motive for writing the piece
   • the author's thesis statement (might be similar to the purpose, but not necessarily);

II. Analysis/Evaluation GOAL: Show that you understand what the author does well and what he or she does not do so well.
1. Answer the "w" questions, like why, why not, what, what if, what for, where, why there, who, how, when . . . Specific questions you might take up include:
   • was the piece convincing? why or why not, specifically?
   • did the author overlook or leave out anything important? what?
   • did the author overemphasize or overprivilege anything? what?
   • is the author one-sided (even if he or she takes your side), or does the author presented a balanced view?

III. Your Reactions GOAL: Share your own impressions and your own experiences with readers.
1. Here are some questions you might consider answering:
   • did the piece hold your interest? Why or why not?
   • did the piece bother or annoy you? why or why not?
   • what did you realize as a result of reading the piece?
   • what questions does the piece raise for you -- about the material, about other things?
   • does the piece remind you of other readings you've done for the class? compare and contrast the piece to those readings.