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STS.036 Technology and Nature in American History  
Spring 2008

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## **STS.036**

### **Response paper guidelines**

**7 Feb 2008**

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Reading response papers are designed to give you a chance to do some thinking on paper about what you have read, to connect specific ideas in the readings with the broader themes of the course, and to generate your own ideas and questions for class discussion. A response paper is not like a formal essay in which you begin with a thesis and then develop your argument with supporting evidence. Rather, you will often write your way *to* a central idea or a set of questions that appear toward the end of your response paper, not at the beginning.

There is no one right way to start your response paper. You can use a relevant personal experience as your starting point, or begin with a particularly compelling or confusing quotation from the readings, or start with whatever idea in the readings seemed most important to you. There is no one right way to structure your paper. During the weeks when we read more than one author, you may choose to compare and contrast some aspect of the readings. During other weeks, you may find it more productive to critique a single author's argument or approach. And you are always free—indeed, encouraged—to make connections back to previous readings or lectures. Regardless of how you organize your response paper, you should avoid merely summarizing the readings. Assume that we have all done the reading and know what the authors think; we are more interested in what you think about the readings. What did you find most interesting, most surprising, most puzzling, most wrong-headed?

However you decide to proceed, your response paper should be marked by insight and clarity and not by grammatical flaws and typographical errors! Response papers should be 1-2 pages in length, typed, double-spaced, and in 12 point font.

Above all, ask questions, even if you don't know the answers! Often you need to wrestle with a question for a while—both on paper and in class discussion—before you can come up with a good answer. And the most interesting historical questions don't have easy or obvious answers anyway. So you should feel comfortable with some intellectual risk-taking here: try out ideas and questions even if you are not sure where exactly you are headed.

Be creative! Remember, writing is thinking, and both are a lot more enjoyable when you are playing with ideas that excite you.

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