

## How to Respond to Nonfiction in Writing

Responding to a nonfiction excerpt in writing requires that you take annotations and develop them into a meaningful response. Reviewing your annotations should help you accomplish this task.

### Prior to Writing about Nonfiction

1. Summarize the passage in a sentence.
2. Describe key elements of the passage (i.e. technique, structure, argument, etc.).
3. Identify the purpose that motivates the author's/speaker's message.

After you have considered the passage in its entirety, it is important to consider how each annotation you have made helps to support a larger purpose.

To get started with this process, it helps to have a standard frame statement to organize your thoughts. See the example below.

### Rhetorical Analysis Introductory Frame Statement

In \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
*Work's Title* *Author* *(describes, communicates, tells)*

\_\_\_\_\_.  
*Brief summary of the passage.*

The passage reveals \_\_\_\_\_  
*What does the author hope to accomplish by sharing this information?*

as evidenced by \_\_\_\_\_  
*Describe the primary way in which the author reveals his/her purpose.*

Once you have planned your thesis, it is important to consider how you will organize your written response. Whether the writing assignment is a paragraph or a full-length essay, you will always want to make sure that you organize your response appropriately, correctly cite evidence, and write meaningful commentary. Examine each of these categories below to appropriately respond in writing.

## Organizing your Response

A good response will always take a “layered” approach. This means that the writer will always include the following components in body paragraphs:

- Topic Sentence
  - Evidence
    - Analysis
  - Evidence
    - Analysis

Examine the response below based on the excerpt from *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert. Each component of the paragraph has been underlined differently. See the key below.

Key
Topic Sentence—Underline
Evidence—Squiggly Line
Analysis—Dotted Line

### Sample Body Paragraph

In the excerpt from *The Sixth Extinction*, Elizabeth Kolbert describes the golden frog and discusses the disease that decimates the frog population in El Valle de Antón, Panama. The passage reveals Kolbert’s grave concern about the loss of a unique species as evidenced by her detailed description about the golden frog’s impact on the Panamanian town and the disease that begins to make the species vanish. Kolbert’s vivid description of the golden frog’s importance in the village is significant. Golden frog figurines wear “filly skirts,” clasp “cell phones,” and “strike dance poses.” Kolbert’s list suggests that golden frogs are an important symbol of luck and a reflection of Panamanian culture. More importantly, they signify a unique natural phenomenon that has always been present. This makes their disappearance all the more devastating. Her description of the level of the frog’s toxicity, set aside by dashes, helps to further her discussion that this species is incredibly important and unique. The fact that the golden frog contains enough poison that “could kill a thousand average-sized mice,” suggests that the loss of such an animal would be great. She contrasts the frog’s tiny size with its outsized poisonous capability to prove its one of a kind nature. It makes the loss of such a species even more biologically devastating. Her descriptions of both the cultural and biological aspects of the golden frog suggest that its rarity makes it precious.

This response moves quickly from identifying evidence to analyzing how that evidence impacts the larger message. A writer who can dig into the larger connections about how the author tackles a big picture issue will always be more successful in their response.

Examine the quick questions for analysis below. Answering these questions effectively will always lead to better written responses.

Quick Questions for Analysis in Body Paragraphs
1. What does the evidence reveal about the author’s argument or tone?
2. How does this evidence shape the passage’s organization and structure?
3. What does the evidence suggest about the author’s purpose?