

Federal Government: Reading Discussion Circles

Student Instructions • 100 Points

What is a Reading Discussion Circle?

Instead of turning in a private annotation assignment, you will complete your reading and then engage in a structured group discussion inside Canvas. Your group of 3–4 students will share summaries, make real-world connections, ask questions, and respond to one another's thinking. The goal is simple: read carefully, think critically, and learn from each other.

The Two-Stage Deadline

This assignment has **two deadlines**. Missing Stage 1 makes it impossible for your group to have a real conversation, which will affect your grade.

Stage	What You Must Do
Stage 1 <i>48 hours before final deadline</i>	Complete and post your Opening Post (Step 1). Your groupmates need to read your summary, connection, and question before they can respond to you.
Stage 2 <i>Final deadline</i>	Post your two Responses (Step 2) and your Synthesis Comment (Step 3). You cannot do this without first reading what your groupmates wrote in Stage 1.

The Three Steps

Every student must complete all three steps. Each step has a specific job in the conversation.

Step 1 — Your Opening Post (30 points)

Write your opening post before reading any of your groupmates' responses. Your post must include all three of the following elements:

- **Summary (3–5 sentences):** In your own words, what is the main argument or key idea of the reading? Do not copy from the text. Write it the way you would explain it to someone who has not read it.
- **Real-World Connection:** Connect something from the reading to the world outside this classroom. You have three options:
 1. **Current event** — link the reading to something happening in the news right now
 2. **Personal experience** — connect it to something you have seen, experienced, or observed in your own life
 3. **Another course or prior knowledge** — link it to something you learned in another class or already knew coming in
- **Analytical Question:** Post one question that you genuinely could not answer after reading. This should not be a basic factual question you could look up — it should be something that made you think, that you want your group to wrestle with together.

Step 2 — Respond to Two Groupmates (40 points, 20 each)

Read all of your groupmates' opening posts, then respond substantively to two of them. Each response must do at least one of the following:

- **Answer their analytical question** with your own reasoning — not a one-sentence answer, but a genuine attempt to work through it
- **Respectfully challenge or complicate their real-world connection** by offering a different or opposing example

- **Add something meaningful to their summary** that they did not include — a key detail, a nuance, or a different interpretation of the same passage

Important: Responses like “Great point!” or “I agree with everything you said” receive zero credit. Your response must add something new to the conversation.

Step 3 — Synthesis Comment (30 points)

After reading the full conversation in your group, write one final comment that does the following:

- **Identify one idea, connection, or answer that came from your group’s conversation** that you did not think of on your own when you first read the material
- Explain how it changed, deepened, or challenged your original thinking.

This comment is the most important one you will write. It proves you were actually *listening* to your group — not just posting and logging off.

Academic Integrity

Your posts must reflect your own reading and your own thinking. Do not use AI tools to write any part of your Opening Post, Responses, or Synthesis Comment. The entire point of this assignment is to demonstrate that you read and that you can think critically about the material. AI-generated responses defeat that purpose entirely and constitute an academic integrity violation. Additionally, do not simply copy text from the reading into your summary. Paraphrase in your own words — that is how your professor knows you understood it.

Questions before Stage 1? Reach out before your opening post is due — not after.

Federal Government: Reading Discussion Circles — Grading Rubric

100 Points Total • Responses & Synthesis weighted heaviest

Component	Full Credit — All Points	Partial Credit — Half Points	No Credit — 0 Points
Step 1 — Opening Post (30 points) Due 48 hours before the final deadline — all three elements required			
Summary (10 pts)	3–5 sentences in student’s own words capturing the main argument; no copied text; clearly demonstrates reading comprehension	Summary present but too brief, too vague, or leans on the text’s wording rather than the student’s own language	Missing, copied directly from text, or so brief it demonstrates no comprehension
Real-World Connection (10 pts)	Clearly identifies one of the three accepted connection types; explains the link specifically and with detail	Connection is present but surface-level, generic, or the link to the reading is unclear	Missing, or simply names a topic without explaining any connection to the reading
Analytical Question (10 pts)	Question is genuinely analytical — it cannot be answered with a quick search; it invites group discussion	Question shows some thought but is answerable with a basic search or is too narrow to drive conversation	Missing, or is a basic factual question that requires no reading comprehension
Step 2 — Responses to Two Groupmates (40 points) 20 points each — must respond to two different classmates			

Component	Full Credit — All Points	Partial Credit — Half Points	No Credit — 0 Points
Response 1 (20 pts)	Substantively answers a question, challenges a connection with a new example, or adds meaningful content not in the original post	Response engages with the classmate's post but adds minimal new thinking; partially substantive	Missing, off-topic, purely social ("Great post!"), or does not reference the classmate's actual content
Response 2 (20 pts)	Same standard as Response 1 — applied to a second, different groupmate	Same standard as Response 1 — partial credit applies equally	Same standard as Response 1 — zero criteria apply equally
Step 3 — Synthesis Comment (30 points) The most important post — demonstrates genuine engagement with the group conversation			
Synthesis Comment (30 pts)	Clearly identifies a specific idea from the group conversation; explains how it changed or deepened the student's original thinking; cannot have been written before reading groupmates' posts	Synthesis is present but vague, generic, or could plausibly have been written without reading anyone else's posts	Missing, or is simply a restatement of the student's own opening post with no evidence of reading the group conversation

Total: 100 points • Step 1: 30 pts • Step 2: 40 pts • Step 3: 30 pts