Writing a Response to Argument Using the Words of Others

College professors often ask students to demonstrate their command of the ideas contained in an essay or article by writing a response that explains, point by point, the key areas where students agree and disagree with the author. After all of your work with Jeremy Rifkin’s opinion piece, you are ready to write a well-informed response to Rifkin’s ideas. Here is your writing assignment.

The Writing Assignment

After thinking about your reading, discussion and analysis of Rifkin’s article, what do you personally think about Rifkin’s point? Do you think it is true, as Rifkin says, that “many of our fellow creatures are more like us than we had ever imagined”? Do you think that we need to change the way we treat the animals around us? Or do you think that Rifkin is wrong? Write a response expressing your viewpoint. Your response should be typed, 1.5-spaced, and 2-2.5 pages long. You must use each of the three methods of incorporating Rifkin’s ideas (direct quotation, paraphrase, and summary formats are each described below) in your response at least once.

A superior response to Rifkin’s argument meets these criteria:

- The response is tightly focused on the issue or issues raised in the essay, editorial, article or opinion piece it responds to.
- The response uses words effectively and efficiently and quotes key words and phrases from the essay or article.
- The response makes a clear point or points and provides convincing support, including logical, emotional, and/or ethical appeals.
- There are no grammatical or mechanical errors.

Using the Words of Others

One of the most important features of academic writing is the use of the words and ideas from written sources to support the writer’s own points. An academic paper is most often a dialogue between the writer and his or her sources. If you learn to quote, paraphrase, summarize and document sources correctly, you are well on your way to becoming a college-level writer. There are essentially three ways to incorporate words and ideas from sources.

- **Direct quotation:** Jeremy Rifkin says, “Studies on pigs' social behavior funded by McDonald's at Purdue University, for example, have found that they crave affection and are easily depressed if isolated or denied playtime with each other” (15).
- **Paraphrase:** In “A Change of Heart about Animals,” Jeremy Rifkin notes that McDonald’s has funded studies on pigs that show that they need affection and playtime with one another (15).

- **Summary:** In “A Change of Heart about Animals,” Jeremy Rifkin cites study after study to show that animals and humans are more alike than we think. He shows that animals feel emotions, reason, make and use tools, learn and use language, and mourn their dead. One study even shows that pigs need affection and playtime with one another, and enjoy playing with toys (15).

In addition to citing your sources in a Works Cited section, MLA style also requires “in text” documentation for every direct quotation, indirect quotation, paraphrase or summary. Many students are confused about this, believing that documentation is only necessary for direct quotations. If the author is given in the text, the page number should be given in parentheses at the end of the sentence containing the material. For example, here is a paraphrase of material from the Rifkin article. Because the author is not named in the text, the last name goes in the parentheses:

> It is well established that animals can learn to use sign language. A long-term study at the Gorilla Foundation in Northern California shows that Koko, a 300-pound gorilla, can use more than 1,000 signs to communicate with her keepers and can understand several thousand English words. She also scores between 70 and 95 on human IQ tests (Rifkin 15).