A Lone Star Reader
Reader Guidelines

See the “Reading & Assignments” schedule” for the selected assignments from A Lone Star Reader.

FORMAT:
* Microsoft Word
* 12-point Times New Roman font
* Single-space
* Place the LSR chapter title at the top of the page
* Place your name on the next line
* Left-justify the body of your paper (i.e., do not right-justify)

For each selection, you are responsible for producing a synopsis/review no longer than 500 words in length. This is intended to be a formulaic exercise with four goals in mind: to expose you to the canon of Texas history; to increase your reading comprehension skills; to cultivate your writing abilities; and, to foster more proficient study skills. The main components of your synopsis/review will include a thesis statement, a summary of the main ideas, and your opinion of the authors’ work.

The *ideal* paper will have three paragraphs, each with a topic sentence. (This does not mean you have to follow the formula laid out here.) The opening paragraph will introduce the reading and state the author’s thesis. A standard approach to the next paragraph is to provide a summary and/or to state the main ideas. A concise paper will be able to work in something about the author’s success/failure in his/her aims. The last paragraph is yours to provide a wrap-up. It may convey a particular insight, or simply bring everything together as a parting thought.

The thesis statement should convey the author’s overriding thought, or contention.

Your opinion of the author’s work can include whether you found it enjoyable, thought-provoking, well-written, or informative. Ideally, I would like for you to be able to express your opinion on the weightier issues dealing with ideas, rather than matters of form.
Following are some common grammatical mistakes to avoid. Know why they are grammatically incorrect—and then avoid them! Your goal, of course, is to produce a paper that rises to my standards. A paper with any of the mistakes below will not clear the bar. Do not make this more difficult than it is. Wise students will let their work “cool off,” and proofread it later. It would be a good idea to have someone else look it as well. In each example below, yellow highlights demonstrate grammatical mistakes. The blue highlights show you how to fix them.

Incorrect: Her motto, “Always saddle your own horse”, exemplified this belief.
Correct: Her motto, “Always saddle your own horse,” exemplified this belief.
NOTE: The comma goes inside the quotation mark.

Incorrect: According to Bolton, Palma was “the keystone in the arch of Indian support” (64).
Correct: According to Bolton, Palma was “the keystone in the arch of Indian support” (64).
NOTE: This should be plain enough...without page number, “monkey-see, monkey-do.” With page number citation, it is “monkey-do” (72).

Incorrect: Eighteenth century laissez faire advocates did not anticipate the kind of economy that would emerge in the late nineteenth-century.
Correct: Eighteenth-century laissez faire advocates did not anticipate the kind of economy that would emerge in the late nineteenth century.
NOTE: Here, “eighteenth-century” is a compound adjective, which takes a comma; the “nineteenth century” in this example is a noun, which needs no comma.

Incorrect: Green defines “the Establishment” as a loosely knit plutocracy mostly comprised of Anglo businessmen.
Correct: Green defines “the Establishment” as a loosely knit plutocracy mostly composed of Anglo businessmen.
NOTE: Things comprise stuff; stuff is composed of things. Hence, the businessmen in the example above comprise the plutocracy; the plutocracy is composed of the businessmen.
NOTE: The next two examples are variations of dangling participles.

Incorrect: Being unsound of mind, the court found the testimony of the defense witness to be inadmissible.
Correct: Being unsound of mind, the defense witness gave testimony that was found to be inadmissible.

Incorrect: Walking along the passage to the town, a memorial archway blocked our path.
Correct: Walking along the passage to the town, we found that our path was blocked by a memorial archway.

Incorrect: Sally had trouble deciding between the three books the one she wanted to read first.
Correct: Sally had trouble deciding among the three books the one she wanted to read first.
NOTE: “Between” two; “among” more than two.

NOTE: In the following example, we have two independent clauses, which need to be separated by a comma. In other words, both of the two clauses could be stand-alone sentences.
Incorrect: Dr. C takes writing seriously and he wants his students to take it seriously as well.
Correct: Dr. C takes writing seriously, and he wants his students to take it seriously as well.
NOTE: In the following example, we have a dependent clause, which should not be separated by a comma. In other words, “and was impeached” cannot be a standalone sentence.
Incorrect: Governor “Pa” Ferguson played politics with higher education, and was impeached.
Correct: Governor “Pa” Ferguson played politics with higher education and was impeached.

Finally, in a formal paper, such as your LSRs:
do not use contractions, e.g.: “won’t” should be “will not.”
do not use an apostrophe after dates, e.g.: “1960’s” should be “1960s”
“18th century” should be spelled out, e.g.: “eighteenth century”
generally, numbers, up to and including 75, should be spelled out, e.g.: seventy-five
whole numbers such as 100, 200, etc. should be spelled out, e.g.: one-hundred
Always use the “Oxford comma.” Here’s why:
NOTE: The questions below are designed to “jumpstart” your efforts in the event you are having trouble expressing yourself, or, you simply don’t know what to say. Do not try and attempt to answer them all!

Does the reading really have a thesis? Or, do you feel that it merely informs the larger work of which it is a part? Can this work really be understood as a chapter apart from the rest of the book?

What is the author’s argument, and am I persuaded? If so, what evidence is particularly persuasive? If not, what evidence does not fit? Or what would it take for me to believe the author’s point?

What does the author care about? What are some of the key terms she uses again and again? What terms does she use for controversial ideas and events?

How did the author write this book? What sources did she use? Only primary sources, only secondary, or a mixture? Is there one source that provided most of her material? Who are the people in the book—is it only about rich white men, or are other groups’ stories told as well?

Why did my professor assign this book? How does it fit into the course? Does it agree with other books and the professor’s lectures, or is there a debate? How does this book square with things I’ve learned outside of class? (It may help to read with your class notes at hand.)

What do I think of this book? What is missing from the book—what would I like to know more about? What is surprising? What is funny? What made me angry?

What theses, tendency, or bias does the book uphold, suggest, or evince? Do you think historians view this book as important? Why or why not, and, to what extent? Identify the author’s main contentions and discuss them; try to provide evidence and/or examples. You might also voice any objections or summarize the book's shortcomings (do not, however, expect the author to have written the book you had in mind). Some word about the author might also be appropriate, especially if you feel some life experience led her/him to write this book.

The conclusion should strike a balance of the book’s merits and faults. The author and work (through you) should have the last word.

Think about the following as you prepare the review: What is the author trying to accomplish? How well or how badly has she/he done this? How does the book provoke debate about Texas? Does it help you better understand the state? What other insights can you offer?