1. Each entry is to be at least one FULL single-spaced typed page.

2. Each response is due on Friday for all weeks of the term. Date each response and give it a title that provides some sense of what the focus of the response is. Unless you have made prior arrangements with me, any entry submitted later than Friday that will not be accepted.

3. During week 16 you will write one final Retrospective Response (again, one full single-spaced typed page. I will talk more about this final response later in the term.

4. Once I have looked over your response and returned it, you are to place it in your 3-ring notebook in a section entitled Out-of Class Responses. I will keep comments on individual responses brief, but you can always come by and discuss a particular response if you want a fuller reaction from me. You will keep all in-class writing (marked In-Class Responses) in this notebook as well, and you will submit the entire journal at the end of the term as part of your portfolio. Because the journal is such a major part of the grade, you should take care of it, keep it up to date, and submit it in a timely manner. It’s not a bad idea to save a copy of each response in case you lose the one I return to you.

5. Each week’s entry should ideally focus on what we have been reading and discussing that week. Consequently, the collected set of entries should constitute a fairly full record of what you were thinking and feeling over the course of the semester. If you are taking the assignment seriously, this kind of record should be of considerable interest to you a few years from now, or for your children farther down the line.

6. Feel free to exercise your imagination in this journal. You may, for example, include copies of photographs or ads or cartoons or posters, etc, which you think reflect mythic content and shape your response around your insights about this kind of material. You might try writing a poem or short story that employs aspects of myth and/or ritual. You might try writing a letter to Jung or Campbell or Walker or Malamud, as if you were trying to get some answers from him/her about why he/she wrote a particular work or took the approach he/she did. Most of all, be ready to write about links you see between your life and times and those of the reading assignments. This personal experience base is critical to what I have termed a "transactional" approach to reading and learning. Also be willing to voice opinions, even if I might not agree. But try to articulate those opinions in a reasoned and thoughtful way, and provide a grounding or basis for them.

Here are some additional comments about the kind of writing for learning I am asking you to do:

Most of the writing you do during your formal education is intended to inform others about what you know. But clearly there can be a huge gap between actual knowing and the process or struggle to arrive at such a point of knowing. The basic idea of the journal is that some kinds of writing promote and nurture learning, that such writing is actually a generative tool for coming to at least provisional clarity about difficult ideas. These journal entries are informal, aimed at much as yourself as at a formal audience, and focused on the assigned reading you will be doing this term. This kind of writing places a premium on expressing thoughts as well as feelings which the readings evoke, on shaping understanding and positions, articulating or interrogating "the self’s" beliefs or emerging perspectives, and building context. Thus, I’m looking for honest speculation and genuine exploration and real questions, not merely an unengaged “giving the teacher what he/she wants.” There is no need for extensive summary of the assigned reading. Focus instead on the play of your intellect and feelings as they struggle to negotiate meaning. Frequently, it is the disjunction between one’s initial sense of a text and one’s own lived experience that initiates an exploratory response. More often than not, personal experience has a direct bearing on how/why you respond to any given reading the way you do. I especially encourage you to let that experience into the journal entries, and in as much rich detail as time and space allow. But don’t lose track of the purpose of the journal. It is not merely an excuse to tell personal history, though that is important in this course. Rather, it is a place for you to shape your emerging understanding of assigned texts and perspectives. Keep in mind that all knowledge is to some extent personally situated. That is, the situation of the writer (education, academic major, class, gender, race or ethnicity, lived experience) will determine the nature of the response. Explore such “situatedness,” but try to keep a good focus on the course material as well.
I want strong, evocative writing from you, so I am more interested in your sense of detail and your willingness to expose yourself and take some risks than I am in grammatical and mechanical decorum. I prefer serious and committed attempts to "get it right with the self" (James Britton's phrase). The documenting/preserving of your evolving thoughts and emotional reactions (process) is much more important than reporting positions or final conclusions (product). These latter generally tend to have a hollow ring because, in ten weeks and in dealing with sometimes new and often difficult material, students simply don't have time to come to many fixed positions. Furthermore, since students are writing at least in part to their instructor, they are put in the unsolvable position of having to explain to that instructor what he/she often already knows better than they (students) do. This is not a particularly real or useful rhetorical situation.

In responses for this class, authentic elaboration of confusions and attempted (if provisional) "solutions" are more valuable than stale, prefabricated, and unsupported generalizations. Force yourself to anchor any generalizations you make in personal experience as well as in the language of the texts. You may also like, on occasion, to read what scholars or biographers have to say about an author in an attempt to build some context for yourself. Feel free to incorporate such research into an entry. CAUTION: Whenever you turn to secondary materials, be very careful to acknowledge both the ideas and the language of the source, and include the name of the writer and the title of the book or essay, the title of the journal, etc.

These out-of-class responses are a bit like mini-essays, but they lack many of the conventions of more formal and informative papers, particularly the "formal" constraints of reports and the so-called five-paragraph theme. Thus, form is often open-ended and contingent rather than nicely packaged and organized in a logical fashion. You don't write the response to say something you think; you write to find out what you think. The understanding, often provisional, comes in the act of "saying"—you are not demonstrating understanding as much as you are recording your own efforts to achieve it.

Let me know if you are having problems. Otherwise, good luck. I hope you find this series of personal responses helpful in shaping your understanding of the assigned reading as well as in assisting you with the more formal writing assignments this term.