Journal entries are due each day there is a reading. They are graded on submission (credit/no-credit). You must complete at least 12 of them for full credit. No late work is accepted unless we agree to you taking a grade of INC. Each journal entry past the 12th is worth ½ point of extra credit. Journal entries document you, reading the text. This is open-ended: you can do journal entries in whatever style best helps you understand the text. The two pictures here might help you get started. They are parts of two very different ‘journal entries’ from a few articles I read. I highlight important points, summarize some sections, and raise questions or note things I don’t understand. You could journal like this (but you will need to mark up most of the article, not just one page). Or you could type up bullet points, or draw diagrams – whatever helps you read.

Counterfactual generality suffices to establish the theoretical distinction between systematicity and stimulus-independence: a creature like D would have systematically recombinal representational abilities in this counterfactual sense while lacking much freedom from stimulus control. Conversely, we can imagine a creature whose thoughts were produced by totally separate, unstruck abilities rather than recurrent, systematically interacting constituent ones, but who could always entertain all of its potential thoughts, whatever its current circumstances.

So in principle, the criteria of systematicity and stimulus-independence are distinct. In practice, though, they are much more intimately connected. A creature with just basic cognition can’t really recombine its representational abilities itself; it is dependent upon the stimuli it encounters to prompt it to deploy its abilities. Unless the world presents it with the appropriate stimuli, there is no way it can entertain most of its potential thoughts. Thus, there remains a significant sense in which a creature with more basic cognition lacks the cognitive resources necessary to recombine its constituent representational abilities generally; it must wait passively for the right stimuli to come along. To achieve an active, self-generated cognitive flexibility, such creatures need more freedom from stimulus control.

Further, unlike the capacity for epistemic reflection, endowing a creature with greater stimulus-independence clearly would make a significant practical difference for it. It would provide cognitive access to a wider range of the world at any given moment, and this in turn would give the creature a richer repertoire of cognitive resources to exploit at a given moment in achieving its goals. By contrast, a creature who could reflect on the epistemic credentials of its beliefs, but whose basic beliefs were still highly stimulus-dependent, or a creature whose capacity for epistemic reflection was itself stimulus-dependent (for instance, who could only reflect upon its epistemic credentials after hearing the ring of a “philosophy bell”), would not be cognitively much better off than a creature who lacked such reflective capacities altogether. The really significant cognitive difference, then, is not the capacity for epistemic reflection or language per se, but rather the capacity for active, self-generated cognition that McDowell and Davidson assume it brings in too. Thus, I conclude that stimulus-independence—but not language or epistemic reflection—is indeed closely tied to the basic tasks of concepts, either as an independent condition in its own right, or as a practical condition on satisfying the Generality Constraint in a robust way.

§4: Instrumental Reasoning

I’ll return in §§5 and 6 to the interactions between systematicity and stimulus-independence and their implications for conceptual thought.
Unit Reflections

Unit Reflections are due at the end of each unit, on Sunday night. They are graded on submission and are worth 3 points each. You must complete all 3, on time, for full credit. You will lose 1 point for each 24 hours late, unless we have agreed to you taking a grade of INC.

Unit Reflections are like journal entries, except that instead of documenting your thinking through a single article, they document your thinking through the ideas of the entire unit. Throughout the unit, there were probably ideas that occurred to you, things you wanted to explore further, ideas that you just really disagreed with, and so on. These are the sorts of things that turn into really good final papers. Unit Reflections are your chance to start brainstorming for the final, and get credit and a bit of feedback for it.

The picture on the right is part of a reflection that I wrote while working on writing an article. Notice that it’s casual, just like the journal entries: I use abbreviations, I ask more questions than I answer, I think about what makes sense to me versus what might be agreed upon, and so on.

I suggest that you find a quiet spot, put on some good music, set a timer for about 10 minutes, and just start writing. Try not to stop writing until the timer goes off. Don’t go back to edit spelling or grammar, and don’t worry about sticking to one idea. Just dump your thoughts out on the page!
Unit Summaries

Unit Summaries are due at the end of each unit, on Sunday night, along with Unit Reflections. They are graded on correctness and are worth 3 points each. You must complete all 3 correctly and on time for full credit. You will lose 1 point for each 24 hours late, unless we have agreed to you taking a grade of INC.

We read 4–5 articles in each unit (sometimes they’re split into sections). For full credit on the unit summary, you must include the following information about each individual article as a whole (not split into sections):

- The bibliographic information in APA format, as it would go in a reference list. -> 1 point
- At least one sentence stating the main thesis of the article – the main idea that the author is trying to convince us of. -> 1 point
- At least one sentence describing the author’s argument for their thesis. -> 1 point

It would not hurt to get started on these as soon as we start reading – keep your mind fresh!

Here are some templates for the first few, to get you started:

|                                                                                                                    |
| In Gorgias, Plato is trying to convince the reader that _____________. He does this by __________________________. |

|                                                                                                        |
| In On Bullshit, Frankfurt argues that _______________. His main pieces of evidence for this are ________________ which show that __________________________. |