

Writing a Personal Response Commentary on a Work of Literature (A Different Kind of Paper)

A Personal Response Commentary is a more personal type of writing than an analysis paper. The purpose of a commentary is for you to interact with the novel or play about some **topic** you find in the work. You still have to supply evidence for the author's views, but then you get to agree or disagree or modify the author's views on the subject. Your evidence can be from (a) the work itself, (b) another work of literature, (c) the news, current events, or history, or (d) your own experience (*Please make sure to respect the privacy of others - including family members - if you are using personal experience; anonymous friends and relatives are best*). Use the steps listed below as an outline; reword the sentence stems to suit your own purposes and style. Since this is an informal paper, you may use I in expressing your opinions. Remember that a person is one person and has a single gender.

Step 1: List all the topics this literary work could be about: This novel is about [*friendship, jealousy, marriage, etc.*]

Step 2: Circle one or two topics that you feel interested in. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are these important issues in the work or are they secondary issues?
2. Is the author teaching me something about these topics?
3. Are these topics related in some way in the work? If so, what is the relationship?

Step 3: Write down what the work says (what you learned) about the topics from the work. (These should be general statements and not specific to this work of literature.)

Example:

Topic: Friendship: The work says that Friendship is very powerful, but no match for romantic love.

Step 4: Write down events or examples from the work that caused you to think this is true.

Example:

I see this in the work when Marianne throws herself at Willoughby, even though she has a good relationship with Col. Brandon.

Step 5: Write down your own response to this idea, including your reasons for thinking so.

Example:

I disagree with this because friendship is often the basis for romantic love and can hold two people together when they have fallen out of love. Friendship is more stable, more to be trusted than changeable emotions.

Step 6: Repeat steps 3, 4, and 5 for the topics you selected.

Step 7: Choose one passage or scene from the work which seems to make a deep impression

on you . Look at that section carefully, examining the author = s use of literary techniques. If it really affected you, then the author did some things to get you to think or feel a certain way. (This can be a passage from one of the steps above; you may include this analysis of the author = s techniques in any paragraph you choose.

Example:

The passage:

I felt/thought _____ because the author _____. An example of this is _____.
The reason I liked this example is that _____.

You may also consider This passage made me feel this way because the author _____.

This technique was effective because _____.

Step 8: Repeat step 7 until you get a passage you really like.

This is the basic outline for your commentary. You should write as fully as possible so that you feel your commentary does justice both to the work and to your topic. Your first paragraph should be a brief introduction to the work and the topic. Your last paragraph should be a personal reflection about the importance of the topic to you or to the present world. This is where you can really tell your reader how you feel about it. This is also your chance to comment on whether you really enjoyed the work and whether you would recommend it to others, and your reasons.

A condensed form of this process is:

What is the work about? (One word topics)

What does the work say about it? (One sentence general statement)

How does the author illustrate this idea in the work?

How does the work make me feel about the topic?

Does this confirm or contradict what I believed before I read this work?

How does the author use the elements of literature to cause me to think or feel as I do?

(At this point the thinking process is analysis, in addition to response.)