

## Do's and Don'ts for Writing Commentary

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This checklist was originally developed for Writing Fellows, but it works well in any course that involves written peer critique of papers. You will develop your own way of commenting as you gain experience, so don't be afraid of creating your own system as long as it works well with your peers.

### Commentary DO's:

- Read a draft all the way through **BEFORE** you begin to comment on it
- Spend at least 20 to 40 minutes commenting on a single draft
- Use a number/comment system instead of **LONG** marginal comments
- Raise questions from a reader's point of view; points that may not have occurred to the writer
- Focus on the overall problems of content before looking at surface level errors (i.e. grammar, spelling)
- Phrase comments clearly and carefully (The average Joe should be able to read the commentary and understand what needs to be changed.)
- Make comments **text-specific**, referring specifically to that writer's draft (NO "rubber stamps" such as "awkward" or "unclear" or "vague")
- Direct comments to breaks in logic, disruptions in meaning, and/or missing information
- Structure comments to help writers to clarify their purposes and reasons in writing that specific draft
- Offer **SUGGESTIONS**, not commands, when possible
- Comment through the use of questions ("This sentence confuses me a little; can you reword it to make it more clear? OR "Could you make a stronger transition between these two points?")
- Look for unexplained "[Code Words](#)" in the draft and ask the writer about them ("What exactly does 'Different aspects' mean here?")
- End comments should include the main **STRENGTHS** in a writer's draft as well as 2 or 3 of the most important things that need improvement
- If something appears too complicated to write in the commentary, just mention that you have something that you would like to talk to the writer about when you have your conference.

### Commentary Don'ts:

- **DON'T** write commentary in red ink
- Avoid turning the writer's paper into YOUR paper
- Do not contradict yourself ("Condense this sentence," followed by, "You need to be more specific and develop this paragraph.")
- Don't over-whelm a writer with too much commentary
- If the writer is not sure that they have understood the assignment, and you aren't sure either, **DON'T** be afraid to tell the writer to talk with his or her professor
- Don't take forever in your commenting on a draft: remember, the writer needs ample time to revise.