

Structuring Your Dramatic Commentary

I. Introduction & Basic Information: Who? What? Where? Why? How?

Identify the text, the author, the setting, the basic plot, etc.

Put this passage in context:

- plot-wise, what has led to this moment?
- plot-wise, what does this moment bring about?
- how does this develop a character or indicate a change in a character?
- how is this moment significant to the play as a whole?

II. Paraphrase

Cover all the statements, questions, declarations, descriptions, shifts, realizations, etc. that come up in the passage. This requires draining the passage of all figurative language and extraneous details.

- Be able to summarize each sentence in your own words. (Putting verse into prose is a helpful way for understanding.)
- Recognize and address transitional words and phrases, which often indicate **shifts** in thought and/or action. (If then; Although ; yet....; So ... ; Therefore ; Either: ... or)
- Recognize and address **tension** within the passage. All language contains tension, and you can bet that any passage chosen will *have* lots of meaningful tension. Find this tension and be able to express how it contributes to meaning.
- Point out, where relevant, how **staging**, **costume**, and/or **blocking** might be important in this passage.
- * Although it is tempting (and here, not necessarily wrong) to paraphrase chronologically, resist providing **mere** summary. Pointing out patterns that come up in a passage is one way to avoid this. Another way may be to show the outcome of the passage (i.e. the last line or so) and then paraphrase all of the ways the character leads to that outcome. You will want to avoid language like, "And then he basically says ... after that he goes and then he's like: ...so then it's all..."

III. Formal Analysis

Now that you have (hopefully) provided as much about content as you can, get to the form. Here the language is a bit more archaic and the conventions a bit more traditional. Point out the uses and effects of:

Figurative language
Structure

Sound
Diction

IV. Conclusion

Here's where you marry your content with your form. The way ideas are *conveyed* by Shakespeare's characters often tells as much about them as what they are conveying. Why this word instead of another word? How does a character's choice of metaphor affect the tone of what he is saying? What is significant about the patterns that develop in this passage? How do these ideas lend to (or complicate) any themes, motifs, or questions raised in this play? Here, it's helpful to consider employing words related to literary features and/or literary unity:

theme
motif
tone
irony

paradox
tension
ambiguity
symbolism

characterization
subtext