

# How to write a commentary on a newspaper article

## 1. Reading

Read the article for the first time, find out what its **general** topic is. Underline **important facts/ arguments** that are introduced by the author.

Read the article a second time and identify the different **elements contributing to the overall style** of the text (stylistic means, formal/neutral/informal style, ... ). What's the article's effect on the reader?

Read the article a third time and write short **notes in the margin**. Such notes can include criticism of the author's arguments, additional arguments that support the author's opinion, additional information on the topic (background info), translations etc.

## 2. Prepare your essay: Structure it

Write an outline for your essay (paragraphs).

The traditional structure is this:

**Introduction:**      **Introduce the article (topic, author, When was it written? / Context (political, social, historical, etc.)**

*Example: The article "We need a new British-Irish relationship" was written by the Irish republican politician Gerry Adams and published by the online magazine guardian.co.uk in May 2011. Adams discusses the Queen's visit to a commemoration which marked the anniversary of a series of bomb attacks on Dublin and Monaghan in 1974 and had left 34 people dead. In his article the author mentions a few landmarks in Ireland and Britain's troubled past, however concludes finally that Ireland and England should overcome their differences and see what they have in common.*

**Analysis:**      **Summary of the article  
Analysis of the article's style. What's the article's effect on the reader?**

*Example: [summary was left out] The author uses straightforward sentence structure and hardly connective devices to link his sentences, e.g. "British interference in Irish affairs has come to huge cost to the Irish people" (l.33) or "Sinn Fein wants a New Republic" (ll. 49-50). This matter-of-fact style makes Adam's suggestions believable, serious and makes his opinion obvious to the reader. His lack of emotional language contributes to that, since the unemotional style contradicts the very emotional topic. One would expect sentimental and polemic implementations from the alleged former IRA member, however he surprises his readers with his settled and clear statement: "We [Ireland and*

*England] should build on what we have in common, while at the same time respecting each other's sovereignty and independence." (ll. 57-59)*

*The effect on the reader is therefore obvious. He must believe that Garry Adams is right when he expresses his hopes for the English-Irish future. The reader wants to repeat the author's "I hope so" (l.27 + 60) with him in order to overcome the aggression and hatred of the last decades. [...]*

**Comment:** **What do you think about the author's arguments? Did he miss any good arguments or counterarguments? Did he cover the range of the issue he set out to address? Are his basic social assumptions valid, or has he overgeneralized some of his statements?**

*Example: In my opinion Adams tries to simplify a conflict that has been troubling Ireland for several decades. Although he uses a matter-of-fact style the painful Irish past is emphasized again and cannot lead to a fresh start between the British and the Irish. Instead of looking back the Irish should let go of history and look to the future. The question should not be what Ireland has experienced but what it wants to become. It therefore also can be claimed that Adam's emphasis on a new relationship between Britain and Ireland is only a half-hearted wish. If he really "hopes" that there will be a change, why does he list all the tragedies of the past once more?*

**Conclusion:** **Final summary of own opinion**

*In conclusion I agree with Adams in the fact that Ireland and England should see what they have in common, however insist on the fact that this will not be accomplished by looking back but by emphasizing the Irish people's wishes for the future.*

3. Useful phrases
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**Analysis:**

The metaphor/ repetition/ ... emphasizes/ shows/ expresses/ draws attention to...  
The author's choice of (stylistic device) clarifies/ illustrates/ points out ...

**Commentary:**

Expressing cause: since/because/owing to/ due to the fact that/ The reason for... is that...

Expressing effect: thus/therefore/so/consequently

Expressing possibility: It is possible/probable/unlikely/certain, the likelihood/probability of (-ing/noun) is ...

- In my opinion.../ I believe that ...
- It is argued that...

- Were this true, we would...
- Never has this been more obvious...
- In addition.../ Furthermore
- The author claims that..., however I think ...
- I agree with X in his opinion that ...
- I strongly disagree

**Conclusion:**

- All in all...
- To sum up...
- Finally...
- To conclude.../ In conclusion ...