How To Write Commentary Essays for IB English Classes

1. Commentary is NOT summary. A person who is intelligent enough to choose to read literary commentary is more than apt to read the original text before reviewing your remarks. Do NOT tell what the work or passage is “about.”

2. Commentary concentrates wholly on literary devices and creative structure in a passage that is of significance in a literary work. If you do not use words such as theme, conflict, epiphany, imagery, meter, form and such from the host of terms you have been taught, you are not writing commentary.

4. The whole point of commentary is to determine WHY the author chose to develop the work by using a particular literary device. How do the devices relate to the work as a whole? How do they develop the plot, theme, imagery, or character?

5. It is sometimes important to discuss character development in commentary. This is especially true of fiction and drama.

6. Eventually, the commentary you will be assigned will be oral, not written. Therefore, you must condition yourself now to be able to
· read a literary selection
· quickly assess which literary devices are being used,
· make intelligent, thoughtful speculations about the purpose and effect of the devices
· support your suppositions with textual evidence
· assess the style of work, the genre, the literary era, and its typicality in regard to the author’s other work or the rest of the assigned literary work

7. As a guide to creating proficient commentary, you should consider these possibilities:
· the presentation or role of a character
· relationships between characters or between character and plot
· theme(s)
· the use of language and linguistic devices such as diction
· significance as it is related to the larger work
· the effects of structure, style, and technique

8. You should make extensive use of literary terms, but CAUTION!, you must use them in intelligent, meaningful ways in order to show your understanding of the passage and of the author’s probable intentions.

Terms you might consider:

| irony     | parallel structure | exposition |
| foreshadowing | complication | conflict |
| mood      | resolution      | catastrophe |
| metaphor  | catharsis       | frame     |
| satire    | fable           | cause and effect |
| theme     | poetic devices  | imagery   |
| allusion  | rhythm and meter |           |

There are many more. Any literary glossary should give you some good ideas.