



A Method for Effective Commentary Writing



What does OEA stand for?

- **Observations** (What do you notice? What idea do you want to examine?)
- **Evidence** (specific examples and evidence quoted directly from the text)
- **Analysis** (So what? Why is this idea significant? How does it help to prove your thesis?)

Why is this structure so effective for commentary writing?

- OEAs keep your writing focused on one specific argument at a time
- OEAs help to organize your ideas within a paragraph and within your commentary
- OEAs ensure that you don't jump from idea to idea without providing full analysis and justification for your ideas
- OEAs help you avoid listing evidence out of context and without adequate explanation
- OEAs keep your commentary organized and coherent

An example of a paragraph using OEA structure:

- Topic sentence
- Observation 1
- Evidence 1
- Analysis 1
- Transition
- Observation 2
- Evidence 2
- Analysis 2
- Concluding sentence: one complete sentence that links the ideas you've just presented back to the thesis statement

(TS) Marlow's visit with his aunt before he leaves for the Congo illustrates that he feels guilty about his real motives for exploring the Congo and therefore allows her to believe his intentions are noble rather than selfish. **(O1)** When Marlow's aunt describes her vision of his work in Africa, she describes him as a missionary who will help to "civilize" the savages. **(E1)** During their conversation, she "[talks] about weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (pg. 10). **(A1)** It is clear that Marlow's aunt believes that the Africans are uncivilized who need to be saved from their savage ways. Marlow fails to correct her assessment of his duties and therefore allows her to believe that his intentions are for the "good" of the world, rather than for his own greed for ivory and adventure. **(T)** In addition, **(O2)** his aunt's misconception of his true intentions for traveling to Africa make Marlow feel uncomfortable during this conversation. **(E2)** Marlow admits that "she made [him] quite uncomfortable. [He] ventured to hint that [his] company was run for profit" (pg. 10). **(A2)** Although he weakly attempts to tell her the truth, he does not press the issue to make sure she understands the truth of his mission. He feels guilty that he is not as noble and unselfish as she believes him to be and this fact makes him extremely uncomfortable—but not so uncomfortable that he actually clarifies the truth. **(CS)** In these ways, Marlow's aunt works as a symbol of his guilty conscience—a symbol of his moral code that he chooses to lie to and ignore as he embarks on his imperialistic journey.