

## Guidelines for a Critical Personal Response TMA

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In addition to the hints given in the guide notes to the TMA, the following pointers are intended to help you in expressing your own appreciation of what you read. Such an assignment is not meant as a forum for you to say whatever you feel about a certain literary work without any proof to convince your reader. On the contrary, such a response should be bolstered with exercising some critical thinking. Most often the importance and the meaning of a literary text lie in the reader's understanding and appreciation no matter what major critics say about it. However, in order to avoid both extremities—the reader's and the critic's subjectivity—this assignment calls for both: your voice and the voice of others. Consequently, the nature of the Critical Personal Response is to combine the subjective and the objective schools of appreciating literature. Once you read a general description of what a critical personal response is, the rest of the guidelines listed below are not the ones that will ensure you a perfect response. Your beliefs, culture, creativity, style, knowledge of poetic conventions and logic play an important role in coming up with an essay that convinces the reader of your opinion. **Thus, read the following ideas as 'guidelines' and not as 'must be'.**

### What is a critical personal response?

**Two terms underline the nature of this TMA: Critical and Personal. What follows is a general and not a definitive description of what these terms mean in responding to literature.**

#### 1) A critical response is one that draws on two main activities:

- a.) the readers' logical and scientific appreciation of what is being read. Here, the readers' academic knowledge of the literary features of the text under study is necessary. Knowledge of literary conventions, whether related to poetry, novel, or dramas, enables them to focus on certain qualities of the text and evaluate the author's manipulation of these conventions.
- b.) a critical response also implies that readers argue with or against another reading of the text under study. In other words, we complement our personal response with other critics' views to further support what we are arguing for or against.

#### 2) A personal response focuses on the writers' own personal reaction towards the text. The reaction may involve the writers' emotional, intellectual, political, social, religious, cultural, philosophical, moral, etc...views. In this context, the writers' liking or disliking of a piece of literature is grounded in their own personal views as to what they believe a literary text should do or have. Some personal responses may include references to painful or joyful experiences triggered by the text and make it difficult for the reader to properly appreciate the value of the poem. Artistic inclinations of the readers of literature are of importance because it establishes how we receive a text and how we appreciate it. For example, you may say I hate rock music because I cannot stand loud music and you do not need evidence to prove it to others. The only thing that you are expected to explain is why you, personally, don't like rock music, such as the lyrics is usually violent and sex oriented, the singers are dressed in a weird way, etc...

That being said, it is important that the response does not get off track by generalizing your own ideas. What you appreciate may not be appreciated by other. Hence, always remember that it is **YOUR** response to the work.

### ➤ **Critical Personal Response**

Therefore, a critical personal response is one that combines the above two: It is your personal opinion, based on what you like or dislike because of the views that you believe in, **and** it is critical when you draw on what other people have said to strengthen your opinion.

**Accordingly, the importance of this kind of task is that it allows you, the reader of literature, to participate in creating the meaning and significance of the text you are reading.**

### **Organization of a Critical Personal Response**

Although organization varies from one student to the other depending on the students' creativity, the following sections should be part of the critical personal response:

**Introduction:** You may introduce your topic in an interesting way that grabs the reader's attention. Then you identify the title of the work or works you are examining, the authors, and the dates of the publication. You may refer to the historical context of each of the poems under study by referring to their poetic genres, their historical and cultural backgrounds so that you prepare your reader to your own preference. After that, clearly state your thesis statement as to which work you prefer and why. The questions raised in the TMA's Guide Notes should help you in narrowing down or identifying the reasons of your choice. You may not need to answer all of them, but they may lead you to further reasons why you prefer one work to the other. In other words, your thesis statement should clearly include the reasons for your choice. These reasons will act as key words or controlling ideas that govern your thesis statement and they will constitute the body of your TMA. Always remember that when you are faced with an assignment that asks "why," this means that your essay is a cause/effect essay and that your thesis statement should include the reasons for your choice. You have to make sure that the controlling ideas must have the potential of being properly developed and supported by examples from the poems you are dealing with.

In writing your thesis statement **avoid** reasons that do not present an issue that is not viable for development, such as

1. using rhetorical questions
2. stating the obvious (such as the poem is very famous, or the poem is a Romantic poem)
3. using vague descriptions (such as: "the poem is very interesting" or "very complex") without specifying the elements that make it interesting or complex
4. formulating your reasons in a question type form (such as "I prefer this poem because of how the imagery is used" or "because I do not like the genre"). Be very specific.

**Body Paragraphs:** Although the body paragraphs are primarily linked to the reasons you have mentioned in your thesis statement, the following are some guidelines as to how you may organize them.

1. Give a **brief** explication of what the work(s) are about, i.e., what they are about and the general characteristics of each. Do not go into details here because you will be doing so in the upcoming paragraphs. You may include **brief information** on the background of the authors of each work so as to situate these works in their historical, cultural, and literary contexts.
2. Then, you may move to focus on to the poem of your choice, highlighting the achievements of its writer and its significant features and **briefly restating** the reasons why prefer this poem to the other one.
3. What follows now is your defence of the reasons you have mentioned in your thesis statement. Take each reason and develop it to the best of your knowledge. Whichever reason you have mentioned in the thesis statement must be fully developed and **supported with examples from the work**. **Secondary sources** may be of good help to you here as you may use them to further strengthen your argument. You are also encouraged to give examples from your personal life that justify the reasons you mentioned.
4. In the context of giving support please keep in mind that you are expected to give evidence to your argument from the text you are referring to. Here your skills at paraphrasing and quoting is of extreme importance—check the TMA guide notes for quoting lines of poetry. You will lose a lot if you do not properly acknowledge and represent the sources of your ideas.
5. **This part of your TMA may take several paragraphs depending on the reasons you have mentioned in your thesis statement.**
6. In the development of your argument you may feel that you want to compare and contrast how the two works deal with the issue you are raising in each paragraph (for example, one poem uses too many metaphors and the other does not) in order to strengthen your own preference and personal opinion.
7. The resources available to you, mentioned in the Guide Notes of the TMA, should be properly investigated to strengthen your argument.

**Conclusion:** Here you may want to summarize in an attractive style (different wordings) the reasons for your championing one work over the other. Move from the specific to the general to engage the reader in new ways of appreciating a literary text.

**Very Important:** Make sure that you properly document each idea that is not yours and review the proper format of the reference page. You will be penalized if you do not acknowledge ideas that are not yours. The more evidence that you have used sources the more credit you will be given for the effort of researching.