How to write textual commentary

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Step 1: Read the text!!

- Read the text several times:
  - First time read quickly to get a gist of what the text is about.
  - Then read more slowly, looking for the main ideas.
Step 2: Contextualising

- Work to which the excerpt belongs
- Author
- Where in the work
  - What comes before
  - What comes after
- Historical/Social context
- Artistic context
Step 3: Summarising

- What the excerpt is about.
- Parts in which it is divided (can be done in the formal analysis section)
- Topics appearing
  - Main topics
  - Secondary topics
Step 4: Formal analysis

- **Structure of the text** (this can tie up with the topics of the text)
  - Parts
  - Patterns
  - Repetitions/Rhythms
- **Formal devices used, and what their purpose and effect is.**
Step 5: Content Analysis

- Thematic criticism
- How does the form affect the contents
- Topics in the text related to topics in the whole work
- How it relates thematically with other contemporary works; influences from previous works or on later works.
Step 6: Conclusion

- Retake the most important points of the commentary.
- Summarising the main points in the form and content section is basic.
Some advice

• These are the basic points that should be tackled in textual commentary but:
  – The media and the type of text affect the way in which it is made.
  – The extension and purpose of the commentary also affects the style.
  – Every section is always related to the others, so if you find yourself skipping from one section to another and then back, don’t worry—it’s actually what you’re supposed to do!