



COMMENTARY GUIDELINES

Commentaries are short, conversational first-person essays. Commentators often share experiences that are personally meaningful, perhaps counter-intuitive or surprising, and resonant with larger social themes. They might take a position or express an opinion on a specific issue. In this sense, commentaries don't have to be "objective," but they should take into account opposing points of view (this contested issue of "objectivity" can be a provocative subject of discussion for teachers and students doing commentaries for the first time). The best commentaries aren't political rants or personal diatribes, nor do they stick to generalized observations. Through commentaries, young people articulate perspectives grounded in compelling evidence, which might come in the form of lived experiences, references to research, or bits of dialogue with people they've encountered in their everyday worlds.

1. Commentaries should be **1-2 minutes long** (that's about **one page single spaced**).
2. Write about **issues that inspire passion** in you. Write **from your own experience**. You could respond to a school shooting by talking about how you were an outcast and really overlooked by adults in your school, or you could start a commentary about body image by describing a moment when an audience member approached you after a performance and thanked you for showing the world that "us fat people can dance."
3. **Use concrete examples** and stories in your writing. If you are talking about getting along with your parents, tell us specific incidents when your communication worked or broke down; or if you are writing about a political issue, like the war in Iraq, try to give examples, like a young soldier in your community who came home with post-traumatic stress disorder.
4. **Write conversationally**. Write like you speak. Read your scripts aloud as you write. Don't just mouth the words. Say it out loud before you write. On your first try, you could sit with someone who can listen to you tell your story and type it out for you to be sure it's conversational.
5. Don't be afraid to **use humor**. Funny lines and topics capture people's attention.
6. Think about the **rhythm and pacing** of the piece. Vary sentence length.
7. **Read your commentary out loud** to someone else and see if it flows and sounds natural. Underline words you want to emphasize to be sure a listener doesn't miss anything.



Youth in Control Show: Online Group

Commentary:

- *Planning:* What interests you? What are people talking about? Think about the things that are going on in your community. Commentaries give you the opportunity to express your views about something that is happening in your world. You can write about any topic, but the stories should be personal. What did you observe during a recent trip? What do you think about the legalization of marijuana? What's your opinion of teachers in the Oakland Unified School District? Any question, thought or idea can turn into a commentary.
- *Writing:* Don't write what you think other people want to hear, write from the heart. This is your commentary, own it! Try to write conversationally. That means you should write the way you talk. Ask yourself if what you wrote sounds like something you'd say out loud. If your writing is filled with words that wouldn't come naturally to you in a conversation, it probably needs some changes. Say less, not more. Simple is beautiful. Try to make things as clear and easy to understand as possible. Conversational writing is founded upon the concept of storytelling. So tell a story!

Radio Commentaries, Youth Radio Style

What makes a story good? **Relevance.**

What makes a story great?

- **Surprise**
- **Newness/Fresh Information**
- **Emotion**
- **Style**
- **Sincerity/Genuineness**

Format for a short radio commentary:

Teaser:

Tag:

Scene:

Argument / Insight:

Closer:

Space to brainstorm ideas...