



Instructions for 2nd round Comment Sheets

For your 2nd round of comment sheets, address your critique as a note to the author. Your job is to offer an honest response with an explanation of why you had that response. It is important for you, as writers, to be able to “beta test” a story, which means you want a clear indication of a reader’s initial response as well as a secondary response.

In the future, unless you are in a workshop situation, it will be nearly impossible to get a thorough “deep” reading of a story or poem because nearly every reader’s response will be compromised in some way. The workshop offers a unique situation in which a reader is compelled, by instruction and grading, to give you a response that is both reflective of an initial reading and a subsequent, more thoughtful reading. As a reader, the workshop also compels you to go beyond your typical “lazy” engagement of a work to give it the benefit of a doubt and a second look.

It is not necessary for you to like or praise the work. Your job is to explain how you initially felt about it and then to look at it more carefully and try to determine if it is doing what you think it should be doing. (Remember, every reading is an implicit interpretation.) As long as you can point to the text to explain why you have a particular response (including a positive one), your critique or praise is valid. If you do not have an explanation, then your reading is simply idiosyncratically yours, and it does not hold up as valid criticism. (For example, “I thought your story was terrible because I hate all stories that have cats in them.”)

Also keep in mind that an informal tone is preferable to a comment sheet that tries to sound like it is by some literary scholar. (You are all students, after all, so just be yourselves.) Be sure to offer suggestions if you have them, but keep in mind that your suggestions should have some rationale behind them (generally a *literary* rationale, though in some cases a commercial rationale might be helpful).