

Practicing Commentary

Directions: Write a brief commentary about something concerning campus life at West Chester University. This exercise may help you arrive at a topic for your longer paper.

1. In searching for a topic, consider all aspects of campus life: your courses, your living arrangements, the activities you enjoy, the trends you've noticed, the rules you've observed, the food that's available, the town nearby—the whole campus life including academics, sports, socializing, and what you like to do when you're alone. Brainstorm as many possible topics as you can.
2. Choose a couple of the topics that seem most interesting to you and brainstorm a list of “issues” that are related to this topic. What's important about these topics, from your perspective? Trimbur writes that commentators “establish issues to explain some meaningful aspect of the topic” according to their own perspective, their own ideas, values, agendas. The object is eventually to share this perspective, to engage in a conversation with an audience you identify.
3. Introduce. Choose a specific topic/issue and write a brief introduction that tries out one of the strategies on p. 329:
 - *Describe* an event or an existing situation.
 - *Describe* the sides of a controversy, conflict, or debate.
 - *Explain* the causes or origins of an issue.
 - *Explain* how you became aware of the issue.
 - *Explain* points and principles you have in common with readers.
 - *Uses examples or personal anecdotes* that illustrates the issue you're writing about.
4. Write your commentary. The issue you've identified can be observed, described, analyzed, synthesized, interpreted, and/or evaluated, depending on what you want to say about it. Brainstorming these possibilities may help you arrive at some interesting ideas.
5. Conclude. Write an ending that tries out one of the strategies on p. 330:
 - *Point out* the consequences of your position.
 - *Reaffirm* shared values and beliefs.
 - *Make recommendations*.
 - *Call on readers to take action*.