Your comments can make a difference in the quality of your peers’ final papers. The more you engage with one another’s papers and help one another, the more you will learn.

As you read each paper, pay close attention to its structure, strength of evidence, completeness of argument, and overall coherence. Write your comments in the margins as you read; you might not remember your impressions if you don’t record them right away.

Commenting effectively takes time, so plan to spend at least one hour per rough draft.

Consider the following when commenting:

**Introduction:**
- Find the **question**. Mark it with a “Q.”
- Comment on the **clarity** and **quality** of the question. What is your understanding of what the author is asking? What is the value of the question? In what way is it a level 3 question? What, if anything, would you change about the question?
- Comment on the **context** that the author provides. What led the author to ask the question? What precise historical period the author will explore? Where did the events covered in the paper take place? What, if anything, would you change about the paper’s discussion of context?
- Find the **thesis statement**. Mark it with a “TH.” How does the thesis answer the question the author posed? What is arguable about the thesis? What, if anything, would you change about it?
- Note where the thesis statement is **located**. Does its placement make it easy to identify, or is it buried in the middle of a paragraph? How effective do you find the placement? What, if anything, would you change about the placement of the thesis?
- Note how the author **words** the thesis statement. How effective do you find the wording of the thesis? What, if anything, would you change about it?
- How, if at all, does the introduction get your attention and introduce the issue in a compelling way? Does the introduction tell you why you might want to read the paper? What could the author add or change that would make the paper more inviting?

**Body paragraphs:**
- Find the **topic sentence** of each paragraph. Underline it.
- Note whether each topic sentence is **relevant** to the thesis and/or to a counterargument. Mark any that seem irrelevant.
- How do all of the sentences in each paragraph relate to that paragraph’s topic sentence? Mark any sentences that seem to be out of place.
- Describe the logical development of the author’s main claims. Mark any place where you seem to lose the thread of the argument. Mark any place where the argument gets repetitive.
- Comment on the transitions. How does the beginning of each paragraph follow logically from the end of the previous one? Mark an especially effective transition. Mark a transition that you think needs to be revised (if there is one). Suggest, if you can, a way to make that transition work.

**Counterarguments:**
- Find the counterargument(s). Mark it/them with “CA.”
- Describe the placement of the counterargument. How does it fit into the flow of the paper?
- Comment on the appropriateness of each counterargument. Does it address the same question as does the thesis? How does it (as it should) propose a different answer to that question, or a different interpretation of a piece of evidence?
- Comment on the strength of each counterargument. How is it supported with evidence? Where does the author discuss why someone might believe it to be true?
- What, if anything, would you change about this section of the paper?

**The argument as a whole:**
- Explain how the author provides evidence in support of both the thesis and the counterargument(s)? Mark any points that seem to require more evidence.
- Is each piece of evidence relevant to the thesis or a counterargument? Mark any evidence that is especially compelling. Mark any that is not and state what kind of evidence you would expect to be there for a logical argument.
- Does the author explain the relevance of the evidence to his/her argument? Point out where the evidence is explained particularly effectively. Mark the places where you believe that more explanation would strengthen or clarify the argument.
- Does the author acknowledge the sources of his or her information? Mark any places in the paper where you are unsure of whether the idea comes from the author or from a source.
- Does the author use correct MLA citation format? Does the author use quotation marks appropriately? Whenever you see a parenthetical citation, can you tell how much of the material preceding the citation comes from the source? Mark one instance and explain what your assumption is about what the citation covers.
- Overall, do you find the argument engaging, logical, and persuasive? Comment on how well the author rebuts the alternative hypothesis and argues in support of the thesis.
Conclusion:
Comment on how well the conclusion meets these conventional criteria:
- It focuses on the significance of the main claim, commenting in a thought-provoking way on the “so what?” of the paper.
- It sums up the argument of the paper and goes beyond recapitulating the introduction.
- It leaves readers with a last thought or reflection on the topic.

What changes, if any, would you make to the conclusion?

Overall comments:
- What did you like best about this paper? (This can be a long list.)
- What do you think is the single most important revision the author can make?

[updated 2/10/15]