Do's and Don'ts for Writing Commentary
Based on a checklist created by Adria Bader, UR Writing Fellow, WC '96
http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/dosdonts.html

Your goal as a peer editor is to help the writer/author present a document that effectively conveys to the reader that writer's intended message. You are not trying to teach writing or content, and so should reply in a manner that expresses how the author might help you as reader better access the paper content.

Commentary DO's:
- Read a draft all the way through BEFORE you begin to comment on it.
- Spend at least 20 to 40 minutes commenting on a single draft.
- Use a number/comment system for LONG marginal comments.
- Raise questions from a reader's point of view; points that may not have occurred to the writer.
- Let the author know when he/she has been particularly effective, taught you something new, or made a strong point in his/her analysis.
- Focus first (and primarily) on overall problems of content.
    - Fix occasional grammar/spelling problems. Comment on frequently repeated problems if they distract from the presentation of content.
    - Deal with organizational issues only if changes are needed to improve reader access to the substantive paper content.
- Phrase comments clearly and carefully. The author should be able to read the commentary and easily understand what needs to be changed.
- Make comments text-specific, referring specifically to that writer's draft (NO "rubber stamps" such as "awkward" or "unclear" or "vague").
- Direct comments to breaks in logic, disruptions in meaning, and/or missing information.
- Structure comments to help writers to clarify their purposes and reasons in writing that specific draft.
- Offer SUGGESTIONS, not commands, when possible.
- Provide solutions to the issues you raise, if possible.
- Comment through the use of questions ("This sentence confuses me a little; can you reword it to make it more clear? OR "Could you make a stronger transition between these two points?").
- Look for unexplained "Code Words" in the draft and ask the writer about them ("What exactly does `Different aspects' mean here?").
- End comments should include the main STRENGTHS in a writer's draft as well as 2 or 3 of the most important things that need improvement.
- If something appears too complicated to write in the commentary, just mention that you have something that you would like to talk to the writer about when you have your conference.

Commentary Don'ts:
- Avoid turning the writer's paper into YOUR paper.
- Do not contradict yourself ("Condense this sentence," followed by, "You need to be more specific and develop this paragraph.").
- Don't over-whelm a writer with too much commentary.
- If the writer is not sure that they have understood the assignment, and you aren't sure either, DON'T be afraid to tell the writer to talk with his or her professor.
- Don't take forever in your commenting on a draft: remember, the writer needs ample time to revise.

Do's and Don'ts for writers receiving feedback

As an author, remember that your peer is trying to help you improve the accessibility of the content you presented. Remember that you are the author of the content, and so have complete control of all decisions to edit. Ultimately, you are responsible for all the words you write, so address any issues raised only when you feel it improves the paper.

Do's:
Do recognize the time your peer took to read and respond to your paper.
Do listen to the feedback with an open mind.
Do ask for clarification when you are confused by the comments.
Do help the reader understand what it is you are trying to do.
Do engage in exchange and dialogue.
Do use this process as an opportunity to improve the accessibility of your message.
Do take all of the commentary as advisory.
Do remember that this feedback is just one opinion from among some 6.7 billion possible readers.
Do let the document sit for a while and revisit the comments after you've had rtime to process the initial conversation.

Don'ts
Don't get defensive.
Don't sweat the small staff (arguing over a comma or word choice is a waste of your time).
Don't read the feedback as a mandate.
Don't discard the feedback just because you don't like it.

A Guide to the Research Proposal
Background, Context, and Method

Use this as one possible way to conceptualize the first two chapters of your research proposal/dissertation. While variations from this outline are perfectly acceptable, readers should ultimately come away with an understanding of how you addressed most of these issues.

Issue 1: Literature Review
Back ground and context that introduces the field you will be researching. This will be a literature review. Include references and citations from other researchers and public figures in addressing the issues below.

1. Describe the field you will be researching.
2. Tell us why this field is important.
3. Describe the current (and relevant) "hot topics" in the field.
4. Describe the specific area will you be researching in the field.
5. Tell us how your research will add to the field (explain why your work is important--does it address any unanswered questions in this field?).
6. Summarize the current research base in your specific area of interest and highlight any gaps in the research that you plan to address with your research.

Issue 2—Methodology
Make sure you use and reference established methodologies from multiple sources. This section should parallel information described by the scientific method.

1. Describe your hypothesis/research question.
2. Tell us how you plan to answer/test that question/hypothesis.
3. Determine if your research is descriptive (describing what is), evaluative (testing an intervention), or theoretical/philosophical.
4. Describe the sample (who or what is the sample, how will you identify it). Will you need or have a control? Tell us how your sample will affect your conclusions (e.g., will the results be generalizable?).
5. Describe the tools you plan to use to gather your data (document analysis, interviews, assessments, surveys, case study, observations, statistical databases, etc.).
6. Describe the manner in which you plan to analyze data.
7. Summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the approach you identified (the goal is to help the reader understand why this is the best approach)
8. Describe your expected timeline for completing this research.

Scientific Method

Research Question / Hypothesis

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Data needed to answer your question

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Method used to gather that data

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Plan for analyzing your data

Findings

Discussion/Implications

Caveats