

How to Respond to an Informal, On-demand Writing Prompt/Quiz

Sample Prompt:

***Treasure Island* (Chapters 9-10): Using textual evidence from these chapters, describe the relationship between Captain Smollet and Mr. Trelawney. Why does Jim tend to agree with Trelawney? What do you think? Why?**

1. Turn the main prompt into a claim statement:

The relationship between Captain Smollet and Mr. Trelawney is tense and unpleasant from the start.

2. Present textual evidence to support your claim:

Captain Smollet, "a sharp-looking man who seemed angry with everything on board...", describes his ill feelings about the cruise, the men, and the first mate, none of which sits well with the squire, who was responsible for hiring them all.

3. Offer Reasoning:

To Jim, the squire's defensiveness may seem reasonable because the captain is attacking everything the squire did, which would be understandably hurtful.

4. More Textual Evidence:

But the captain, by his own admission, believes it is "better [to] speak plain...even at the risk of offence." And offend he does, for Squire Trelawney is immediately "very angry," as the captain describes in detail his concerns about the crew, the placement of the weapons, and the fact that "There's been too much blabbing already."

5. More Reasoning/Textual Evidence:

This is clearly directed at the squire, who already has a reputation for sharing information better kept secret. Jim admits, "...he was so loose a talker; yet in this case I believe he was really right." At the end of Chapter 9, Jim says plainly, "I assure you I was quite of the squire's way of thinking, and hated the captain deeply."

6. Address the Secondary Question in Prompt: **Why does Jim tend to agree with Trelawney?** Turn the secondary question into a statement (secondary claim):

Jim probably agrees with Trelawney because Trelawney, like a child, is more concerned about getting the adventure underway than he is about more grown-up concerns like safety.

7. Reasoning/Textual Evidence:

It's like when a family goes on vacation and the children chatter excitedly about all the fun things to come, but Dad is out in the garage making sure the luggage is carefully secured atop the car and the spare tire is properly inflated. Someone has to take care of those responsibilities, and the captain is that person. As a rich and likely spoiled member of the upper class, the squire is not used to being bothered with such details and he bitterly resents the captain's questions, saying, "As it is, I have heard you. I will do as you desire, but I think the worse of you." The captain replies only, "I do my duty."

8. Address the Tertiary Question in Prompt: **What do you think? Why?** Turn the tertiary question into a statement (tertiary claim):

I think Captain Smollet is right.

9. Reasoning/Textual Evidence:

The squire is a proven blabbermouth, and all of the captain's concerns are reasonably explained. In fact, he is ready to resign his commission if Dr. Livesey does not agree to certain terms. It makes sense that the captain would worry about these things, and by Chapter 10, his predictions begin to come true. The first mate "turned out even worse than the captain had feared. He had no command among the men...after a day or two at sea he began to appear on deck with hazy eye, red cheeks, stuttering tongue, and other marks of drunkenness."

10. Conclusion Statement:

Captain Smollet is the only knowledgeable and trustworthy member of the crew, but Jim agrees with Squire Trelawney's criticisms because he is too young and easily distracted by the adventure to consider the consequences of his childish outlook.

Here is the complete response to the sample question above:

Shiver me timbers! In a novel like *Treasure Island*, readers expect the adventurers to clash with the pirates at some point, but when the protagonists clash with each other before the ship sets sail, you know there will be trouble on the high seas. The relationship between Captain Smollet and Mr. Trelawney is tense and unpleasant from the start. Captain Smollet, "a sharp-looking man who seemed angry with everything on board..." describes his ill feelings about the cruise, the men, and the first mate, none of which sits well with the squire, who was responsible for hiring them all. To Jim, the squire's defensiveness may seem reasonable because the captain is attacking everything the squire did, which would be understandably hurtful. But the captain, by his own admission, believes it is "better [to] speak plain...even at the risk of offence." And offend he does, for Squire Trelawney is immediately "very angry," as the captain describes in detail his concerns about the crew, the placement of the weapons, and the fact that "There's been too much blabbing already." This is clearly directed at the squire, who already has a reputation for sharing information better kept secret. Jim admits, "...he was so loose a talker; yet in this case I believe he was really right," and at the end of Chapter 9, Jim says plainly, "I assure you I was quite of the squire's way of thinking, and hated the captain deeply."

Jim probably agrees with the squire because Trelawney, like Jim, has a childish outlook. They are both more concerned about getting the adventure underway than about more grown-up concerns like safety. It's like when a modern family goes on vacation and the children chatter excitedly about all the fun things to come while Dad is out in the garage making sure the luggage is carefully secured atop the car and the spare tire is properly inflated. The childish excitement is understandable, but someone has to take care of those responsibilities. In *Treasure Island*, the captain is that person. As a rich and likely spoiled member of the upper class, the squire is not used to being bothered with such details and he bitterly resents the captain's questions, saying, "As it is, I have heard you. I will do as you desire, but I think the worse of you." The captain replies only, "I do my duty."

Despite Jim's narrative favoritism, I think Captain Smollet is right. The squire is a proven blabbermouth, and all of the captain's concerns are reasonably explained. In fact, he is ready to resign his commission if Dr. Livesey does not agree to certain terms. It makes sense that the captain would worry about these things, and by Chapter 10, his predictions begin to come true. The first mate "turned out even worse than the captain had feared. He had no command among the men...after a day or two at sea he began to appear on deck with hazy eye, red cheeks, stuttering tongue, and other marks of drunkenness." Captain Smollet is the only knowledgeable and trustworthy member of the crew, but Jim agrees with Squire Trelawney's criticisms because he is too young and easily distracted by the adventure to consider the consequences of his childish outlook.