What is snark? You recognize it when you see it -- a tone of teasing, snide, undermining abuse, nasty and knowing, that is spreading like pinkeye through the media and threatening to take over how Americans converse with each other and what they can count on as true. Snark attempts to steal someone's mojo, erase her cool, annihilate her effectiveness. In this sharp and witty polemic, New Yorker critic and bestselling author David Denby takes on the snarkers, naming the nine principles of snark -- the standard techniques its practitioners use to poison their arrows. Snarkers like to think they are deploying wit, but mostly they are exposing the seethe and snarl of an unhappy country, releasing bad feeling but little laughter. In this highly entertaining essay, Denby traces the history of snark through the ages, starting with its invention as personal insult in the drinking clubs of ancient Athens, tracking its development all the way to the age of the Internet, where it has become the sole purpose and style of many media, political, and celebrity Web sites. Snark releases the anguish of the dispossessed, envious, and frightened; it flows when a dying class of the
powerful struggles to keep the barbarians outside the gates, or, alternately, when those outsiders want to take over the halls of the powerful and expel the office-holders. Snark was behind the London-based magazine Private Eye, launched amid the dying embers of the British empire in 1961; it was also central to the career-hungry, New York-based magazine Spy. It has flourished over the years in the works of everyone from the startling Roman poet Juvenal to Alexander Pope to Tom Wolfe to a million commenters snarling at other people behind handles. Thanks to the grand dame of snark, it has a prominent place twice a week on the opinion page of the New York Times. Denby has fun snarking the snarkers, expelling the bums and promoting the true wits, but he is also making a serious point: the Internet has put snark on steroids. In politics, snark means the lowest, most insinuating and insulting side can win. For the young, a savage piece of gossip could ruin a reputation and possibly a future career. And for all of us, snark just sucks the humor out of life. Denby defends the right of any of us to be cruel, but shows us how the real pros pull it off. Snark, he says, is for the amateurs.

Personal Review: Snark by David Denby
Snark: Nasty, and downright personal criticism; once a rough tumble device in societies of Ancient Greece and Rome for those who moved in the literary and political circles now Anyone once you are lined up in a snaker's sights they will attack you for the least of causes, no holds barred, nothing is beneath their shoddy low brow view,. So warns David Denby film critic of The New Yorker.
This is written from a USA perspective but is valuable to the other readers in English not just as a warning but as an excellent brief view of American literature.
Mr. Denby is to be congratulated for taking on the current fashion for using snark as a cheap pseudo journalistic way of pretending to be witty, all knowing and of course cynical. For in doing so he is bound to ruffle a lot of feathers and so become the target. However you can tell by the confident, measured and witty prose that he is not in the least put off by this, and can dish out the biting criticism in a more erudite and literate way than these lesser folk.
This slender volume is a concentrate of the definition of snark, its historical highs, some of its more adept practitioners and to the current wretched low use it is put to. Thus there are so many levels on which to enjoy this read; a literary history; brief essays of writers who have worked in this style, such as Juvenal, Pope, Swift, Tom Wolfe and Mencken; and most importantly an education into just what damage and lowering of standards the current crop of Internet denizens are causing to literature, humour, often the personal reputations of essentially harmless folk and political debate, the latter point is rather chilling when placed in the context of The Great Medical Reform Shouting Match currently going on in the USA.
His main target are those who hide behind the cloak of the Internet, and from this foggy place can snipe spitefully without any recourse to accuracy, transmuting rumour and gossip into a fool’s gold version of fact, managing to weave racism and misogyny into their webs.
In addition to being entertaining and informing Mr Denby makes you think as you read for he does not condemn snark outright only the cheap and uncalled for usage. He loves as much as anyone to see the pompous, hypocritical and false savaged and pulled low, but only in those areas in which they deserve it. So don’t try and rush through this nodding with righteous enthusiasm, you’ll see snark use upheld and a few sacred beasts swatted (Ohmigosh -Private Eye!!). A valuable addition to the fight against dumming down, sound bites and the creep of nastiness for its own vacuous sake.

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