

21W.022.03 Spring 2014 Workshop Essay #1 Instructions

Due: Marked-up essays and individual response letters (two copies-for classmates and instructor). **Note: All student work and your comments are considered confidential. Keep the Essay 1 prompt in front of you as you review your classmates' work.**

Students will review several essays for Tues.'s workshop. As a class, we will review one essay in common. Then you will review the essays of your small group. I will email out the essay we review in common; you should email your essays (not cover letters) to group members (include me in your group email). Our workshop has a dual purpose: (a) to provide individual feedback and (b) to help identify common writing concerns, as students prepare to revise essays. **Review each essay and type a letter of one to one and a half pages (double-spaced) to each writer. Also make marginal comments on the essays.**

The reviewing process usually takes about three to three and a half hours. It's best to read an essay through first, without commenting. After a second reading, comment in the margin and write a response letter. Many reviewers are most effective if they divide the editorial work into two parts, reviewing one or two essays first, and then returning to those remaining.

Your letters should identify (a) two or three specific strengths of each piece and (b) two or three specific things that need work. Make clear, specific suggestions for improving each essay. Our primary focus is strengthening the essay as a whole, rather than more minor problems of "polishing" (e.g., minor grammar errors, punctuation).

Most writers learn more from constructive criticism than being "slammed." Acknowledge first what you like about an essay, before identifying weaknesses and suggesting changes.

Some questions to consider:

1. How well do the title/introduction engage you? Does the writer's voice/tone seem appropriate to the topic? How well does the introduction establish a context for understanding the essay?
2. How well does the essay vividly present and reflect upon life experience? Are there any aspects of the experience that seem undeveloped? How well does the writer use the tools of fiction (setting, character, dialogue)? How well does the essay address the Essay 1 theme of identity?
3. What else do you, as a reader, want to know? Does the essay (a) connect this experience with wider human concerns (b) present a clear perspective on the experience? ("B" connects with what we might call "argument" in an expository piece.)
4. Is the piece clearly organized so that you can follow the movement of thought? Are there any transitions, especially between time periods, that could be improved? Are there any sections or paragraphs that would work better if reordered or omitted?
5. How effective is the conclusion in (a) dynamically closing the piece and/or (b) opening up reflection to broader issues?

6. How might the author strengthen the essay on the paragraph or sentence level? Briefly comment on grammar issues. Mark recurrent grammar errors (e.g., comma usage) once.

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