

21W.730 SPRING 2010 Workshop Essay #1- SES #4

**Due: Marked-up workshop essays and individual response letters to classmates, with copies of letters for instructor.**

Dear Students:

We have several essays to review for our writing workshop next class. You should receive these essays over email by Saturday. This workshop has a dual purpose: (a) to provide individual feedback to some of you and (b) to help identify common writing concerns, as students prepare to revise essays.

Your assignment for this workshop is to review each essay **twice**, carefully and critically, and type a letter (1-1 ½ pages, double-spaced) to each writer. (Bring **two** copies of each letter to class, one for me and one for the writer.) You should also make marginal comments on the essays, in addition to the letters.

This editing task usually takes 2 -3 hours. It's best to read an essay through first, without commenting. Then, after a second reading, comment in the margin and write a response letter. Many readers find that they are most effective as responders if they break up this editorial task into two parts, reviewing one or two essays first, and then returning to the essay(s) remaining.

Your letters should let the writers know two or three **specific** strong points in each piece, and two or three **specific** things that you think need work or that you have questions about. Make some clear and specific suggestions for improving each essay; be proactive in your response. (Rather than stating that "This section is confusing", you might say, "Try to explain this point more clearly".) Our primary focus is on the essay as a whole and how it might be strengthened, rather than more minor problems of "polishing" (e.g., grammar, punctuation, etc.).

What you're aiming for here is constructive criticism that will help your peers craft better revised essays. Since most writers learn more from constructive comments rather than being "slammed," it's best often to acknowledge first what you like about an essay, before identifying its weaker or more problematic areas and suggesting some possible changes.

Here are some questions for you to consider:

1. How well do the title and introduction engage you as a

reader? Does the writer's choice of voice/tone seem appropriate to the theme? How well does the writer establish a context for understanding the essay in the introduction?

2. How well does the essay vividly present and reflect upon life experience? Are there any aspects of the experience that seem unclear or undeveloped? How well does the writer tie the experience into the theme either of (a) developing an ethical framework or awareness of social issues or (b) acting ethically?

What else do you, as a reader, want to know? Does the essay connect this experience with broader issues of interest to a readership?

3. Is the piece clearly **organized** so that you can follow the movement of thought? Are there any weak transitions or sections or paragraphs that would work better if reordered or omitted?

4. How effective is the conclusion in (a) dynamically closing the piece and/or (b) opening up reflection to broader issues?

5. Are there any ways in which the author might strengthen the essay on the paragraph or sentence level?

In class, we will spend equal amounts of time on each essay. Since we can't possibly cover all suggestions for each piece, these letters are critical in providing feedback. At the end of the class, you'll return the marked-up essays with your letters to the writers, and copies of the letters to me.

In reviewing and discussing these essays, we abide by the norm of strict confidentiality. That means that you are not free to discuss the content of other students' essays or your comments about these pieces outside the classroom. Also please store your fellow students' writing in a secure place.

Thanks in advance for your hard work.

Andrea Walsh

P.S. Have a copy of the essay 1 assignment sheet (on website) in front of you as you review these pieces.

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