

21W.731 SPRING 2004 Workshop #1:Draft, Essay #1

Due: THURS 2/19: Marked-up drafts and individual response letters to classmates, with copies to instructor.

Dear "Writing and Experience" Students:

We have several essay drafts to review and comment on for our writing workshop next class. This workshop has a dual purpose: (a) to provide individual feedback to some of you and (b) to help identify common writing concerns, as all of you prepare to revise your essay drafts.

Your assignment for this workshop is to review each draft 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 should take about 2 -2 ½ hours. It's best to read an essay draft through first, without putting pen or pencil to paper. 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 your fellow students know two or three **specific** strong points in this draft, and two or three **specific** things that you think need work or that you have questions about. We are primarily focusing here 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 a draft, before identifying its weaker or more problematic areas.

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 topic? How well does the writer establish a context for understanding the essay in the introduction?

2.How well does the draft vividly present and reflect upon life

experience? Are there any aspects of the experience that seem unclear or undeveloped? How well does the writer use the tools of fiction (setting, character, dialogue)?

What else do you, as a reader, want to know? Does the draft (a) connect this experience with wider human concerns (b) present a clear perspective on the experience presented? ("B" connects with what we might call "argument" in an expository piece.)

3. Is the draft clearly **organized** so that you can follow the movement of thought? Are there any 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 draft 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 in 20-25 minutes, 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.

Thanks in advance for your hard work. See you in class next week.

Andrea Walsh

P.S. It may be helpful to have a copy of the essay assignment sheet (or "prompt") as you review these drafts.