

Writing Workshop: First Version, Essay #3 21W.731 Spring 2004

Workshop Letters Due: Thurs. 4/15. Essays should be emailed to small group workshop members (see handout) by Mon. 4/12 as Word attachments. Do not mail the cover letter that you send to the instructor.

Your assignment for this workshop is to review each essay carefully and critically. Responding to the questions below, type a 1- 1 ½ page **letter** to each writer. (Bring **two** copies of each letter to class, one for the instructor and one for the writer.) You should also make marginal comments on the essay, in addition to the letter. This reviewing assignment should take about 2-2 1/2 hours.

Your letters should let your fellow students know two or three **specific** strong points in their essays, 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.).

Here are some questions for you to consider:

1. Do the title and introduction engage you as a reader and establish a context for the essay? Do the writer's form of narration (first person, third person) and voice (e.g. humorous, angry, sad) seem appropriate to the topic? Are there alternate forms of narration (e.g. diary/journal or letter format) that might be more effective?

2. How well does the essay vividly present and reflect upon an experience (that of the author and/or someone else)? Comment on the writer's use of the tools of fiction: time, setting, character and dialogue (when appropriate). How well does the author integrate interview material? (If the writer has not yet integrated interview material, has s/he indicated plans for doing so?)

3. Are there any aspects of the experience that seem unclear or undeveloped? Does the piece need more "backstory"?

4. Does the essay (a) connect this experience with a broader psychological or social issue (b) offer a clear perspective on the experience presented? Are there any secondary sources (or types of sources) that you might suggest? If writer has already integrated outside sources, comment on the ways in which the student uses these source(s) in the essay: Does the connection between the source(s) and the experience/argument seem clear? Are excerpt quotations well-selected and appropriate in length? (As a general rule, it's best to avoid long block quotes in short experiential essays.)

5. Is the essay clearly **organized** so that you can follow the movement of thought? Are there any sections, paragraphs or sentences that would work better if reordered? Does the writer transition effectively within and between paragraphs and sections?

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

7. Are there any ways in which the author might strengthen the essay on the paragraph or sentence level? Mark any grammatical errors (or potential errors) that you notice.

P.S. It may be helpful to have a copy of the Essay #2 assignment sheet (or "prompt") as you review these pieces.