

21W.011 Fall 2015 Workshop Instructions Essay #1 Version 1- Tues. 9/22

Due: Marked-up workshop essays and individual response letters to classmates, with copies of letters for instructor. **Do not email response letters to classmates before workshop.**

Students will have three essays to review for Tuesday's workshop; I will email out the essays to the class over the weekend. This workshop has a dual purpose: (a) to provide individual feedback to writers; (b) to identify common writing concerns, as students prepare to revise essays.

Review each essay twice, carefully and critically; type a letter (1-1 ½ pages, double-spaced) to each writer. (On Tues., bring in two copies of each letter, to the writer and instructor.) Make marginal comments on the essays, in addition to the letters.

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

Your letters should identify two or three specific strong points in each piece, and two or three specific things that you think need work. Make clear, specific suggestions for revision; respond proactively. (Rather than "This paragraph is confusing", you might ask, "Can you explain the idea of ___ more clearly"?) Our primary focus is on strengthening the essay as a whole; a secondary focus is on more minor problems of "polishing" (e.g., grammar, punctuation).

We are aiming for constructive criticism to help your peers craft better essays. Most writers learn more from constructive comments than being "slammed"; it's best to acknowledge first what you appreciate about a piece, before identifying problems and suggesting changes.

Some questions to consider:

1. How well do the title/introduction engage you? Does the writer's voice/tone seem appropriate? Does the introduction set 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 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? Identify 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 to strengthen the essay on the paragraph or sentence level?
6. Other suggestions for improvement in revision (e.g., narrating in flashback, using dialogue)?

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