

Workshop #1 (Narrative Essays)

Guidelines for comments:

Begin by reading your partners' essays for pleasure. Then, take a look at the list of questions provided here and reread the essays with these questions in mind and write out your comments. Use each question as the point of departure for a thoughtful response ("yes" and "no" answers are of little value to your partners). Your finished comments on each essay should add at least one and half pages (400 words) to the guideline document. When you are satisfied with what you have written, go back to the course website for the narrative essay (first version), click on your partner's name, and post your comments in the appropriate locations (click on the "Add a comment" link near the writer's name). Be sure to include your name and the name of the essay's author with your comments. Remember to post comments for both of your partners.

Remember that your comments are intended to help the writer create a more compelling version of his or her essay. Be tactful and complete. I have not asked you to comment on the writer's grammatical or mechanical errors. I will take care of those problems myself. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful comments.

I will reorganize the workshop groups for three workshops so that you will have a chance to work with different students each time.

Questions to consider in your comments on the narrative essay.

1. **Introduction:** Do the first few paragraphs draw you into the narrative essay? Do they point you in the right direction? If not, can you suggest minor revisions or additions that would make the introduction more engaging and effective?
2. **Background information** (setting and context): What kind of background information does the author provide? Do we know enough to appreciate the narrative? Suggestions for additions or changes?
3. **Use of detail:** Does the author provide sufficient detail? Which details seem particularly revealing? Can you visualize the setting and the actions?
4. **Continuity and coherence:** Are there significant gaps in the narrative? Do you want more information or description? Does any of the material within the narrative seem extraneous?

5. **Central insight:** Does the essay lead up to a central insight? How would you characterize the main idea or focal point of this essay?
6. **Balancing narration and reflection:** Does the author achieve a natural balance between narration and reflection? (Does the author miss out on opportunities to reflect on the story? Does the story have a life of its own or does it feel like just a prelude to the author's conclusions?)
7. **Conclusion:** Does the essay come to a natural end? Can you see the connection between the conclusion and the introduction? Suggestions?
8. **Generalizations:** Does the author present conclusions that reach beyond the purview of the essay? Identify any unwarranted generalizations. How might the writer get at these insights without generalizing?
9. **Major strengths:** What do you see as the major strengths of this essay?
10. **Opportunities for revision:** What aspects of the essay should be reconsidered or revised? Where does it need attention? (If you have already covered #10 in your responses to earlier questions, you may skip it.)

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

21W.034 Science Writing and New Media: Perspectives on Medicine and Public Health
Fall 2016

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.