**Course Writing Guidelines**

This course invites you to explore several approaches to the essay, a popular nonfiction genre characterized by an **individual approach, vivid detail, and the quest for insight**,while practicing the writing process and strengthening your writing skills. Though you should shape and focus your topic according to each subgenre’s purposes and characteristics, choices are limited only by your interest and imagination—with consideration of the rhetorial situation, particularly audience—and could range from the lighthearted to the life-altering.

*How will it work?*

* During the first eleven weeks of the course, you will compose **four sketches, each about two (and no more than three) pages long, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, and in Times New Roman 12**. See below for specific guidelines for each subgenre.
* You will post your sketches to Blackboard, read your workshop members’ sketches there, then meet with your classmates in workshops during class to give and receive feedback on each one.
* In addition to writing the sketches, you will complete complementary readings and assignments, both online and for in-class meetings. See your syllabus and Blackboard for more information.
* Conferences: During **week seven**, you will meet with me and a small group of your classmates to discuss your review sketch topic ideas; during **week twelve**, you will post a Reflection and Plan for Revision to *Digication*, then meet with me to discuss your work and strategies for the portfolio.
* In the last month of the class, after your conference, you will select which sketches (at least two) you want to include in your **final portfolio**, then work to revise and develop these pieces into strong essays. I will provide more detailed guidelines on this portfolio later in the semester, but know that you will need to include approximately **twenty pages** of writing, three of which are a required **reflection** essay, which serves as the introduction to your portfolio.The portfolio is due on the last day of class, December 12.
* IN ADDITION to this primary course project (four sketches, develop a selection for your portfolio), you will also 1) select and **read one nonfiction book** from the reading list and in **week thirteen** 2) submit a one-page sketch on the book and give a presentation on it to a small group of your classmates. See below for specific requirements. If you choose to do so, you can revise and include this piece in your portfolio.

*Genre Characteristics*

We will discuss each of the subgenres for this assignment—**personal essay, observation, review, and topic exploration/research**—in depth, reading examples of published and student essays, as well as study the writing process, from invention to composition to revision, to help you create strong sketches and final drafts.

*What is a sketch?*

A **sketch** is an early draft, but not the first writing you do on your subjects. Always **brainstorm and freewrite**, pursuing possible angles and details, before writing your sketches. Give yourself room to explore and wander. You don’t have to figure out your point in a sketch (though keep an eye out for it), but do consider why you want to explore the topic and share your thoughts with readers. Maintain a strong voice that fits with the rhetorical situation.

*Project Due Dates*

**September 15 – Personal Essay sketch due**

The **personal essay sketch** is an exploration of a meaningful experience or a reflection on an idea. You should have a strong presence in this piece. Take a close look at a significant memory, whether a pivotal moment or a quiet realization. “Personal” doesn’t mean private, but it should matter to you. When narrating a moment, build scenes with vivid description. Try out some dialogue. Draw on all your senses. Help readers to enter the experience with you. Insert commentary and build toward INSIGHT. Don’t choose too large of a topic! A tighter focus means more opportunity for details and specifics instead of summary.

**September 29 – Observation (profile OR place narrative) sketch due**

The **observation sketch** is a description of another **person** (called a profile) or of a **place**, perhaps in a specific moment or series of moments, based on your observations of and interactions with your subject. Your feelings and actions can remain important, but you might also detail the person/place from a distance, limiting how much you develop and emphasize your role. **Think about *what you and your readers might learn* from your observation subject.** If you choose the profile, perhaps interview the person and use their words in your sketch. If you choose the place option, do more than tell readers what it looks like: Why is it significant? What does it mean to you or others? Can you include it as part of a story (writers often make their settings another character in their work)? DO NOT choose for this sketch people you have never met (this isn’t a biography or profile of famous person) or a place you have never visited.

**October 8-9 – Group conferences**

You will sign up for a half-hour meeting with me and a small group of your classmates to discuss your review topic.

**October 13 – Review sketch due: include citation for your subject if applicable**

You will analyze an outside work—such as an album, concert, game, film, or novel—or product (e.g. shoes, a car) as the focus for the **review sketch**. Approach as a reviewer, asserting a *judgment* that measures the significance and quality of your subject through selected *criteria*, perhaps by comparison and contrast or by a dissection of certain elements, and supporting your assertions with specific *evidence*. Use your subject as a source and CITE it, if applicable. You could also explain why you chose your topic, what it means to you, and how it’s connected to your beliefs or experiences, then draw on your memories and observations as you examine the work—an approach called *autobiographical criticism*—but your emphasis should remain on the work itself.

**October 22 and November 3 – Topic Exploration (research) proposal and sketch due: THREE (and no more than five) sources required with in-text citations and a works cited page**

This is a sketch that includes research, not a report or formal paper, so you should utilize your experiences, observations, and maybe interviews as well as outside sources (see below). Your approach should blend the relevant tools of the subgenres that we have studied so far—personal essay, observation, and review (analysis)—and be written for an **audience of fellow college students**, though you could define your readers more narrowly.

Also dueis a **topic proposal** (about a half-page, typed), in class on **Wednesday, Oct. 22.** Required elements:

* Your inquiry question (what do you want to answer through research, exploring your experiences and observations, and your own analysis?). What is your hunch about the answer you might find?
* A summary of what you learned about the topic through your preliminary research; demonstrate a working knowledge of the subject. *What do you already know?*
* Why might the topic matter to your audience? *What is at stake?*

*Source Requirements*

Your sources can be websites, magazine or journal or newspaper articles, books, poems, songs, movies, television programs, surveys, interviews—basically anything that provides you with information or compelling ideas that you can use purposefully—and should be chosen with a critical eye that considers the source’s relevance and authority. Strive to use the **library’s resources** and demonstrate that you can look in multiple places, not just the Internet, for information. Use **MLA documentation style** for your in-text citations and works cited pages. We will talk more about this in class, as well as ways to evaluate sources.

**November 7 – Reflection and Plan for Revision due on *Digication***

I will provide more details in class as well as a demonstration of how to access *Digication* and create your site.

**November 10-13 – Conferences**

You will sign up in class for a meeting with me to discuss your reflection on *Digication* and the sketches you plan to include in your portfolio.

**November 17 – Sketch and Presentation on nonfiction book due**

In your **1-1½ page sketch**, include 1) a concise summary of the book’s content, 2) a brief review/analysis of themes and style, and 3) a reader-based response to the author’s insights and story/ies (what struck you as significant, made you think or feel, or connected to your life or something else you’ve read or witnessed?). In the presentation, overview the points of your sketch and tell the group what you learned as a reader and writer. More to come on this.

**December 12 – Portfolio due**

I will provide detailed guidelines and grading criteria one month prior to deadline. Your final drafts for your portfolio should be the products of your revision and expansion of **at least two** of your sketches; the final page count of each will depend on your focus, purpose, and presentation. Submission guidelines TBA.