

Writing Days: Workshops and Writing Responses

Workshops

Once during the semester you will workshop one of your drafts in class. Workshops will last about 35 minutes. During workshops we will discuss your draft according to the progression goals. We will predominantly focus on large scale matters (argument, structure, etc), though sentence-level and stylistic suggestions might also be brought up over the course of the workshop. These workshops are intended not only to improve your particular progression draft, but also to call attention to larger trends in your writing.

You must submit your draft **24 hours** before your workshop (so, if you are workshopping on a Thursday, by 10:10 Wednesday). Upload your draft to the “Workshop” folder on the Google Site. Label it by your last name and date of workshop. Because there are 14 students, it is impossible for everyone’s workshop to fall on a formal draft due date. This means that most of you will either need to work ahead or receive feedback late in the writing process. You will sign up for workshop days online, and I encourage you to consider those two options when you choose your workshop date. Regardless of when your workshop is, you want to submit the best possible draft so that you can receive more meaningful feedback in class.

On the day of the workshop, you will begin by briefly commenting on the stage of your draft so far. Tell the class what you like about this draft, what you’re struggling with in this draft, and where you’d like it to be by the end of the progression (this should only take a minute or so). Then the class will be open to respond to your comments and discuss their own observations. Though you will be free to respond to any questions, clarify any points, etc., refrain from monopolizing the conversation with a defense of every criticism. Though this is an understandable impulse, it is more useful to first fully understand *how* readers are reading your essay, and why they might be reading it that way, before you simply *tell* them how you meant it to be read. Only when you fully understand the reader’s current perspective can you know how to change your essay to alter that perspective.

Writing Responses

Before **each of the 14 workshops** (excluding your own), you will write a Writing Response to your peer’s draft. You will find the draft in the “Workshop” folder on the Google Site. Read through the draft in its entirety once. Then write **at least 2 marginal notes** and **one end-line comment** (copy-paste, or simply write in, at the end of the document). The end-line comment should be about **100-200 words**. You have 24 hours to read the essay and write comments. Any missed or late comments will deduct one point from your participation grade.

Comments should be written in complete sentences (not simply phrases like “good!” or “huh?”). An ideal comment conveys **your experience as a reader**. In other words, the comment explains both what you understand from the essay and what you struggle to understand from the essay (“I think you’re trying to get at... , but I’m not quite sure how you’re connecting...”). Good comments are also often a blend of compliment and criticism. This is not simply because this makes the writer feel better. This is because a writer needs to know not only what he is doing wrong, but also what he is doing right. Otherwise, he might unnecessarily remove what was working well in his paper.

Since the draft will be on a shared Google Doc, it might be the case that you would like to comment on a sentence or paragraph that another peer has already commented on. If that is the case, then your comment should be in response to your peer’s comment. Do you agree with your peer’s concern, but have a different suggestion? Do you disagree with your peer’s concern, but have another concern of your own? Response comments like this should not just say “I agree” or “I disagree.” They should expand on your peer’s comments in some way.

Also keep in mind that **we are not copy editing** our peer’s drafts. Don’t waste your time fixing comma splices or spelling errors. Some of these sentences (and paragraphs) might be completely removed by the final draft, so it is a waste of your time to copy edit your peer’s draft anyway. Focus instead on big picture items (arguments, close readings, structure, transitions, etc). Look at the **progression checklists** for comment inspiration. However, if you notice a grammatic/stylistic problem that recurs several times throughout the essay, you can briefly note it in your end-line comment.

On the day of the workshop, your peer will first explain his/her current stage of the writing process and concerns with his/her draft. Then I will open the conversation to respond to those concerns, and to bring up any other observations. As with written comments, discussion comments should focus on big-picture items. However, they should also be grounded in the actual essay. So, for example, if you are having a hard time identifying an argument in the piece, you might call attention to a specific paragraph where you think the argument is most clearly laid out, and we can discuss the larger argument as well as the role of that paragraph. Of course, it is also okay to call attention to specific sentences, or even specific terms—as long as you are calling attention to them because they are critical to understanding the larger argument (not because there is a spelling error).