

WRITING WORKSHOP: PAPER #1

Short Fiction



The purpose of the workshop is to give and receive constructive feedback on these papers while they are in progress. Just as you would want to receive feedback that might help you improve your work, you should be interested in providing feedback that may help someone else improve.

With this goal in mind, I'd like you to read and respond to at least two papers this class period. First read the paper straight through without making any marks on it. Then go back to the beginning and read it again, this time to annotate it thoughtfully, critically, responsively. Some questions are provided below to guide your response. But in general, if you're reading an essay, you will be looking to comment on the paper's focus, development, organization, style, and correctness. Try to provide constructive criticism wherever you think the draft could be improved, or encouragement where you think the draft is successful. Include your own responses to give the writer an indication of where the essay is most and least meaningful or powerful. If you find that you have few ideas for improvement, discuss what you think has been the writer's overall purpose and message, and whether or not that message is meaningful to you personally.

If you are reading a creative short story, your comments will be somewhat different than they might be if you were responding to an essay. Some questions below should help guide your response. You can comment on the plot design, the character development, the narrative point of view, whether any element in the story has taken on a symbolic resonance, and what the meaning of the story seems to be to you.

EVALUATING ESSAYS

- FOCUS.** How well is the paper focused? Locate and evaluate the writer's thesis sentence(s) and determine whether the essay is unified around this controlling idea. Does the thesis provide an anchor for all of the content in the essay? Should the thesis be revised to reflect more accurately how the writer develops the paper, or should the paper be revised to reflect this thesis? Is there any content in the essay which does not relate back to this controlling idea? How can the writer make adjustments to improve the paper's focus and unity?
- DEVELOPMENT.** How well is the essay developed? Are key points explained in depth, or does the writer seem to merely scratch the surface? What further rhetorical strategies can the writer use to develop key points in the essay (i.e., textual evidence, examples, anecdotes, comparisons, definitions, etc.). **If you are reading an expressive essay**, does the writer first make it clear how the literature has provided the springboard for personal reflection without resorting to plot summary? Are the writer's personal experiences presented in a vivid, engaging way? **If you are reading an analytical (objective) essay**, does the writer provide enough observation and inference to fully explain the meaning
- STRUCTURE.** How well is the essay structured? Examine the quality of the introduction and conclusion—are they bland or engaging? Can the writer use one of the strategies on the handout provided, "Writing Effective Introductions and Conclusions"? Consider the arrangement of paragraphs in the body of the essay to determine whether the order needs work. Are there any glaring shifts in focus, style, or content that should be addressed? Does the reader move easily from one idea to the next within and between paragraphs?
- STYLE.** Does the writer's style call attention to itself in a positive or negative way? Is there a variety of sentence structures and rich vocabulary to avoid a monotonous tone? Is the diction and word choice engaging and appropriate? Are readers likely to be impressed by the writer's style, be put off by it, or have little reaction to it? Does the writer manage to communicate his or her unique personality, or does the voice in the paper seem generic?
- CORRECTNESS.** Are there errors in the writing you can help the writer correct? If you find any errors on the draft, make the corrections.

EVALUATING SHORT STORIES

- PLOT.** Does the story have a dramatic, suspenseful plot? Is there tension? Does the action build to a crisis? Is the crisis resolved? Do readers have a sense that things in the story are happening for a reason rather than by coincidence or chance? Will readers sense the conflict that's driving the action?
- CHARACTER.** How do you understand the personalities of the people in the story? Does the writer give readers enough information that they will have a sense of the main character's motivations? Does the main character seem like a round character, a believable character, a dynamic character? What more would you like to know about the character in order to find the story more meaningful?
- POINT OF VIEW.** Who is telling the story? What do you observe about the narrator? Do you have any suggestions or observations about the effectiveness of the narrator?
- SETTING.** Will readers have enough of a sense of place as the story goes along?
- SYMBOLISM.** What, if anything, in the story seems to take on a symbolic resonance? How do you interpret the symbolism in the story?
- THEME.** Do you feel that the story will be meaningful to readers in some way? What does the story mean to you? Can you articulate this for the writer?
- Evaluate how well the writer has used narration and description to make the story as vivid as possible.