

WORKSHOPPING ESSAY I

A few words about Workshopping in general

(I have adapted these ideas from Prof. Rebecca Faery's handout on Workshopping):

Workshops are intended to be encouraging and at the same time offer a serious critique of each work under scrutiny: The goal is for the writer to come away with new insights and possibilities, an incentive for returning to the essay, and some specific ideas regarding how to proceed with revision. In particular:

- 1) **Critique**: To help a writer realize her or his goal for a piece of writing, we have to critique what we perceive to be the writer's vision. Keep in mind, however, that "critique" doesn't imply solely negative criticism (though we often use the word that way)—rather, it means to read with critical insight, and includes recognizing what works well, how the writer has succeeded, as well as what doesn't seem to be working.
- 2) **Discussion**: The purpose of having a conversation in a writing workshop isn't simply to reiterate what you've written on the draft; rather, the conversation should be dynamic—use the occasion to stimulate new ideas and open up possibilities that no one foresaw before beginning the conversation.
- 3) **The writer's role**: The writer is in charge of the workshop of her or his paper in this way: s/he opens the workshop by asking questions and waiting for readers' responses. But the writer's most important role in the workshop is to *listen*.

Language for Workshopping:

To make Workshopping a richer source of learning for all participants, it will help to avoid the general language of good and bad, like and dislike; instead, use vocabulary that focuses on specific aspects of essay writing. It's fine to say "I like what you do with your introduction, the way you..."—but it's not helpful to say "Yeah, I like your essay, it's really good." Similarly, "I don't like your introduction" is not helpful, whereas "Your introduction doesn't seem to provide enough context for the reader to understand why you're talking about this subject" could be quite helpful.

Workshopping Essay I

- We'll workshop Essay I in pairs. I will put the names of the pairs on the board.
- We'll take approx. an hour and 10 minutes to workshop. Here's how we'll proceed:
 - 1) Take turns reading your draft aloud to your partner. Read at a good pace (don't rush!) and with expression. Try to hear your words as you read.
 - 2) Next, answer the first two questions on the Writer's workshop sheet. (Try not to spend more than 5 minutes on this task.)
 - 3) Exchange drafts and read your partner's draft silently, commenting and asking questions as you go. You may write that you know what the writer means, or that you'd like to hear more about something, or that you're not sure why the writer includes this piece of information, or . . .; you may use check marks, as I do, for things that work; you may underline things that seem important, etc.
 - 4) Respond to the questions on the Reader's workshop sheet.
 - 5) Discuss! Have a conversation, focusing especially on what you think works and what doesn't work. (Note: The writer's task is not to be defensive but to listen and ask questions for clarification.) This is also a good time to try out ideas for revision.
 - 6) Finally, answer the last question on the Writer's workshop sheet. If you have any questions for me, you can add them at the end of your comments.

WORKSHOPPING ESSAY I: WRITERS

Name: _____

1) What's the most important thing—idea, feeling, image, story—in this essay? Why?

2) Can you articulate the idea* that's at the heart of your essay?

(After Workshopping)

3) Where do you see yourself going with revision?

* An idea is expressed in a complete sentence; an idea says something *about* something. For example: "Cooking" is a topic. "Cooking creatively is easier and more satisfying when you're cooking for friends" is an idea.

WORKSHOPPING ESSAY I: READERS

Reader: _____

Writer: _____

NOTE: Readers: Please make comments and ask questions in the margins as you read through the draft, and then answer these questions. Make sure you leave time for discussion!

1) What does this essay seem to be saying? In a few sentences, tell the writer the meaning you hear him/her making in this draft:

2) Where/how do you see the writer drawing you in in this draft? Point to a few specific places.

3) Briefly: What's working best in this draft? What needs work?

4) Any additional comments for the writer?