

WORKSHOP-CONFERENCE: PAPER 3

To repeat what others have said, requires education, to challenge it, requires brains. -- Mary Pettibone Poole

Like Papers 1 & 2, we will be conducting workshops and conferences for Paper 3. However, in order to provide each student with an opportunity to have his/her draft workshopped by the class, we'll be doing your workshop & conference in small groups. By doing this, every student will write 2-3 Reader's Letters to peers, and will in turn receive 2-3 Reader's Letters. Then during the workshop-conference, you will have the opportunity to talk with a crucial part of your audience who will offer feedback, discuss strategies for revision, talk through ideas, and help reflect on the material and assignment.

Because we are working in small groups, it is absolutely imperative that you turn in your materials on time, and arrive to your workshop-conference on time, ready to participate.

OBJECTIVES:

- To practice providing constructive criticism on other writings
- To practice effective integration of varied critique of your own writing
- To practice extrapolating general principles of good expository writing from a set of writings
- To practice depersonalizing feedback on your writing in order to more effectively use that feedback
- To practice working with reduced direct assistance from your instructor

HOW IT WORKS--PREPARATION:

Once your drafts are turned in, I'll post the cover letters and drafts within your small groups on the discussion board. You will read the essays written by your group members, and write a Reader's Letter to each group member (instructions below). In turn, you will also receive Reader's Letters from each of your group members.

I will be writing personal margin comments on each of your drafts, and will post these to your group. However, instead of doing full end comments for each draft, I will include the bulk of my personalized feedback within the margin comments themselves. Throughout the course, we have been gradually moving toward the writing model you will likely see in your other coursework—wherein you will not have a draft stage with comments from your instructor or TF; often you will not be able to have a conference with your instructor. To prepare you to effectively work within this structure, I will post the margin comments for each member of the group. You are responsible for reading your own comments, **as well as** those I've written for your group members. Use this opportunity to learn to anticipate and respond to feedback from your future instructors and TFs.

Prepare for the workshopping of your paper by sketching out the kind of feedback you'd most benefit from. Are there things you want to ask your readers? Specific elements in your paper that you want to discuss? These may be the same things you indicated in your draft cover letter, or they may be new questions. In the workshop, just listen for the first several minutes of discussion, rather than responding to each comment right away. This allows you to absorb feedback without interference, and to really hear what's being said. Subsequently, you can ask questions of your peers, pitch possible revisions, or ask what your classmates have done to resolve challenges in their own papers.

Prepare for the workshopping of your peers' papers by prioritizing the types of feedback from which those papers could most benefit. What questions will you ask of your group to help get feedback for each peer's draft?

HOW IT WORKS—DURING WORKSHOP-CONFERENCE:

Similarly to the in-class workshops we have done, each paper will receive ~10 minutes of focused feedback, followed by ~20 minutes of general discussion with the group. Thus you will *all* be acting as moderators for one another, and it is *your responsibility* to help your peers get useful feedback on their writing. (This is an excellent way to boost your participation grade as well.)

Unlike the previous in-class workshops, the setting is also your conference with me. Therefore, you will likely find that I am a more active participant during these sessions than I have been during the previous in-class workshops. I am doing this to try to help you receive additional necessary targeted feedback.

While workshoping the papers of your peers, your job isn't to "teach," or to be the dominant speaker about the draft, but to facilitate the conversation—soliciting feedback from the rest of the class, asking questions to enable the discussion. (Basically, you're just helping to keep things moving, so that I can recede into the background a little bit.) You should have a list of the questions you want to ask printed in front of you (see below). For each draft of Paper 3, we will generally follow this sequence. Plan what you'll say and bring it with you to workshop-conference.

1. Introduce your author and yourself, and read the title of the paper being workshoped.
2. Briefly summarize what the author intends to do (thesis). Is this an intervention, a study or combination? Is there disagreement about these? Where did students see the topic stated/implicit? (This is a good place to ask for specific paragraph/sentence numbers).
3. Briefly summarize the significance (i.e., motive) of this essay. Who is the intended audience? Is there disagreement about what the motive is? Does the significance match the intended audience?
4. Briefly summarize the methodology. How does the author propose to accomplish the thesis? Is there any confusion about this?
5. Now you have some options as to how to proceed. I've put some suggestions, or you can think of your own approach. Either way, remember that you have limited time, so prioritize the order of your comments—you want the most important ones to be first in case we run out of time.
 - a. One strategy is to look at the cover letter the author wrote. What questions did s/he ask of readers?
 - b. Another possible approach would be to address specific elements—motive, stance, thesis, etc.—and discuss how they're working. You could particularly emphasize the elements being emphasized in Unit 3 (from the Unit 3 Prompt) or those from Unit 1-2.
 - c. Another strategy is to choose questions from those which folks were asked to address in the Reader's Letters.

Here are some possibilities to bring up when your draft is being discussed. You should plan what you'll say/ask and bring it with you to workshop-conference.

1. Are there any trends in the feedback from the Reader's Letters you want to ask about?
2. Did your classmates see your thesis or motive the same way you are thinking about them? If not, try to say verbally what you're trying to communicate. Ask your classmates for help making this more clear.
3. If you are interested in getting additional evidence, ask folks which of their sources speak to some aspect (be specific!) of your essay.

HOW IT WORKS—AFTER WORKSHOP-CONFERENCE:

Yay! You did it! Take some deep breaths and feel good.

1. Take some time to look through the set of Reader's Letters.
2. As you're reading, keep note of consistent suggestions, commendations, and critiques that many of the letters express. If you find that these are generally consistent with the comments you've received from me, then these are the comments on which you should focus in your revision process.
3. If you find that there are particular comments that are really outliers—in the sense, for example, that only 1 letter seemed to like a certain structure in your paper while all the others didn't find it effective—don't consider this

feedback to be as relevant in your revision process. Writing is not an exact science—ultimately different people will have different opinions, and you’ll find it impossible to take the every suggestion of every person.

4. If you find particular things that are confusing in a letter, feel free to email the author or ask them in class for more explanation.

Once the workshop-conference concludes, you should still be in contact with your group members during your revision process. They will be an excellent resource for you—your peers have heard the kinds of things you’re trying to do, and will be able to provide you with feedback and suggestions on your revision processes. Be prepared to help your group members during revisions.

GUIDELINES FOR WORKSHOP-CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION:

Before the workshop-conference, everyone will read the drafts to be workshopped and write a Reader’s Letter to each of the authors; you don’t need to do a Reader’s Letter for your own draft. You will post these on our course website for the authors to download. Please bring print outs of the drafts to be workshopped, as well as the Reader’s Letters to class to guide the discussion.

You will also be responsible for reading the comments I’ve put on your draft, as well as those I’ve put on the drafts of your group members. Please be prepared to help your peers elicit needed feedback.

READER’S LETTER INSTRUCTIONS PAPER 3:

Print out each draft. As you read, please mark comments on the draft itself. Bring this to class for discussion. Write a Reader’s Letter to each author and post to the class website; if it would be helpful to the author, also attach a scan of the draft with your notes. Bring copies of the materials to class for discussion.

Type a Reader’s Letter (~1-2 pages, single-spaced; **see Style Guide**) for each draft addressed to the author in which you discuss the following points or questions. In your letter, point to specific sentences and paragraphs (which will be numbered) whenever possible; at a *minimum*, you should have at least 4 specific references to spots in the essay.

- 1) **Focus Question/Thesis:** First, **in your own words**, say what you think this paper is about. (What is its topic, analytical question, argument, thesis? What are the specific aims?)
 - i) Where specifically is it **first** stated/implied (e.g., P2 third sentence and P3 first sentence)?
 - ii) Where is the **last** place in the draft where the thesis is explicitly mentioned?
 - iii) Is the thesis arguable? In other words, does the topic seem novel and worth of study/intervention?
 - iv) Does the draft anticipate how readers might disagree with the proposed project?
 - v) How might the thesis be clarified/focused for readers?
- 2) **Motive:** In your own words, say what you think the author’s significance is.
 - i) How does the writer establish the significance/motive/value of this paper? Are there specific places in the text (e.g., P2 third sentence and P3 first sentence)?
 - ii) Does the paper feel like an end in itself or does it generate (or have the potential to generate) a larger insight?
- 3) **Assumptions/claims/definitions:** Are there any terms or ideas which are not yet fully explained in the essay (e.g., virulence, malaria, bednets, symptoms, adaptation, etc) that are needed to understand the argument?
- 4) **Interpretation/Analysis:** How effectively does the author handle the elements of interpretation, evidence and analysis?
 - i) Any suggestion for the author on which evidence needs more analysis?
 - ii) Where more evidence could strengthen the argument?

- 5) **Structure and Orienting:** Does the author correctly use the proposal structure? Where can adjusting the structure in service of the proposed idea make the paper more effective? Does the proposal read in a logical and reasonable manner? Can readers who are not experts in the subject follow your argument?
- 6) **The Fine Print:** are there any required pieces of the assignment that are missing, or format that is not meeting the assignment guidelines? Briefly note these for the author. Because this is a draft, it may be that the author simply hasn't polished the paper—and that's okay. But just in case the author has forgotten an aspect, this is a chance to point it out before the revision.

A **helpful** Reader's Letter will be specific in its discussion (again, refer to particular paragraphs, claims, sentences; make concrete suggestions) and constructive in its tone. An **unhelpful** Reader's Letter will be either harsh in its tone ("I totally disagree with your argument; it's unclear and I don't think you know what you're talking about") or really short and superficial ("This is a great draft and with a little bit of polishing you'll have a great paper!"). **You will get more out of the workshop as a respondent**—and so will the authors who get your letters —if you put effort into this exercise.

For sample Reader's Letters, please see the coursepack from Unit 1 "1-15 Workshops Paper 1".