

WOC190 – CREATIVE NONFICTION: PEOPLE AND PLACES

Going Forward: Questions and Answers

Q: What are the major assignments and their due dates?

A: There are two more major assignments: **Essay on an Object** and **Character in Context**.

In addition, for your **final project**, I'll ask you to revise one of the essays you wrote (probably the one you're proudest of or most interested in) with the goal of turning it into a complete, polished piece of writing that you are proud of, one you or I could imagine being published in *Meridian: A Literary Atlas of DKU*. (*Meridian* is an annual anthology of creative writing by DKU students, highlighting work that gives vivid windows into the places students come from or that are significant to them.)

The due dates are:

- **Essay on an Object:** due before class on **Mon. Apr. 10**
- **Character in Context:** due before class on **Mon. Apr. 24**
- **Final project (revision):** due during exam week (**date TBD**)

Q: What do the grades you give on writing assignments mean?

A: Here's how I understand the meaning of the grades I give:

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| <p>✓+ This piece, considered as a whole, “comes alive.” It grabs me and keeps me reading. If this were on the first page of a book, I'd want to keep reading, maybe buy the book. The piece may not be complete, but it has energy to it; it lives and breathes.</p> <p>✓ A genuine attempt, but a piece that doesn't, on the whole, “come alive.” There may be some moments that really “work,” but not enough to make me want to hear more of this voice.</p> <p>✓- In some important respect the author missed the point of the assignment, or didn't seem to take the assignment seriously. If you get a ✓-, I'll ask you to redo the assignment.</p> | <p>P Of publishable quality. Not only does it grab me and keep me reading, it keeps me interested all the way to the end, and when I reach the end, I feel satisfied. It has energy; it lives and breathes—and this energy is employed to the fullest effect.</p> |
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(Important: Sometimes you may also see the mark ✓(+) or ✓(-) This means I'm torn between giving a ✓ and a ✓+, or between a ✓ and a ✓-. For the purposes of calculating the final grade, I usually consider it a ✓.)

A note on language: Except in rare circumstances, the accuracy of your English is **not** a factor in my grading. The qualities we're striving for transcend language. Usually I can tell if they're there, even if the English is pretty rough.

Q: Why do you handwrite your comments rather than type them? I can't read your handwriting!

A: I handwrite comments because 1) it is quicker for me; 2) it helps me focus on what issues are most important; and 3) if I use a computer when my 2-year-old son is nearby he will grab it and start playing with it.

If you have trouble reading my handwriting, **please, please** let me know! Take photographs of the things you don't understand, send them to me on WeChat, and I will explain. I would rather you bother me constantly for explanations than not understand what I write and never ask.

Q: How will my final grade be calculated?

A: I have a simple scheme for determining the final grades for this class. A student who earns an **A** in this class is one who demonstrates three qualities: **commitment, skill, and improvement**. Here is what I understand those qualities to mean:

COMMITMENT: A student who demonstrates commitment is one who a) shows up to class (on time) unless excused, b) does all their homework, c) meets deadlines, d) follows directions, and e) takes assignments seriously. Failing to do these things once or twice isn't an issue—it's when it becomes a pattern that I may lower a student's grade for "commitment." (*Note, however, that handing in one major assignment **seriously** late will very likely lower the commitment grade.*)

SKILL: A student who demonstrates skill is one who earns at least one $\checkmark+$ or **P** grade on one of their essays (place, object, character, or final revision).

IMPROVEMENT: A student who demonstrates improvement is one who has, over the course of the session, revised one \checkmark essay to a $\checkmark+$ or one $\checkmark+$ essay to a **P**.

In general, at the end of the session I'll compute the final grade using this formula:

A = the student has strongly demonstrated all three: commitment, skill, and improvement.

A- or **B+** = the student has demonstrated two of these three qualities.

B = the student has demonstrated one of these qualities.

B- and lower: the student has not demonstrated any of these qualities, and may have a record of unexcused absences, tardies, late assignments, failure to follow directions, etc.

Note: Failing to hand in a major assignment at all (one of the three essays) will drop your grade by one grade level, i.e. A to B, B to C, C to D, etc.

Q: Can I revise an essay and turn it in to you *before* the deadline of the final project?

A: Yes, absolutely! I encourage you to do so. You can revise an essay at any time and as many times as you wish. It all depends on how motivated you are to improve it.

My one rule is that if you'd like my feedback on an essay you've revised, please **make an appointment with me** to talk one-on-one on Zoom. I'll either have you read it out loud to me or go through it paragraph by paragraph with you so you can see how I experience the piece.

Q: Can you give me the rest of the assignment guidelines now?

A: Sure. Here they are:

Essay 2: Essay on an Object

Write a short essay about an object—as small as a thimble or as large as a refrigerator—that you associate with your home culture: the place you grew up, or the place you consider yourself to be “from,” however you choose to define it. Needless to say, your essay should include a physical description of the object. You may appear as a character in the story, or you may not; it is up to you. See the sample pieces for inspiration.

Essay 3: Character in Context

Write an essay centering on a single character and their relationship with a place—where they grew up, where they live, where they work, or any other place that is significant to them. The goal is to evoke this character in their **context**, and thereby capture this an interesting aspect of this person's relationship with their environment. See the sample pieces for inspiration.

There are two ways to do this assignment: as a reported piece (journalism), or as a memoir.

Option A: As a reported piece:

If you choose to write this essay as a reported piece, you will write what is called a “character profile.” Your central character should ideally be someone who lives or works nearby, whom you can interview. (You might consider someone related to the place you wrote about for Essay 1; or you can choose someone entirely different.)

If you're interesting in taking this approach, you might want to start soon. It might take a few visits to this person to get all the information you need to write the story.

Option B: As a memoir:

If you choose to write this as a memoir, your central character could be a person from your past—a friend, relative, or other acquaintance—whose story who find compelling. If possible, you may wish to interview that person, or other people who know or knew them, to refresh your memory about the details of that person and the place against which you intend to depict them.