

## **H. Compelling communication**

- Some notes about commenting on the outlines and drafts of others.
- One example of a peer commentary

## **Practicum, CCT698**

## **Commenting on outlines and drafts**

There is a spectrum of approaches to giving one's outlines/drafts to others and commenting on them. At the "red ink" or "copy-editing" end, lots of specific suggestions for clarification and change are made in the margins. Only a minority of students, in my experience, are led beyond touching up by such suggestions, into re-thinking and revising their ideas and writing. At the other end, comments are shaped first to reassure the writer that they have been listened to and their voice, however uncertain, has been heard. Suggestions from the reader are few and general. It is in this spirit of hearing the writer's voice that Elbow emphasizes the importance of building a sharing relationship for one's work (see chapter 3 and the handout from early in the semester). We haven't been able to spend as much time as I'd hoped on sharing, so I will leave it to your own preference and judgement what approach or balance of approaches you ask for as a writer or use as a commentator.

Towards the end of hearing the writer's voice, you might give general appreciation before mentioning some areas you would like to see addressed/developed.

Towards the specific suggestions end, you might choose a subset of items below and make comments that don't cover everything about the writing, but, when combined with the comments of others, will get close.

A compromise would be to give a general appreciation combined with suggestions on some specific items.

Clear topic?

Strong thesis?

Clear audience?

Overall structure clear and well presented (not obscured by detail)?

Topics of the sections well defined?

Connections between sections evident?

Clear steps taken to develop topic?

Powerful order of steps.

Sections connect to the thesis?

Title and opening capture interest & focus attention?

Appropriate amount and placement of background detail indicated in the outline?

Clear conclusion?

Incorporation of research effort.

Arguments & counter-arguments dealt with?

Gaps & weak points.

Overdone subsections.

Appropriate level of detail for an outline?

Evidence of outline having been thought out/ worked over/ edited down.

Did listener/reader get lost?

Overall comments (going to be wordy since I won't be there early to talk it over with you tomorrow!):

This is a great draft...I love the stories about your journey along the path of exploration. I really liked that I could get a sense of your fear, your concerns and your worries and also your triumphs as you pushed your way through all that to take the photographs after all. As a reader, I felt like I was exploring with you and that's a good thing. I loved hearing about the lobstermen, about your partner helping you with the revelation you are a student, not a professional, etc.

I tried to take myself out of what I knew about you and the paper and read it as though I was an average person trying to understand it. A couple main comments:

The topic was clear but I felt that your thesis statement was fairly unclear (you say it but not in a really clear manner) until you get pretty deep into the paper. For example, halfway through you mention that you had a discovery—that it wasn't just a photo essay you were doing, but a sense of place you were trying to find. I didn't have any clear indication up front that the project was a photo essay of Scituate...I thought all along that you were trying to find a sense of place. Some clarity there would help a bit.

You have a LOT of fragments in the paper. A few here and there are fine to punctuate what you are saying and to make a point, but you use them really freely...should definitely try to make complete sentences out of the majority of them.

You also switch back and forth between first person and second person a lot, which is confusing. One moment you are saying "I" and the next you are saying "you." It makes for a really awkward read. I would think about going back and reworking each of those sections.

I think it would be helpful if you had sectioned it a bit more clearly. The tone is so conversational that while there is chronological flow, I think some of your main points that you want to make clear get mashed in amongst it all. I think finding a way to make certain things very clear would help—sectioning them a bit more clearly. For example, the process-flow is core to your paper but it often gets lost and I am not always sure where you are along that process flow. You mention it here and there but a section very clearly explaining it up front (after you reveal your topic and thesis statement) and then breaking it down more explicitly into your steps amongst that process would help. I'm not recommending a huge overhaul, so don't think that, but perhaps a re-structuring of some of your points and streamlining a bit for clarity to highlight those steps would be helpful.

You talk a bit about your research but mentioning some of the key texts would be good, I think. I found myself wondering what you were reading and why you thought they were helpful. You sort of mentioned one book about the view-finder but you didn't source it. Enquiring minds want to know!

The pictures and the learning behind the pictures are excellent. That's really a lot of the meat of your paper in my opinion.

Also, I did make some nit-picky grammatical changes, which hopefully should be clear.

Also, where are you going with the project? Are you done? What, specifically are your next steps? Future plans? Need to learn? Etc. I think you should close your paper with a few paragraphs talking

about these things. You talk briefly about it but it sounds more dreamy than action-oriented, if you know what I mean. Those are things you WANT to do but what are you really GOING to do? ☺

I hope all this makes sense...there is so much great stuff in this paper and my comments are meant to help you draw those strengths out more clearly. I hope that it is helpful.

More is in the body of the paper in the comments.

Crystal

*[What followed then was copy editing using the track changes tool of Word]*