As part of the application process, we want you to critique a student essay. Please read the General Guidelines for Critiquing Essays, below. Then review at least one sample critique found at http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts_humanities/sample_essay_critique_writing.html http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts_humanities/essay_critique_writing.html

Then, follow the Directions. Attach the resulting critique to your online application with a cover letter and resume.

This task has two purposes:

• First, it allows us to further examine your qualifications as an instructor. Our standards are those of the General Guidelines.

• Second, it allows you to see whether working in distance education writing courses is appropriate for you. If you do not agree with the General Guidelines, this work is not for you. If you find that critiquing one essay takes what you consider too much time, this work is not for you. Multiply the time it takes to fully critique this essay by the number of students you would like to have. Assess whether you have time for this work.

If you do not follow the instructions for critiquing the student essay, your application will not be considered.

General Guidelines for Critiquing Student Essays

Responding to Writing

There are many techniques of responding to student writing, and we welcome any approach that works effectively for the student.

• Most of our instructors write short comments in the paper as they read and compose a summarizing page-length note.

• Some write a number in the body of the essay and make comments about each number.

• Others have students write questions and reply to those questions in critiques.
Responses should reflect very high standards. Critiques are encouraging. As in any coaching situation, instructors respect the student's efforts, recognize successes, and-most important-take students seriously as both writers and thinkers.

It is especially important that the instructor present areas for further work-either suggestions for revision or suggestions for new themes and styles students might want to explore. Each piece of writing should be explored as part of the ongoing process of development.

**Grammar and the "Rules" of Standard English**

Instructors in the Writing Series are expected to attend to global issues of form and content and not limit comments to sentence level issues of grammar and style. On the other hand, instructors in Language Rules should focus more specifically on how the student's grammatical usage affects writing style and should point out recurring error patterns.

CTY's writing program does not take a rigidly prescriptive approach to matters of style, grammar, punctuation and usage. Instructors help students understand that Standard Written English is a matter of convention, not of what Joseph Williams condemns as "Transcendental Correctness." *(Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace, 3rd ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1989) 191.* Instructors help students put the "rules" of English in perspective by asking them to look carefully at what professional writers actually do with language. Students should learn how to use the conventions of English as a resource for expressing themselves, whether it is by working within or against those conventions. For instance,

- Showing students examples of the proper use of colons and semi colons helps them produce more subtle shadings of emphasis and meaning in their own writing.

- Showing them effective uses of sentence fragments (often considered one of the worst possible errors) demonstrates the expressive possibilities that open up when conventions are flouted.

By examining professional works closely, students should come to see language as a flexible medium, not an unyielding compendium of rules.

**How Much Comment is Enough?**

These writing courses do not exist to discourage students and exhaust instructors. Too much commentary achieves both results. On the other hand, comments such as "Good Work with Adjectives!" do not tell students where, how, and why they have succeeded nor do they tell students how to improve. Skimpy comments may tell students what to improve:

"Think hard about writing a better introductory paragraph."

But, this comment is useless without guidance about how to write a better intro paragraph.
To avoid demoralizing students, each essay must bear evidence that you have read and thought about it. Marginal comments must go beyond simple corrections of mechanics. You may critique transitions, diction, syntax, sensory and factual detail—whatever is relevant. Nevertheless, remember that a writer can only work on improving a few elements at a time.

- Choose what you wish to comment on and be prepared to explain how and why it will improve the essay.
- As a rule of thumb, it is wise to focus on no more than three areas for improvement in each piece of writing.
- Your critique should be roughly 400 words (one full page).
- Save comments about punctuation for the margin notes, and don't mark every instance. After the first 3 repeated errors, explain that you won't continue to correct this mistake, but tell the student to be aware of it when revising.

Your critique must refer explicitly to the student's essay. Quote the essay, or cite page number and line. For example, "The 2nd graph seems to be a continuation of your intro and might be more effective as part of the intro graph." Or, "In the third line from the bottom of page 2, your tone shifts from familiar to formal."

Discuss tactical issues that you have highlighted in the student's margins. Discuss strategic issues such as essay structure, content, point of view, levels of formality. Explain in depth how to remedy faults and how to maintain successes. Don't neglect content, but remain objective. Students come from a variety of backgrounds, so remember to be sensitive to cultural and social differences.

**Sample Critique for Crafting the Essay**

Review at least one sample critique found at [http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts_humanities/sample_essay_critique_writing.html](http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts_humanities/sample_essay_critique_writing.html) [http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts_humanities/essay_critique_writing.html](http://cty.jhu.edu/ctyonline/courses/arts_humanities/essay_critique_writing.html)
Required Critique (writing sample) for Application

Directions: Please review the following Assignment and the student’s response. Then compose a 400+ word critique to be posted for the student and parent. At the top of your critique, write the elapsed time between when you began reading the student essay and when you completed writing the critique. Attach the critique to your online application with a cover letter and resume.

Assignment

1. Write in any style or prose form: "How It Feels To Be Verbally Gifted."

I know this is a difficult subject. One of the most difficult things to write about is yourself. You probably have a variety of feelings about being verbally talented. Sometimes it makes you feel great (100% on spelling quizzes or grammar tests or an A on your latest in-school essay) and sometimes it makes you feel lousy (like when you get extra work just because you do the usual workload better and faster than everyone else). The problem with a subject like this is that you have to:
   1. recognize those feelings,
   2. give them names, and
   3. be sure you've recognized and named them correctly. Then you have to
   4. deal with those feelings (how do you feel about having those feelings?). Finally, you have to
   5. deal with how other people feel about how you feel about being talented. For instance, is it immodest to talk about your ability to excel?

2. The process of writing this essay

I suggest you think about this subject for a day or two and make some notes. JUST notes. A bit later, try writing a few paragraphs. Then reread what you've written. Is that what you want to talk about? If not, don't worry; you can throw out a few paragraphs. Next, ask yourself what more you might want to talk about. With so many topics in this subject, you'll have to narrow your focus. In a way, "How it feels, etc." really asks how it feels to be you, and since you are more than 1 month old, you could write a million-page autobiography. Which you could never finish 😄 So, you have to look for a particular aspect of being verbally gifted, maybe two. If you use more than one, make sure you see (and explain) how they're related to each other.

3. Uncovering your thesis

Now try writing a page or two. Don't worry about writing perfectly clean (error-free) prose yet; you're discovering what you have to say. Chances are, by this time, you have an incident or two to relate. (For example, the time your great-aunt Nelly thought "verbally talented" meant you were vocally adept.) Try adding whatever conversation you remember from those incidents:

"Gracious," said Great-Aunt Nelly, "we'll finally have a musician in our family!"
I said, "No, Ma'am. 'Verbally Gifted' means..."
Add a ½ sentence or so of important detail.

How did the place smell? (Great Aunt Nelly was fond of garlic.)
What were your friends doing? (Shelley was outside shooting arrows into the sky.)
What physical action happened? (After I defined Verbally Gifted, the dear old lady fainted.)

Stuff like this makes a scene come alive. Once you're this far, add a sentence or two of obvious interpretation or commentary: your thoughts about what these scenes mean. Avoid phrases such as "in my opinion." We know it's your opinion because this is your essay.

Needless to say, by the time you reach this point, you've got yourself a thesis. A thesis is one, good, specific idea.

A subject might be "hot dogs."

A topic might be "hot dogs aren't good for you."

A thesis might be, "Hot dogs aren't good for you because they're packed with sodium nitrate."

4. Write a first draft

When you have a thesis, write a first draft. Set your thesis down early in the essay (perhaps in the first paragraph), and show us your incidents/scenes as evidence that your thesis holds water. Then revise at least once. “Revise” means do more than just fix spelling errors and mechanical mistakes; add and delete and rearrange and condense and combine sentences and paragraphs. See the sheets on cumulative sentences and methods of paragraphing that I sent you. Send me that revision.

You can also write about not being verbally talented. Some people argue that they aren't. If you choose this approach, you have to prove to me that you aren't. I've seen that done quite successfully.

5. Set aside time to write

DO NOT put this assignment off. Set yourself a schedule—a daily schedule to think for 20 minutes at first, longer later, when you need to write—and stick to it. If you wait till the last minute, this assignment will be a real mess.

This is the end of the student assignment and the beginning of the instructor assignment. Good luck!
Ruminations on Verbal Giftedness

The teacher recites each name precisely. There is a familiar sensation, as a cloak of fear twists itself around me. I tear myself from my vinyl seat and stumble down the narrow aisle to snatch my corrected test paper from the teacher's slender, unfeeling hands. My seemingly sunburned face returns to normal as I gaze at the 'A' in the margin of the paper. I am so relieved that it isn't a 'D' that I trip over the metal trash can on the way back to my seat. Twenty-nine pairs of laughing eyes and identical smirks follow me as I lower my body into the chair with a forced smile.

I have to laugh at myself. I complain about falling behind everyone else into the open arms of stupidity. Now let me remonstrate about the caliber of mentality in the cerebral cortex of an ungifted adolescent. I am convinced some of my friends have the vocabulary of a flea. When the word "diabolical" is returned with a dumbfounded "huh?" it prevents use of my best intellectual jargon. Usually, it shoves me into a closet of silence -- I'd rather say nothing than be forever spurting explanations.

A teacher may fear the gifted and then become their enemy. Dictionaries, outlines and libraries become abhorred weapons. She is too blind to see their splendor; simple enough only to see their function. Pointless homework assignments antagonize creative thoughts. It is not as though learning these subjects for the first time is unnecessary; it is dull
repetition of mastered skills that becomes infuriating. The teacher must stimulate the imaginations of the gifted or expect to find herself staring into a sea of glazed eyes.

Although I am classified as verbally gifted, there are days when my pen isn't connected to my brain. I can do nothing but hope words will flow melodically later. Contrary to popular belief, I am not perfect and am correct only 99% of the time. Verbally gifted or not, I'm only human.

Luckily, gifted programs are becoming widespread and I am given the opportunity to fraternize with others like myself. There is a fireside warmth between the gifted. We share feelings of anger, jealousy, fear and love. But, most of all, we share the ultimate understanding of total communication.

Reminder: Attach the resulting critique to your online application with a cover letter and resume.