Required Writing Sample for Prospective Linguistics Instructors

As part of the application process, we want you to provide a critique of a Final Writing Assignment (FWA) for a Lesson. Please read Expectations for Critiques and the Sample Critique below, then follow the Directions. Attach the resulting critique to your online application with a cover letter and resume.

EXPECTATIONS FOR CRITIQUES

Students always point to the instructor's response to their assignments as a distinguishing feature of CTY Online. You can find general expectations about critiques in your Instructor Handbook. In general, they should take the form of a 300+ word letter to the student.

While critiques should be substantial and detailed, avoid overwhelming the student. Choose two or three areas that the student could most benefit from working on and explain them clearly, rather than giving a long list of suggestions.

Here are our expectations for critiques:

- Each critique of an assignment bears evidence that you have read and thought about it. Comments go beyond simple corrections of mechanics. You may critique transitions, diction, syntax, sensory and factual detail--whatever is relevant.
- Your critique must refer explicitly to the student's work.
- 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.

Sample Critique Language Rules: From STRUCTURE TO STYLE

Lesson 1, FWA, Family Tree by Student Name
Comments by Instructor Name

For this first final writing assignment for the course, you were asked to write about your family heritage and discuss whether knowing about your family heritage is important to you. Student, you write in a confident and direct voice, with a narrative focused on the last one hundred years of your family history, although this history is one that actually stretches back to the 17th century. The topic of this essay was just ‘made to order’ for you! Although you choose to write just a brief profile description of yourself, I see your approach as quite traditional, linking your personal identity closely with both your nuclear and extended families. Thus, this essay not only lets us get to know you a bit, but also introduces other members of your multi-generational family. In this way, we learn more about you through your relationship to your grandparents, parents, a great, great uncle, and your sister. One of the strong points of this essay is your ability to be selective about dates, facts, and people, and to choose relevant and unique anecdotes to narrate. You have an excellent ability to weave all these features together to create a well-developed, well-organized, and very interesting essay.
Other strong points of your approach to writing are that you skillfully use a variety of sentence patterns and sentence lengths, handle subject-verb agreement well, make very good use of a variety of adverbials (apx. 40% of the total sentences in this essay), and create clear but complex sentences that include subordinate and independent clauses. All of this adds interesting detail, a lively flow of thought and information, and keeps the reader involved in your tale. I suggest that you take this opportunity to further strengthen your writing skills through independent study of two topics in Kolln that we will not cover in our class. These are Coordination (pp. 37-62) and Punctuation (see Kolln, inside front cover, Reference Guide, all topics and pages listed under Punctuation.) [Editor’s note: Coordination has since been added to this course.]

You’ve presented us with a lively family portrait, rooted in Central and South American and Sephardic history and values. Keep up this very good effort in all your writing assignments! In your essay below, my comments are highlighted in yellow and blue.
My Family Tree
By Student Garay

As I sit down and think about my family tree, I think about how large it truly is. Extending from ocean to ocean, its branches reach so many different places, places with incredibly different yet similar cultures. Each leaf represents a different person who either suffered or triumphed in their lifetimes. Each branch represents a different family, each with their own unique stories to tell. Although my dad may be from Honduras, my mom from New York, my grandma from Guatemala, my grandpa from Colombia, and my younger sister and I from Miami Beach, Florida, our families originated in other places.

On my dad’s side of my family, my grandma comes from two distinct roots. Her mother is of Sephardic descent. And in the early 1600’s during the fall of the great temple in Israel, her ancestors fled to Spain. [Student, at the end of your essay, I list some links to websites that discuss the history of the Second Temple in Israel, the Spanish Inquisition, and Jews forced to convert to Catholicism. Although your sentence is grammatically correct, I encourage you to review the dates and historical events to better understand the chronology of the events your mention here, which are inaccurate.] Once in Spain, they were forced to change their last name as a punishment, since they were Jewish. When they began to be persecuted in Spain, two brothers left for Mexico to seek refuge. At the time [comma] one of them stayed in Mexico and the other brother made Honduras his home. I am very proud to be able to trace this [side of my] family back 10 generations.

My dad’s paternal grandfather was in the Honduran Air Force and made history by being the first Honduran pilot to attempt a flight from New York to Tegucigalpa, Honduras [it would be interesting to have a date here for this flight]. Sadly, he did not make it all the way to Tegucigalpa; he was picked up by a freighter a few miles north of the coast of Honduras after his plane had technical difficulties and landed at sea. His
pilot’s license was actually signed by the Wright brothers, and is currently on display at the Air Force museum in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He was also an inventor, one of the interests he and I share, as I really enjoy coming up with new innovative ideas that make our everyday lives easier.

This brings us to my mom’s side of my family. My grandpa’s great, great grandfather traveled to Colombia from France in search of gold. He fell in love and started a family in Colombia. For many years no one knew if his original dream to find gold actually came true. But isn’t it ironic that once the house where he lived in was sold, the new owner found gold inside the ceiling between the first and second floors. My grandpa often shares stories of his childhood and of his family with me. One of the stories I distinctly remember is when my great, great uncle was actually eaten by cannibal Indians during one of his travels to Central America.

And now we travel to the city of Guatemala, my grandma’s hometown. Her family was well known in the community as charitable, caring, and kind-hearted. In a powerful earthquake, my great grandmother’s house was the only one left standing. She then gave shelter and food to all the people in the community. My grandma tells me stories from her childhood, and one that always sticks in my mind is the one where she starred in the first ever TV show aired in Guatemala.

What interests me the most is how so many traits are passed from generation to generation. I have physical traits from every branch of my family. For example the shape of my eyes and face resemble my dad’s side of my family, and the shape of my lower face resembles that of my mother’s side. Personality traits are also passed from generation to generation. For example I’ve been told that my kind-heartedness comes from my grandma’s family. Another example of how traits are passed on is that my grandma’s family used to sing and dance; my sister loves to sing and dance.
As you can see, my family comes [Congratulations, Student! You successfully handled the subject-agreement of the collective noun ‘family’ with the plural form of the verb. This is correct; although the noun has a singular form (i.e., no ‘s’ as a pluralizing suffix) it has two possible senses: singular and plural. If one thinks of ‘family’ as a unit with all members doing the same thing at the same time, then it has a singular sense and the verb should be in the singular form. However, if one thinks of ‘family’ as a group of people who separately do things, then the verb should be in the plural form. You chose the latter sense.] from many places and their history is varied and in many cases exciting. It makes me proud and grateful to be a part of such wonderful people that in one way or another have made a difference in the world. I too hope that one day I can make a large impact on the world and our lives. [vague reference; does ‘our lives’ refer to people in your family or to all people in the world, or both? Student, I suggest you rethink and revise this last sentence of your conclusion so that you express your ideas more precisely and with greater rhetorical effect on readers. For example, can you describe, briefly but more specifically, what type of impact you’d like to have on the world? Again, a bit more specifically, how do you hope/imagine you can affect other people’s lives? The conclusion is a very important part of every essay since it’s a writer’s last opportunity to persuade his/her readers about the importance of the topic/themes of a piece of writing.]

The Second Temple

The Spanish Inquisition

Anusim (Hebrew, “the oppressed ones”; Jews forced to convert to Catholicism who lived/live secretly as Jews in Spain, Portugal, S. America, etc.); diversity of the Jewish community
http://www.kulanu.org/anousim/index.php
Analysis

Now that I analyze my essay I notice that “Although my dad may be from Honduras, my mom from New York, my grandma from Guatemala, my grandpa from Colombia, and my younger sister and I from Miami Beach, Florida, our families originated in other places.” has too many noun phrases, and could have been written differently, to make the sentence sound clearer and easier to read. I could have maybe put “Although my parents and grandparents come from different corners of Latin America, our families originated in other places.” [Student, your revision here of a long sentence with many noun phrases makes effective use of an adverbial phrase as a sentence opener. This adverbial concisely summarizes some of the key members of your family, while eliminating the information overload of many place names. NOTE: in this first section of the analysis, the instructions ask you to comment on subject-verb agreement errors in your FWA1. You have no comments about this. Did you find any in your essay?]

I also noticed that “For many years no one knew if his original dream to find gold actually came true.” And “But isn’t it ironic that once the house where he lived in was sold, the new owner found gold inside the ceiling between the first and second floors.” Both begin with adverbial clauses instead of the subject. I chose the construction of the first one because it sounded short, clear, and descriptive; however, I do think I could have made a few changes to its structure. Now that I look at the second sentence I see that it can be quite confusing, and noticed it doesn’t start with the subject. [Perhaps this confusion is because there’s either no or weak cohesion between sentences, both beginning with adverbials. The reader can’t keep track of the subject i.e., the actor or agent in the sentences. We will study cohesion in Lesson 3.] I think that “it
is ironic that once his house was sold, the new owner found gold inside the ceiling between the first and second floors.” could have been a shorter and more understandable alternative. [Student, your revisions are effective because you applied some of strategies for revision emphasized in Lesson 1, Ex. 4: creating clarity and focus in sentences by bringing the noun headword into closer relation to the verbal predicate.]

I also think I shouldn’t have started “And in the early 1600’s during the fall of the great temple in Israel, her ancestors fled to Spain.” With “And”, and simply with “In the early 1600’s…”

I think I could have created “her mother’s ancestors that [who] date back all the way to the 1600’s, are of Sephardic descent.” This change could have made the sentence longer and place the subject and predicate further apart, possibly making it more confusing. [Another good example, Student, of how you create sharp and precise meaning in a sentence keeping the subject and predicate in close relationship with each other.]

**Required Critique (writing sample) for Application**

**Directions:** Please review the following Final Writing Assignment and the student’s response. Then compose a 300+ word critique to be posted for the student and parent. Attach the resulting critique to your online application with a cover letter and resume.
Final Writing Assignment: Lesson 3: Cohesion

Note to Applicants: Here’s a quick summary of the lesson.

Where are we going?

In this lesson, we are going to discuss ways to make your writing more cohesive. In doing so, we will first learn about something called the "known-new contract" and then discuss issues of pronoun case and reference.

This assignment has two parts: 1) a first draft of this essay and 2) your analysis.

After thinking about these questions, write a short essay (1-2 pages) that takes a position on this issue. Make sure that your essay has a clear thesis statement.

Part 1: Essay (Please choose one of the following options):

Option 1:
Many schools group students by intellectual ability into such categories as "honors," "college bound," "vocational," "remedial," or "terminal." Do you go to a school that tracks its students? How does the system work? Whether or not you go to a school that does this, consider the advantages and disadvantages of intellectual tracking systems? Overall, are they harmful or beneficial?

Option 2:
Choose one aspect of your educational experience thus far and discuss how it benefits or has benefited you intellectually. In this case, "aspect" can include things like this CTY course, nontraditional time schedules, the materials or people you work with, or any other part of your educational experience. The choice is yours.

"Benefits" can be short or long term. Thus, you might explain how this aspect might benefit you intellectually by challenging you in some way or by preparing you for the world beyond school (university, career, homeschooling your own children in the future, etc). Your essay should be short (1-2 pages) and should include a thesis statement.

A word about thesis statements:

The word "thesis" comes from the Greek and means putting or positioning. Your thesis statement is a sentence that expresses your main opinion on the issue you are considering. In order to provide a clear direction for your essay, present your thesis early. Then explain your opinion and provide supporting examples.

Part 2: Analysis

Now that you have written one draft of the essay, go through every sentence. Write a one-page letter to your instructor discussing your essay in detail.

- How does each cohere with earlier sentences? If a sentence doesn't have at least a small reference to an earlier sentence, does this sentence serve a rhetorical purpose (similar to Warner), or should it be revised to enhance unity, perhaps by adding known information?
- What about paragraphs? Do your paragraphs refer to each other?
Diversity within a population is inevitable. There will be those who are stronger in a physical condition while others have more intellectual abilities. Perhaps some people have both traits. However, people are judged by these traits. For example, students are separated into different classes by their intellect. “Honors”, “remedial”, and “regular” classes exist at my public school. Those who can learn concepts at their own speed are offered various paced classes. Each student is placed in the appropriate class by using grades of the previous school year. Being part of this process for several years, I believe it is beneficial to have this system because it teaches students to overcome obstacles and provides an indication for colleges.

Each individual’s learning ability is attended to by classes offered at different levels. Though there is a misconception that different classes label students’ skills; this is indeed a false assumption. For example, Honors classes simply excel at a faster pace of the same material offered in the other classes. If there was one level of placement, then the enthusiasm would quickly diminish. This creates a negative influence since they do not feel challenged. If this kind of mindset continues, future generations will not progress as they would not have learned to overcome challenges.

In addition, indicators for colleges, such as Johns Hopkins University, to select their candidates are determined by the varied placement of classes based on performance. A system that can target those whom fit into their teaching philosophy is needed by colleges. Different levels of classes would help colleges to make prudent admissions decisions.

It is an advantage to modern education to have a system of separation of education levels. From promoting students to overcome challenges to determining individuals’ futures, it is obvious different leveled classes are of great use. Though everyone may not be placed in the class they wish, their given course it may perhaps be better for them to follow through. The pace of that course may be more challenging than they assumed.

Analysis

Each sentence leads from the sentence before it. This creates a flow as you can lead the reader from one point to another without any sudden confusion.

The paragraph transitions are slightly harder than making sentences flow since they are about different topics, but usually it is up to the first and last sentence to perform this transition. Personally, I think the paragraphs do lead the reader from one subject to another, though their topics are slightly different.