

# **The Essay**

## **High School Creative Writing Course**

**I have designed this course to introduce the student to the world of the essay. Although it may seem more glamorous to write poetry, short stories, plays, or novels, most people, if they are called upon to write anything, are called upon to write an essay.**

**For my purposes, I am going to give a wide range to the type of writing I consider an essay, even to the extent of including such diverse writing as sermons and editorials.**

**Since each essay will be dichotomous in nature, it is obvious we must approach each topic from a singular point of view. If we are writing a eulogy, we will approach the subject with a different perspective than if we are writing a satire on texting, twittering, or cell phones.**

**Following are a number of essays which we will imitate, not as we imitate the core style, but as we imitate a technique of writing, a style of writing.**

## 1. Satire

Satire is the use of ridicule, wit, irony, or sarcasm to expose the follies, vices, etc. of others, especially those unconscious of such failings. *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire. A satire may be vindictive, or it may be gentle. We may employ it to attack the vices of humankind or to correct its foibles; to belittle other political parties or politicians in general; or in a myriad of other situations.

Satire implies that we have greater knowledge than the people whom we satirize, that we "know better" than they do. It puts us, therefore, in a very difficult position because it exposes us to attack for our air of superiority. People may call us supercilious, haughty, and arrogant, and even though we may be right in what we say, our opponents may call our wisdom into question because of our assuming a posture of moral righteousness or condescension.

In order to avoid such vulnerability, we are well advised to temper our satire with humor, to make it more gentle, and thus, more palatable for our audience. A humorist can get away with acidic comments because he serves them up with a sprinkling of humor.

## **Some People are Bad People.**

**Joggers are bad people. Supercilious, smug, self-satisfied – these are but a few of the adjectives I associate with them. Perhaps it is their air of self-righteous virtue I find offensive, the disdain of the reformed smoker for one who has not yet found the courage to quit.**

**The main reason I find joggers offensive, however, is that the activity exists for its own sake. I am a pragmatist, a descendant of Benjamin Franklin, and I believe that to posit a cause that will not have a beneficent effect is the apotheosis of selfishness. But joggers benefit no one except themselves. It is their lungs, their arteries, their physical well being that motivate them, and their concern for anyone else is at best miniscule.**

**If I were to classify a person who jogs, I would number him or her among those humans who, feeling themselves among the favorites of the gods, condemn those of us who have at best mortal blood flowing through our clogged arteries.**

**For their hubris, may each and every one of them, one classic fall day, receive a coronary surprise!**

## 2. Commencement Address

There are two or three addresses we may hear at commencement exercises. We may listen to a student speaker (or speakers), and we may listen to an adult speaker.

Let us suppose that I have been asked to speak to your graduating class. Before I write anything, I must first consider the situation, the atmosphere in which I will find myself at the podium.

You students are happy because you are leaving, and yet there may be a certain anxiety because unlike high school, where there were but some courses which depended on your choice, now there are choices which will determine the course of your life.

From this moment on, life becomes serious. You may not see many of your friends for long periods of time. You will move into new situations and have to meet new people. You will be in serious competition for graduate schools and jobs. I will have to address these things without sounding as if I am a preacher or a teacher. I will have to point out these new realities without making you afraid.

**As a speaker, I want you on my side because I want you to listen to what I have to say. Before I begin to advise you, therefore, I will praise you, stroke your ego, and make you realize you have something I don't have. I will invest you with a feeling of superiority over me, and then you will be more malleable, more pliable, more willing to ingest the words of wisdom I will offer you. Build up your audience; don't demean them. Never forget this point!**

## **Commencement Address**

**There are many of us here who would like to be you today, many of us who envy your youth and your vigor and your physical well-being. You have the vitality of the young lion and lioness, strong and swift and sure. You have the ability, both physical and mental, to set a goal and achieve it; to be able to run and swim and play and party all night long; to be able to study and memorize and cram; to be gifted with the power to endure.**

**Some of us are in the stage of the aches and pains of life. We don't have the physical stamina. We can't remember as well as we used to. We leave parties early. We can't climb mountains.**

**We need your strength, and you need our wisdom. Not the wisdom we were born with, but the wisdom pain has brought us. And to acquire that wisdom is to become an adult.**

**Our armor is tarnished from having made mistakes, possibly some of them with you. Yours is bright and unstained. Today you go forth to do battle, not willingly perhaps, but you are about to engage in conflict and your armor will be sullied. You are going to be called upon to stand the watch, to guard the towers, to pull up the drawbridge.**

**And that is a good thing. That is an adult thing. We can't stay children forever. Holden Caulfield tried it and wound up in a mental institution. No person who ever amounted to anything came away from the battle without wounds. No adult is without scars. As Emily Dickinson put it, human nature is "freckled." Your armor will be pierced.**

**And that is what you will find after you leave here today. You will be faced with more choices, more decisions. And you will be responsible for your choices, and you must bear the guilt and the failure when you make the wrong ones.**

**You can no longer blame things on your parents. Today is the day when you ought to**

**become an adult, when you should stand up and say, “From this day on, I’m responsible for what I do with my life, no one else. From this day on, it will be my armor that is sullied, no one else’s. It is my watch. These are my towers. This is my drawbridge.**

**Don’t let the world scare you. You have been given a fine education. You have been taught well. You are prepared. Engage in the conflict. Fight the good fight. At all times remember, the knight with wounds will be the subject of the poem.**

### **3. Humor**

**There are so many different ways to achieve humor that a single example will give but a limited insight. One may tell a tall tale; write about eccentric people; about customs that are indigenous to a particular ethnic group; about family traditions; about pets; about political gaffes. The topics that may provoke humor are endless.**

### **Joshua, Son of Shamu**

**In the Book of *Exodus*, Joshua is chosen by the Lord God of Israel to succeed Moses and lead**

the chosen people into the promised land. In my own circumscribed life, Joshua was my dog, the son of Shamu and Lady Sapphire. He was a Doberman.

Lady Sapphire had a difficult pregnancy, and Joshua was a breach-birth-baby. He was, therefore, deprived of oxygen for a period of time sufficient to do damage to his brain. In other words, he was stupid.

As a result of his mental mediocrity, Joshua was never what one might call house-broken. Some parents deal with children who have similar problems by putting them on the toilet many times each day until they make the connection between place, position, and function.

Religiously, therefore, I put Joshua out into his yard many times each day no matter what the weather. One sub-zero winter night, after he had been out for a minute or so, I heard his annoying whine grow more shrill. I dashed out into the yard to see what had happened to him.

I had enclosed his yard with a chain-link fence. As he had lifted his leg and urinated, the urine hit one of the links in the fence and froze on impact. Like a statue, his right leg lifted to perform his appointed task, he was fixed to the fence, attached by a frozen stream of urine. I ran into the house, grabbed my axe, ran outside

again, and chopped him loose. We were both relieved, in more ways than one.

#### 4. Drama Review

In New York City, some of the drama critics are so influential with their readers that they have to power to close a play if they give it a bad review. Walter Kerr (Deceased), Clive Barnes, and John Simon were or are prominent critics of the past twenty or more years. Many people refuse to see a play until they have read their reviews.

As a general rule, playwrights have no use for critics, especially when they pan their plays. One of the playwrights' contentions is that critics are not creative artists themselves, and, therefore, have no right to judge someone's work of art. The conflict between the two will never be resolved and will continue to be the theme of endless newspaper and journal articles.

A judicious critic will try to find something good in a new play. He realizes the tremendous effort the artist has expended in writing a drama, and he will be as objective and circumspect as he can in his review. He does not want to destroy creativity.

**Despite what playwrights may say about critics, there is such a thing as a creative critique. When we write a play or a short story or a poem or a novel, it is difficult, if not impossible, to be objective about our own work. We write and we fall in love with what we have written. Our work of art is like a child we have begotten. In our eyes, it is perfect.**

**Being a creative artist does not exempt us from writing things that are preachy, narrow-minded, prejudiced, poorly structured, stereotyped, etc. Furthermore, being an actor or actress does not prevent us from playing the part poorly, from misinterpreting what the author intended, from not having the range or the depth within ourselves to play the part, from mouthing our words, etc. In a play, everything is subject to criticism from the playwright to the director to the actors to the set design to the costumes to the lighting to voice projection.**

**So it is the task of the critic to be the conscience, as it were, of the playwright. To keep him honest. To keep him aware. And in a positive sense, to point out things that the playwright or the actors or the set designer or the director have done well that they may not have noticed themselves. Critiquing a play does not mean the critique has to be negative.**

## Beauty and the Beast in the *Phantom*

*The Phantom of the Opera* employs an old theme that never fails to please: the ugly man and the beautiful girl who sees behind and beyond his physical appearance. The variation on the theme in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical is that the innocent girl fails to "redeem" the ugly man because his soul is also ugly.

If you enjoy the pyrotechnics of stagecraft, you'll enjoy the play. *Phantom* dazzles the audience with its magic as the phantom hurls his bolts of fire about the stage.

In the scene where he takes Christine into his lair beneath the opera house, all the stagecraft you may wish for is put to use. They paddle across the stage in his boat as torches miraculously rise up to surround them, and a mist-filled stage gives the atmosphere of a romantic underground cavern. This is state of the art technology.

If you are looking for depth of ideas, then *Phantom* is not the play for you. It is a romantic tale of love, and you must suspend any insistence on reality to enjoy the play. On this level, the play is delightful.

As the phantom, Michael Crawford gives a stalwart performance. He has the dash and flair of the old swashbuckling hero, and he convinces us of the pain and suffering which his disfigurement causes him. Emotionally, he pulls us in two directions: one of sympathy for his plight, the other of horror and disgust at his cruelty. His voice is adequate, not marvelous, but he does full justice to his songs, especially the *Music of the Night*.

Sarah Brightman, the wife of Andrew Lloyd Webber, does a creditable job as Christine, but you leave the play thinking the part might have been better cast. One of the main ideas in the plot is that the phantom teaches Christine how to sing, and because of this, she sings as no other soprano has ever sung. Ms. Brightman was a former lead singer with a rock band before she married Mr. Webber, and although she has a pleasant voice, she does not qualify as a great operatic soprano.

A critic may carp about this or that in the production, but I don't think there is anyone who won't enjoy the play. I recommend you see it despite the long wait and the high price for tickets. You may even feel the duet of Christine and Raoul is one of the finest you have heard in years.

## **5. The Most Unforgettable Person**

**There are few of us, if any, who go through life without meeting someone who makes a profound impression on us. It may be a parent. It may be a teacher. It may be a friend. It may be someone who doesn't hear the bars of music that most of us sing, but who hears notes that are beyond the range of our ears.**

**We may be inspired to pursue a religious vocation because of some priest or nun we know. We may choose a career in medicine because some doctor's manner impressed us so much when we were sick. We may find courage because a friend of ours has suffered without ever complaining. We may study physics or history or languages in college because a teacher has made us fall in love with the subject she teaches.**

**Whatever the scenario may be, there are people in our lives who make or have made a great impression on us. They may even be our heroes or heroines, and whenever things get dark for us, we may think of them and their attitude and the things they have said to us which help us carry on.**

## Farewell, My Socrates.

After having taught forty-four years, Mr. Francis P. Long has retired from Scranton Preparatory School. For the past thirty-four years, he was one of my heroes. With admiration and affection, I write this tribute, for I sat at his feet as a young teacher, and I came away enriched.

Whenever someone raised a question to which no one had the answer, my conditioned response was, "Ask Frank." In his diffident manner, as if he were apologizing for his knowledge, he would explain the problem with lucidity. To my amazement, his mind had trapped all the knowledge to which it had been exposed, even as far back as his college courses in philosophy.

Whenever possible, I would try to get to Prep in time to have lunch with Mr. Long. Although our philosophical, theological, and literary tastes were often polarized, we relished the intellectual exchanges, and I marveled at his rapier mind. At times I was able to hold my own with him, and on a good day, parry all his arguments, but when the discussions ranged to philology, he left me gasping.

**When my son, Jay, came to Prep in the fall of 1975, I insisted he take Mr. Long's class in Greek. I would not allow him to matriculate at Prep without having been taught by the Master. And Jay became intellectually entranced by Mr. Long, one student in a long line of students who knew they were experiencing teaching at its apotheosis.**

**Without exception he was the greatest teacher I have ever known. In my mind, of all my colleagues, he was the most knowledgeable and the most intelligent. I will never meet his like again.**

**As in years past, so too in years to come, his students, not colleagues like me, will stand as his finest testimonial, men and women who bear witness to his erudition and his pedagogy; to his gentle, humane ways; and to his passion for the knowledge and the wisdom he found in his beloved classics.**

**Even at this moment as we bid him farewell, like Socrates, he is surrounded, if only in spirit, by those who loved him. May he always know that when men speak of great teachers, his name will be first on their tongues and first in their hearts. And when men speak of the Golden Age of Prep, it will be of the time when disciples gathered at his feet.....Farewell, my Socrates.**

## 6. College Essays

*Ceteris paribus* (all things being equal), a college admission officer may decide whether you will be accepted to his college on the basis of the essay you write in your college application. The questions will be the same for every applicant. So the admission officer will look for two things: technical expertise and creativity.

Technical expertise, i.e. spelling, grammar, and syntax, are a *sine qua non* for any essay. If you are not literate, a college will not want you. Creativity, a unique perspective on the way in which you view your world, may tip the decision of the admission officer in your direction.

The following questions may be examples of some questions you will have to answer in your college essay.

If you could spend an evening with a historical or literary figure, whom would you choose and what would you discuss? Why do you think we should accept you into our college, and if we do, what contribution to our college will you make? If you could make one change in our society, what would it be? Who has been the most influential person in your life, and in what way has she influenced your approach to life?

## **“If I Could be with You, One Hour Tonight...”**

**In all my readings in literature, I have never come across a writer who fascinates me as much as Emily Dickinson. If I had to choose a person with whom I would want to spend an evening in conversation, it would be she.**

**In my opinion, two of the most important things in life are to find joy despite being alone and to find peace despite the encroachments of the world. Eschewing the blandishments of this world, Emily found within her few family members and friends as well as within herself the deepest joy in living and peace in the way she chose to lead her life.**

**As she rose from bed each morning, I picture her as having an entire orchestra of words at her command, waiting to weave the pictures and sounds of her world. To some, the solitary singer of Amherst lived within a circumscribed world, parameters that most people would find constricting to their spirits, but to me she contained the world within herself, and the world did her bidding because she could utter the creative word.**

**And so I would have to ask her the secret of her singing. Does the key to peace and joy lie in possessing our soul in silence? Can we ever be**

**free until we shuffle off all our material possessions before they possess us? How can we live an intense, passionate life without busying ourselves running about the world? Are the great questions of life and death and love and immortality the only ones worth asking?**

**With all the things I would like to discuss with her, it might take more than one evening.**

### **Step 7. Using Poetry in your Prose**

**There are some technical aspects of writing of which you must be aware, and I have included some of them at the end of this course. Since this is a class in creative writing, however, I will assume you are competent in the basics of writing. And so, I am going to teach you some of the more sophisticated aspects of writing that make a great writer.**

**When we read or listen to the speeches that were given by Winston Churchill, Douglas McArthur, Martin Luther King, and John F. Kennedy in the twentieth century, we wonder why their words were able to move people. Granted that some of them had speech writers to assist them, there is still an element in their writing and delivery that can teach us a great deal about the written and the spoken word.**

**The first point I want to make about great prose writers is that they must know poetry, the key for all of us who would write well. The most important thing to learn from poetry is the use of images and figures of speech. Poetry takes a feeling, e.g. helplessness, and translates that abstract word and concept into concrete images, something that we can see and hear and touch and taste.**

**For idealism, it may use stars; for struggle, it may use mountains; for dreams, it may use rainbows; for friendship, it may use bridges; for infinity, it may use oceans. Whatever word it chooses to translate an emotion, it is never another abstract word.**

**The reason for using imagery and figures of speech is that although we are rational beings, we are moved to action, to battle, to love, to hope, by our feelings. The proper object of the intellect is truth, and we reach truth by reasoning, by the use of abstract words in philosophical treatises. The proper object of the will, however, is choice, and we choose by the way we feel. We are creatures who are persuaded by our emotions, by our feelings. Love is not an intellectual state. Loneliness is not, nor is sorrow, pity, desire, etc. And so the great writers move us by images that appeal to our imagination.**

**“The shadows are lengthening for me. The twilight is here. My days of old have vanished, tone and tint. They have gone glimmering through the dreams of things that were. Their memory is one of wondrous beauty, watered by tears, and coaxed and caressed by the smiles of yesterday. I listen vainly, but with thirsty ear, for the witching melody of faint bugles blowing reveille, of far drums beating the long roll. In my dreams I hear again the crash of guns, the rattle of musketry, the strange mournful mutter of the battlefield.” (An excerpt from Douglas MacArthur’s final speech to the Corps at West Point)**

**The second point is the rhythm or the cadence of the prose, the ability to make the prose we write have an almost metrical pattern to it. Some critics have said that one can hear the meter in the prose of Winston Churchill. The following is not an exact quote, but a paraphrase of his style.**

**We will fight them on the land and in the air and on the beaches, until the last drop of English blood is shed.**

**Note the sonorous rhythm of the prose, a use of anapestic and iambic rhythm. Except for the spondee, “last drop,” there is no place where two accented syllables or words come together.**

**Until the comma, the meter is anapestic; after the comma, the meter is iambic. The use of metrical patterns is pleasant to the ear, and it reinforces what the writer is saying. The anapestic rhythm gives “flight” to the idealistic commitment of the British, and then the iambic movement brings us back to the reality of what such a commitment will cost in human terms of suffering.**

**Note the following examples of rhythm in prose, and the ways in which we can use it to give power to our words.**

**1. It will be a long, hard struggle before we reach the light of day.**

**2. As we walk in this garden of earthly delights, we are blessed by the loveliest blossoms of nature.**

**3. The hour has come to stand tall, to hold firm, to bear arms.**

**The normal rhythmic pattern of the English language is iambic, and when we vary from this normal pattern, we can create many different effects which will enhance the meaning of what we say. In Shakespeare’s plays in which he uses blank verse, the normal “foot” is the iamb.**

Such techniques as these are sophisticated, and the ordinary reader may not notice them nor be able to point them out if questioned about them. And yet they will still affect him in his subconscious and move him even though he may not know why. And if the words are spoken, he will be affected on two levels.

An example of a famous quotation, which moves the reader, though he may not be able to articulate why he is so moved, is a quotation from Thomas Paine during the Revolutionary War. "These are the times that try men's souls." What makes this sentence so powerful? The words are simple, monosyllabic, yet they carried a profound impact on men during those early days in our battle for freedom.

The English language lends itself to a variety of sounds. Our language has a strong Germanic content which derives from Anglo-Saxon, the primary language of England until the Normans (French) conquered the country in 1066. The Anglo-Saxon language gives us short, crisp words, harsher in sound than the words which derive from French.

With the influence of the French language, which is derived from Latin, there was a "softening" of English because of the many vowel sounds which were a part of the Latin/French

**influence. Such words also tend to be polysyllabic, which adds to the number of unaccented syllables and gives the language a more mellifluous tone.**

**The Romance languages of Spanish, Italian, and French are mellifluous languages. They have so many vowels it is difficult to find the harsh sounds which we need. By weaving the two influences, the harsh sounds of the Anglo/Saxon with the soft sounds of the Romance languages, we are able to make our language serve our purposes better. The English language, therefore, is much more suited to expressing our thoughts and ideas, especially on an emotional level, than any other language. If you question me on this point, then read Shakespeare, the greatest writer who ever lived.**

**Note the following examples of the use of sound to achieve a particular effect.**

**1. We exhort you, in these perilous times, to put on a badge of courage and to bear the burden that will be placed upon our backs.**

**2. Take up your cross, and tread a rough path strewn with thorns that will tear at and gouge your flesh.**

Since the consonants in the English language are harsher than the vowels, when we want to express problems that face us, we resort to the use of many consonants to bring out our feelings. In the above sentences, note the use of harsh sounds through the consonants: “p,” “b,” “t,” “k,” “g,” and “d.”

On the other hand, when we wish to express pleasant feelings and a sense of well being, then we use the vowels and liquids (l, m, n, r) of the language together with a “w” and soft “v” to create a soothing effect.

1. On this lovely, wonderful occasion, we wish all of you the joy and happiness of a full life.

2. There is a murmur of the wind as the leaves fall to a soft landing on the green grass.

3. Day by day, I hear her singing a lullaby as she calms the fears of her lonely son.

4. I wish all of you a leisurely journey down the road of life and sweet dreams as your companions.

5. May all of you share love and life and laughter all the day long.

**In the following paragraphs, notice how we can combine both the cacophonous sounds and the euphonious sounds to achieve two different effects. We will castigate and excoriate sinners, and then we will soothe and calm those who follow the Lord.**

**Those of you who sit out there tonight, smirking and gloating over your sins of the flesh, will rot in the scorching fires of hell. The devil will fetch your wretched bodies from a fiery crash and pull them burning and smoking down to hotter fires in the bowels of the earth, ravished in the belly of the beast. He will prod you with prongs of lead and beat your bodies until they're nothing but pulp, grist for his furnace.**

**But those of you who walk in the love of the Lamb of God will be filled with grace. Under his wings he will shelter you all the day long until the evening comes and the busy world is at rest. And you will hear his loving voice calling you to follow him, to rest from your labors, and to fall asleep in his arms.**

**Our language is flexible, suited to every occasion. It will do what we want it to do if we know how it works. There is no greater joy in writing than to know we can make the word become flesh, that we have power over the language, that we can taste and touch and feel and hear the strength of our native tongue.**

## 8. Persuasion

In the following essay, which is really a speech, we are trying to convince young men of the necessity of reinstating a military draft in this country. We face a difficult audience because we are calling upon them to make a sacrifice, and making a sacrifice is antithetical to human nature. It means that we must forget about ourselves and think of others, often others who have not as yet been born. And furthermore, when we ask of someone that he lay down his life, we are asking the ultimate sacrifice that anyone has to offer. In order to achieve this, we have to make these young men feel there is a higher goal in life than to strive for their own personal happiness.

Note the rhythm of the language, the use of strong imagery, the sounds created by using euphony and cacophony.

### Renewing the Draft

There is irony in asking you to make this sacrifice. I am an old man, bent and broken, ravaged by time. I could not mount the barricades with you even if I forged my will to spur on this battered body which has been

ravaged on the field of battle. Time is tolling the bells for me.

Yet in my memory a flag flies in the languid breeze, unfurled to the winds of war. It hovers over us with stars that urge us to dream dreams of glory, with stripes to make us remember that we must be scourged before we can be crowned.

There are rumblings among even men of good will that I would turn our land into an armed camp, that I would place a sentinel on every corner, that I would erect barbed wire along our shores, that I would fill the skies with birds of prey. It is the same old cry of those who would be free without paying the price.

I ask of you no more than millions of Americans have already given in the cause of freedom. I ask that as the enemy stalks us, we be vigilant. I ask that as he fixes his bayonet, we hold our shield at the ready. I ask that as he breaks toward our lines, we form a solid phalanx against him.

It is not an easy thing to ask you to be willing to shed your blood. Every man wants to live a life without pain and to walk calmly in the sunset of his days. And yet some generations of Americans are called upon to sacrifice their

**dreams upon the altar of the bloody god of war. Some men must die that others may live.**

**And so tonight I propose that we begin a draft of young men who will be trained in the science of war. The swollen belly of the god who lurks in our land will claim victims from among us. But there is a higher cause, a more noble call that demands our goals be set aside so that our children may live in freedom in the land we love. It is to preserve our dreams that I sound a clarion call to arms. Let us rise up and do battle with those who would enslave us.**

**Your generation has been called. Your generation must answer that call, or this nation will perish.**

## **9. Thought**

**If we want to appeal to the intellect, however, we should include words of Latin and Greek derivation. They are polysyllabic. They sound and are more sophisticated. They appeal to an audience who enjoys using its intellectual powers.**

**I cannot stress too much that we must keep our audience in mind at all times. We cannot use an Anglo/Saxon vocabulary when addressing**

erudite people or they will resent us for our apparent condescension.

We may think of ourselves as writing a paper to be presented before a group of academicians, of computer analysts, of businessmen, of aesthetes, or, of writing an essay to be published in an intellectual journal.

### Aesthetic Emotions and Real Emotions

In talking to one of my colleagues, I remarked on a play I had seen in which the daughter announced to the mother at the beginning of the play that she intended to commit suicide. The play was so well crafted and executed that I was ecstatic about having seen it.

My colleague replied there were enough sad things in life without going to a play or a movie which would depress him by enacting some tragic tale. Scenting a fertile discussion, I assumed my best pedantic manner and assured him he was wrong.

If we become depressed after having seen a “sad” movie or play or painting or sculpture, it betrays a lack of intelligence on our part, a puerile emotional reaction to what we know is not reality.

Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* has not committed suicide, is not dead, has not left his wife alone in the world. He is a character of the imagination, and in the movie and in the play, he is but an actor, not a real person undergoing pain. So to react to Arthur Miller's work of art in a depressed fashion is absurd because there is no "real" person to feel for.

The only rational emotion we can feel when confronted with art is an aesthetic emotion, the emotion which appreciates beauty in art for its form. If we are intelligent, we can see a movie which deals with the most tragic subject matter and leave the movie leaping with joy because of how well it has been written and performed.

The movies *My Left Foot* starring Daniel Day Lewis and *The Fourth of July* starring Tom Cruise are examples of cinema at its best. Despite all the pain and suffering which these movies depict, we can't help but be elated over how well these works of art have been crafted.

If we do not drink alcoholic beverages, we may be unhappy if people invite us to dinner and have a long cocktail hour before the meal. It is a real emotion, an adverse feeling to a real situation. On the other hand, if we see the play *The Cocktail Party* by A.R. Gurney, during which the stage family has a prolonged cocktail hour

**before their meal, I'm sure we would enjoy it. At the play we are undergoing an aesthetic emotion, even though the subject matter and the time element may be the same in both instances.**

**A tragedy can happen in real life that causes us grief, but a painting of the same tragedy can give us pleasure. We can be revolted by ugliness in real life, but a painting which depicts something ugly can be a work of great beauty. People like Hitler and Stalin and Pol Pot are anathema to us in reality, but statues of them might be magnificent works of art.**

**A child goes to a movie that is "scary," hides under the seat, has nightmares because he thinks what he has seen is real. We are not children.**

**The only emotion we can rightfully feel when we look at a work of the imagination is an aesthetic emotion, the joy at a work of art's being so well crafted, or the sorrow and pain we feel for an attempt at art that has failed.**

## **10. Eulogy**

**If we learn to be judicious and sparing in our use of harsh consonants when we want to write something that will soothe our readers, and**

if we learn not to use “spondees,” which in poetry means putting accented words together (e.g. hard rock), then the tone of our writing should be both mellifluous and pleasant. It does not mean our writing will be great, for these are but technical tools, but using these technical tools is part of learning to write well.

Let us consider another form of writing, the eulogy. Since churches permit lay people to give a eulogy for a deceased person, it is possible that you may be called upon to give one or choose to give one for someone who has been close to you.

The word eulogy comes from two Greek words, “eu” meaning good or pleasant, and “logos” meaning word. So the etymology of the word tells us that a eulogy should contain pleasant words. Since there is sorrow, pain, and loss upon the person’s death, however, we must also use some of the harsh sounding consonants to convey the feelings we have about death. Once we know the technique we will use, then we must consider our purpose in writing a eulogy.

The obvious purpose of a eulogy is to say something good about the person who has died. The people we address are the survivors, those who are mourning, perhaps our own relatives. And so our purpose must be to console them, not by telling them their pain will pass, but by

**extolling the virtues of the person whom they have loved.**

**The danger that lies in store is that we will resort to sentimentality and melodrama and use maudlin language which will make what we have to say sound like a T.V. “afternoon soap.”**

**Let us pretend that we have been called upon to deliver a eulogy for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who guided our country out of the depression and was our leader for most of World War II.**

**Goodbye, Mr. President.**

**No man has been our president for so long a time. I do not hesitate to say that no man will ever again be our president for so many years. Men like Franklin Delano Roosevelt pass this way but once.**

**Through the dark days of the depression, when desperate people were haunted and hungry, and through the terrible times of the Second World War when the enemy pushed us back toward the brink of peril, his patrician voice told us to fear nothing but fear itself. We sat by our radios and we warmed to his soothing, calm**

manner, a father assuring his children lest they be afraid of the dark.

The ship of state still sails in troubled waters. The sun has flickered through the clouds on gloomy days, but we have not yet bathed in its light without trembling that it will be blotted from our eyes. And the voice that called us to battle has died, leaving us as bereft as orphans.

Yet somehow we are sure he will be with us through the storm-clouds that threaten us, that his fatherly voice will whisper in our ears and show us the way and the light, that he will guide us and guard us until we are safe at home.

May we love him and honor him and thank God for having sent him to us, and may he receive all the good things that heaven has in store for those who have served their country well.

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We must learn to use all these techniques so well that our audience will not notice them. Making it look easy is the mark of a true craftsman, whether it be in sports or in intellectual endeavors. With this in mind, one of the things we should avoid is excess. The speechwriters for President Kennedy were fond

**of balance and antithesis in parallel structure. Those for Eisenhower were fond of alliteration. Use no technique which attracts attention to itself and distracts the audience from what is being said. Remember, all things in moderation.**

## **10. The Editorial**

**The editorial column in a newspaper is the place in the paper where the newspaper publishers express their opinion on any topic from local to world events. As readers of the paper, we would like to think the editorials we read are objective, well-reasoned, and wise.**

**Since the paper may be of a conservative or liberal bent, however, or the publishers may have a vested interest in something about which they are writing, we can not be sure if the opinion they express is honest or biased. We must, therefore, read all editorials with a jaundiced eye. (e.g. Wall street Journal; New York Times)**

**Newspapers don't play with the facts in their editorials. If they did, they could be held legally responsible. It is how they interpret the facts that we must be wary of.**

**There is an editorial staff and an editorial board at a newspaper. Some writers are more**

versed on a topic than others, and so one of the staff will write the editorial according to his expertise. The publisher informs the executive editor of the basic policy of the paper, and the executive editor is responsible for carrying out this policy.

For example, a publisher may tell his editor there will be no “Senator Casey bashing” in editorials. This does not mean the paper will not keep a close eye on the political happenings in Washington, but they will not write editorials attacking the Senator as if he were an opponent.

The writer of an editorial is anonymous. He is the “voice” of the paper, and because he is not identified, he can be more open and frank about his opinions without fear of personal harassment. When you are writing your editorial, therefore, do not use the word “I,” only “We.” This is known in newspaper circles as the “editorial we.”

Unlike a reporter’s factual detailing of a story, however, the editorial takes a firm stand on something about which the editorial board feels strongly.

## **A Dumping Ground for Cancer**

**Scranton is known as the dumping ground of the Northeast. Towns from neighboring states have their garbage trucked in here, and we have been afflicted with huge trucks that have injured and even killed our people.**

**Even more terrifying, companies have allowed lead to seep into our land, poured millions of gallons of toxic waste into our abandoned mines, and attempted to dump hazardous materials into our landfills.**

**And most terrifying of all, statistics say the incidence of cancer in our area is greater than the rest of the state. Granted we have an elderly population which accounts for a higher mortality rate, but this still does not account for such a high number of cancer cases. In one block of the Hill Section of Scranton, five cases of cancer have occurred.**

**Something is wrong. The National Health Department has conducted a study of our area at the request of the Lackawanna Medical Society. When the facts are in, we hope they will identify our problems and that our government will respond with vigor to eliminate them.**

## 12. Lifetimes

I borrowed this title from the newspapers that carry a “Lifetimes” section. The major feature in such a section is a personal portrait of someone who is in a profession or has a hobby that other people may find interesting.

The choice of subjects may range from someone who has been in the acting profession for a long time and is now doing local theater to someone who makes stain-glass windows to nurses who work in a school district. The only criteria the writer uses in choosing a subject is that his readers may find it interesting, and of course, it is the responsibility of the writer to make it interesting.

This type of essay poses certain difficulties for a writer that other types may not. An essayist often knows what he is writing about, but this type of essay is more like an interview where the reporter must ask questions about a subject of which he is ignorant and then make a coherent whole out of the answers. Something else which is different is that he will have to quote the person with whom he is speaking in order to give his piece veracity. Because of this, it may be advisable to bring a tape recorder.

**If a subject is too technical for you, (e.g. opera, dance, computers, etc.) then you'd be wise to avoid it.**

## **Embalming, an Art Form**

**Johnny Lestrangle works in Ferguson's Mortuary on Albert Street in New York City. He's what is known in the funeral business as a "trade embalmer."**

**"A trade embalmer is a guy who doesn't have his own business," he said. "He likes embalming so he contracts out to guys who have big businesses and don't have time to embalm."**

**Johnny likes his work. When I called to interview him, he told me I'd have to interview him while he was embalming. He couldn't take time off from work to talk to me.**

**When I came into the morgue, which smelled of formaldehyde, Johnny was working on an accident case. "This poor guy here was smashed up pretty bad when he was hit by a truck. I have a picture of him, so I'm trying to fix him up."**

**Johnny considers himself an artist, someone who can take a body despite its**

condition and reconstruct it again for a viewing. “It makes the family feel good,” he said. “It makes me feel good.”

I watched him work his magic. The man had one eye left in his smashed face, and Johnny had a picture of him. He measured the length of the eye in the picture, the length of the mouth in the picture, and the length of the one eye that was left. That way he could find the length of the man’s mouth which was torn away.

“You use a formula,” he said.

Length of eye in picture (6mm)=Length of eye in body (26 mm)  
Length of mouth in picture(12mm)=Length of mouth in body(x)

The formula gives you the size of all the features of the face. After he had the right measurements, he began to cut away all the loose tissue and then undercut the edges. That way he’d have a smooth surface when he got to the final layer of wax.

“All these tissues are moist,” he explained, “so I’ll dry them with a carbolic acid solution and cotton, and then I’ll swab a liquid sealer over the exposed areas to stop any moisture from leaking out.”

He filled the deep holes with cotton until he got near the surface. Then he used a wire base for

**the foundation on which to start building the wax which he tapered into the skin. Finally, he began to recreate the features.**

**“Only an artist could do this,” Johnny said as the face began to look remarkably like the photograph. “There’re lots of guys who are just fluid pushers as I call them, but they’re not many of us artists around.”**

**By the time Johnny finished, hours later, I agreed with him. I had watched a work of art come into being before my very eyes.**

### **13. Sermons**

**In some of the preceding essays, you have noticed the use of images that are meant to move the reader, to “affect” him, to move him to feel, and, as in the essay on the draft, to move him to take action. These essays appeal to the “will” of the reader, the faculty in people that makes choices. The satirical essay, on the other hand, appeals to the intellect, the faculty in man that perceives the “truth.”**

**There is another faculty in man that we use all the time in writing, the imagination. There are different kinds of imagination, but the one we speak of here is the creative imagination, the one with which we create new images.**

**Not only do we use images to appeal to the will, but we often develop the images into metaphors, which exercise a more powerful influence because they give us a picture that is unified by a number of congruent images. Using a castle, its watchtower, drawbridge, sentries, moat, etc., focuses our imagination on one extended metaphor, which poetry calls a “conceit.”**

**Christ used this method often in the parables or stories he told his disciples. e.g. the sower sowing his seed, the barren fig tree, the virgins at the wedding feast, the workers in the vineyard, the grain of mustard seed, the great supper, the prodigal son, the unjust steward, the rich man and Lazarus, etc.**

**Everyone knows the parable of the Good Shepherd and the way in which Christ uses it to show not only that he will protect us, but that he will lay down his life for us. It was through the use of such imagery that he appealed to the imagination of the people. Let us suppose we must give a sermon in church on the parable of the Good Shepherd as our biblical text.**

**In the following sermon, note the use of the pleasant sounds of the language in order to convey a message of comfort, and, in the rhythm of the language you will rarely find two accented words together. Both of these techniques work on**

**a sub-conscious level to give the listener-reader a sense of well-being.**

## **The Good Shepherd**

**In the Gospel according to John, chapter ten, we find the parable of the Good Shepherd.**

**When we think of the billions of people in this world, we often wonder how God can remember who we are, let alone be concerned with us and the troubles we encounter in this life. How can he hear the pleas of all those who ask him for help each and every day? To our human minds, it is beyond our understanding that he remembers and watches over us.**

**And so to console us and to assure us that he will be with us all the days of our lives, he tells the parable of the Shepherd for all of us who depend on his concern. He says he can call his sheep by name, that they will know his voice, and that he will not flee when they are attacked by wolves, but will fight to save them.**

**Since our human minds can understand so little of his ways, he assures us through this story that he knows us and that he loves us with an everlasting love, that he will never leave us, and**

**that he will be with us through our suffering and sorrow.**

**All of us cherish our names. We are not happy when people do not remember us and forget our names. But Jesus assures us and calms us by saying that he knows all of us by name, even those of us who have strayed from his loving concern. He says that he is willing to lay down his life for us so we may have life and have it in a richer sense than we can imagine.**

**When at times we feel we are lost and abandoned, that no one is concerned about us, the parable of the Good Shepherd reminds us that even if the world shuns us, God will still love us, each and every one.**

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**When we write an essay, there are two types of essays with which we will concern ourselves: the formal and the informal essay.**

**In a formal essay, we treat the subject matter as serious, and we write in the third person. We wish to inform our readers about some significant aspect of life, to convince them of our point of view, and to explain why we think it is important. What we think and the way we**

**think matters. This is the position we take in writing a formal essay.**

**Several possible topics for a formal essay clarify the point: Happiness, the Goal of Life; Violence in America; The Wisdom of a College Education; Educated Women in a Changing World; The Blight of Fast Food Franchises; A Contract before Marriage; An Afterlife; Parents and Children, A Holy Warfare; Pornography and the Degradation of Women; “Cell Phones, Texting, Facebook, and Tweetering, the New Us.**

**When we write an informal essay, on the other hand, we treat our subject matter with levity, and we use the first person singular or plural. Although the world may have its flaws, the tone we assume is that we find amusement in the topic about which we write.**

**Several possible topics for an informal essay are: Television Commercials; My Favorite Aunt; Cats are Real People; Getting High on Food; Falling in Love with Myself; Trying to Grow up Sane in an Insane Family; Why I Don’t Step on Sidewalk Cracks.**

**What you must remember is that writing an essay can be just as creative as writing a short story, a poem, or a play.**

## Technical Reminders

1. Keep your prose lean by eliminating when possible adverbs and unnecessary phrases. Let nouns and verbs do the work.

2. Do not use clichés: “high as a kite; sick as a dog; hot as hell; icing on the cake; good riddance to bad rubbish; if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.”

3. Don’t mis-spell or mis-use these common words:

a. all right----two words, not one

b. your, you’re

c. it’s, its

d. to, too, two

e. their, they’re, there

f. already – one word, not two

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