Revising the Personal Essay

See “Guidelines for Peer Reviewers” ( 38) and “Guidelines for Using Reviewers’ Comments” (42) in *Bedford Handbook*.

Use “Writing Checklist,” “Improving Your Diction,” and Improving Your Syntax” on DCA “Moodle.”

Organization and content for this particular essay:

\_\_\_\_\_Introduction clearly and vividly describes the person, place, or experience (appeals to 5 senses)

\_\_\_\_\_Uses 2 examples of figurative language

\_\_\_\_\_Effective thesis statement after the introduction that states how the person, place, or experience described changed the author

\_\_\_\_Clear topic sentences that reveal specific ways the author was influenced in the past, present, and possibly future (conclusion)

\_\_\_\_Adequate development of each topic sentence

\_\_\_\_Closing paragraph that projects future effects of lessons learned/possibly linked to intro or title for effect

\_\_\_\_Effective title that grabs attention of reader (NOT “Personal Essay”)

Improving Your Diction

\_\_\_ Verb Check:

1) Uses active voice--not passive voice. (BH 142-147)

Active: John hit Barry. Passive: Barry was hit by John.

2) Uses specific verbs. (ex) Instead of “He said”write “He mumbled/ chirped/ squeeled, etc.”

\_\_\_ Uses specific words ((BH 216-219)

Too general: “After the strenuous activities of the day, I did not feel like dancing.”

Better: “After playing twenty-seven holes of golf, I did not feel like swing dancing.”

Too general: The room smelled bad.

Better: The room smelled like a crowded bus/ damp basement/

musty attic/ sweaty locker room/ department store perfume counter.

Note: A sentence with seven mediocre adjectives/adverbs isn’t as

effective as one with one or two well chosen ones.

Links abstracts to concretes. Concrete words refer to what can be

perceived through the five senses: sight, taste, touch, sound, smell.

(ex) “manacles of segregation,” “quicksand of inequality”

Specifics linked to senses:

Touch: clammy, grainy, gritty, moist, satiny, slimy, velvety

Taste: bland, biting, bitter, salty, spicy, vinegary

Smell: greasy, musky, musty, pungent, rank, woodsy, dusty, fragrant

Sound: blare, murmur, pop, chime, clatter, clink, swish, tinkle, whine

Sight: chalky, dappled, ebony, foggy, glossy, grimy, sallow, muddy

\_\_\_\_\_ Uses imagery ( 2 figures of speech), avoiding clichés and mixed metaphors. ( BH 221-224)

Similes: “She crouched like a fawning dog.” (Steinbeck)

“His face was as blank as a pan of uncooked dough.” (Faulkner)

“Laverne wasn’t too bad a dancer, but the other one, old

“Marty...was like dragging the Statue of Liberty around the

floor.” (Salinger)

As the crowd left the scene of the accident, all that remained

was a sprinkling of broken glass that shone like tears in the

moonlight.

“And her fingers felt like a dead person’s, like an old

peach I once found in the back of the refrigerator; the skin

just slid off the meat when I picked it up.”(Amy Tan)

Metaphors: (ex) “Sons are the anchors of a mother’s life.”

“California is the flashy blonde you like to take out once or twice. Minnesota is the girl you want to marry.”

“His money was a sharp pair of scissors that snipped rapidly through tangles of red tape.” (Yamamoto)

Note: Avoid mixed metaphors. (ex) Playing with fire can get you into deep water. (ex) Her climb up the ladder of success was nipped in the bud. Correction: She slipped on her climb up the ladder. OR Before her career could blossom, it was nipped in the bud.

\_\_\_\_\_ Eliminates triteness/cliches. (ex) raining cats and dogs, cool as a cucumber

\_\_\_\_Eliminates wordiness and needless repetition. (BH 198-203) (ex) Change “in the event that” to “if.”

\_\_\_\_Uses appropriate, exact language showing awareness of connotations (attitudes we associate with particular words).

Note the differences: boyish prank VS act of vandalism, thrifty VS cheap, petite VS shrimpy

(ex) “The professor glared/looked/gazed at the student.”

See “Improving Your Syntax/Sentence Structure” and “Writing Checklist” for further stages of revision.