

Finding Your Critical Writing Voice – English 30

In an academic setting and when presenting a position in a public forum, it is necessary to take on a more formal and more critical writing voice. This critical writing voice is required on both the English 30-1 (critical response to text) and the English 30-2 (persuasive letter) diploma exams but it is also required for university and for those who participate on committees or in public office. A critical voice leads the reader to respect and consider the author's point of view as it objective and formal.

The following are some general rules for critical writing. Please keep in mind that basically ALL rules of language arts can be manipulated and “broken”. These general rules, though, give you a good starting point.

Critical writing should:

- A. include only formal language (no slang)
- B. be written in the third person (he/she/they)
- C. be written in present tense
- D. present a position that is supported with evidence

Attached to this is an example of a critical writing voice. Read it critically to determine what aspects may help in the development of your own critical voice.

Assignment

Write a critical analysis of a character from “All My Sons”. The central concern for this assignment is not structure and format but voice. Present thoughtful ideas and support in a formal writing voice.

Here is an example from the short story “Identities”. Focus on the sound of the critical voice.

The short story “Identities” by Canadian author W.D. Valgaardson poses the idea that our socially constructed identities, largely based on appearance and supported by cultural understandings, do not define the whole person. In the short story the wealthy, bearded protagonist “meanders” his way from the “twice cut lawns” of his gated community to the “cracked sidewalks” on the other side of town. The houses that “all face the sun” are juxtaposed against the houses that “are squat and... sunk into the ground”. The man makes certain assumptions about the community and the people in it. His background as a wealthy North American male has led him to believe that police provide safety and that young people dressed in leather are potential thieves. The implicit irony presented at the end as the man “instinctively” relaxes because he is “certain of his safety” just moments before he is shot presents the reader with questions about his own judgements and about the judgements of society in general. The story provides no real perceptions about the life of the man. He is not presented as a man with a perfect life as he is “locked in domestic grief” and the police officer is not presented as a malicious sort, just “inexperienced... nervous and...suspicious”. The story is therefore not a study in character but instead a discussion about how individuals are influenced by their own interpretations of identity based on appearance and the culture from which they originate.