

To: All Freshman Composition Teachers
From: David McMurrey, Writing Lab Director
Subj: The Freshman Writing Contest
Date: October 21, 1982

I am happy to announce the second annual freshman writing contest and hope that you will pass this information on to your freshman composition students. Here are some of the details of the contest:

1. Contestants need only be officially enrolled in a freshman composition class this fall semester 1982.
2. Judges will be Dominique Browning and Suzanne Winckler of the Texas Monthly.
3. There will be three contest categories: the critical essay, the creative essay, and the short story (all discussed, along with judging criteria on the following pages).
4. All three first-place writers will receive \$100 gift certificates and all three second-place writers \$30 gift certificates from the University Co-Op. Gift certificates of \$10 each will be awarded to writers receiving honorable mentions.
5. To enter, students who are officially enrolled in a freshman composition class must come to Parlin 3, the Writing Lab, sign up, and get the information package by November 19.
6. All entries must be received no later than 5 p.m., November 29; winners will be announced and prizes awarded at 4 p.m., December 9, in the Writing Lab, Parlin 3.

Please take a few moments in your classroom to announce the contest and talk it up with your students. Your efforts in bringing the contest to your students' attention and encouraging them to enter will mean much to the success of the contest in general. Also, if you want to "sponsor" individual students you think might win, please feel free to do so. After all, the purpose of the contest is to stimulate our students to care about good writing, and whatever advice, support or encouragement they receive from you can only help.

Last fall the winners and honorable mentions were as follows (students' teachers' names in parentheses):

- Short fiction: first place, Philip Billnitzer (Judith Wilson); second place, Peter Ray (Wayne Lesser); honorable mentions, Peter Messerschmidt (Marshall Alcorn), Daniel E. Magnus (John Cline), Gary J. Gardner (Janice Kirk).
- Creative Essay: first place, Gerald Atkinson (Janice Kirk); second place, Jim Jarnagin (Sue Chisholm); honorable mention, Robert Ryan (John Cline)
- Critical Essay: first place, Brian Parro (John Cline); second place, Natalie Atkinson (Ramon Saldivar); honorable mention, Kay Nester (John Cline)

(Copies of these two pages are available to students in the Writing Lab.)

CONTEST CATEGORIES

The three categories discussed here all tend to overlap a bit. The real difference in some cases may only involve the writer's emphasis or original intentions. Lab staff members, your teachers, and contest officials will help you decide which category is appropriate for your entry. Except for grossly out-of-place entries, there will be some leeway in each category for a variety of entries.

Short Story

Everyone is familiar with short stories. A survey of any anthology of short fiction will show you the wide range of techniques, styles, and subject matter that short stories make use of. The whole range of techniques is open to you: for example, first-person narration, "stream-of-consciousness" narration, flashbacks, foreshadowing. The whole range of tone or mood is also: humorous, melodramatic, slapstick, tragic, dramatic, absurdist, mysterious, or fantastic tones or atmosphere are all possibilities. Likewise, the whole range of genres: westerns, detective stories, romances, science fiction, parables, fables, tales, scenes from ordinary life.

Critical (or Persuasive) Essay

In this category you take on a critical attitude, argue for an idea or belief, particularly one concerning some controversial issue of the day. Such essays can use the whole range of persuasive or argumentative strategies. Topics for this category can come from such broad areas as politics, religion, morality, ethics, and so on. As for the style, tone, or mood for entries in this category, the critical essay can be anything from serious to comical, gentle to strident, or traditional to unconventional. Your critical essay can be as elaborate as a philosophical treatise or as informal as some newspaper editorials.

Creative Essay

The category of creative essay is the most difficult to label and define and at the same time the category that for most contestants will be the most fun to enter. It includes light, informal, entertaining, amusing, clever prose such as you can find examples of in Texas Monthly, The New Yorker, Ms., or even our own local Utmost. These articles can produce a certain amount of useful or interesting information, but do so in a light, informal way. One could call this category light, informal expository writing, personal essays, or possibly creative expository writing. One could consider this category humorous or entertainment reading, but certainly other moods are possible.

(Copies of these pages are available to students in the Writing Lab)

INFORMATION FOR THE FRESHMAN WRITING CONTEST

Registration and Preparation

1. To enter the contest, you will need to come to the Writing Lab (Parlin 3) to sign your name and your composition teacher's name. You need not commit yourself to entering one of the three categories until you bring your entry in. The registration deadline is November 19, no later than 5 p.m.
2. As you prepare for the contest, feel free to seek the advice of your composition teacher or the staff of the Writing Lab. Remember, however, that when you sign up to enter the contest, you will also be signing a statement in which you pledge that your entry will be your own work and no one else's.
3. If you have any question about the criteria that will be used to judge the contest, about the differences between the three contest categories, or about which category your planned entry fits into, ask a member of the lab staff for information or take a copy of "CONTEST CATEGORIES AND JUDGING CRITERIA."
4. When you are finished writing your entry, bring it to the lab on or before November 29 (no later than 5 p.m.).

JUDGING

5. A panel of English Department members will screen all the entries and select a group of finalists. The entries selected by this panel will then be typed and sent to the final judges for the selection of the winners and honorable mentions.
6. Announcement of the winners and honorable mentions and presentation of the prizes will be held in the Writing Lab (or some nearby room if it gets too crowded) on December 9 at p.m.

We encourage all contestants, contestants' friends and lovers, teachers, interested students and anyone else to attend this awards ceremony. We will publicize the names of the contest winners and honorable mentions to all the local media and, with the permission of the winners, keep copies of the winning entries on display in the lab.

You may have difficulty deciding whether your entry belongs to the short story or creative essay category. Don't worry: write what you want to write and discuss what category it belongs in later with people involved in the contest. In general, however, short stories begin with an intention to tell a more or less fictional story, whereas creative essays begin more with an aim to produce information or ideas about the real world. Despite this basic difference, a creative essay can tell a story, one that is more or less real, in accomplishing its aim.

Look through back or current issues of the magazines mentioned above to get an idea of this category. Also, talk to your teacher or people in the Writing Lab.

CRITERIA

Essays and short stories will all be judged by such criteria as freshness, creativity, originality, clarity, conciseness, persuasiveness- whichever are most appropriate to the particular entry. These standards will be more important than those such as correctness of punctuation, usage, grammar, spelling, or other such mechanics. Each entry will be judged on its own merits, according to how successfully it accomplishes its apparent intention or purpose. That purpose can involve practically anything: to persuade, explain, inform, entertain, interest, amuse, inspire, move, convert, startle, amaze, cause people to stop and think, change their minds or to do something actively.

ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS
for the
WRITING CONTEST

1. There will be a limit of one entry per person. Because of the number of entries we expect already, we could not handle the additional volume of writers' entering more than one essay or story or more than one category.
2. You need not type your essays or stories. Neatly hand-written entries will be judged by the same standards as the typed ones. However, if you can manage it, we encourage you to type your entries for the judges' sake.
3. There is no official length limitation on the essays or stories; however, we encourage you to keep your entries below ten typewritten pages long.
4. We encourage you to discuss your writing contest plans with your teachers, fellow students, or members of the staff of the Writing Lab.
5. You are welcome to submit essays or stories you have written in the past for your composition classes.