

Sketchbook

Like an artist who keeps a sketchbook of attempts to present something pictorially, you will keep a sketchbook of attempts to present something verbally. You should produce something for your sketchbook at least five days a week. Each entry should run about five sentences (between 100 and 150 words total). By the end of this course, you should have accumulated at least 75 entries.

I would prefer that you keep your sketchbook as a weblog. You can set up a free blog at <http://www.blogger.com> or at <http://wordpress.com> or at many other sites. Do not use a pre-existing blog for this assignment, set up one just for your sketchbook. When you set up your blog, e-mail me the address immediately. I will check your blog periodically and may leave comments on some individual entries.

If you don't keep your sketchbook as a blog, I recommend using a loose-leaf notebook. Each entry must be dated and legible (preferably typed). You must bring the sketchbook to class every day. I will occasionally spot check or collect sketchbooks; if you don't have your sketchbook with you, you will receive no credit.

Your sketchbook is not a diary. I do not want you to share your feelings or the latest gossip. I want you to practice presenting things in classic prose. Over the course of the semester, your essays will move from presenting objects, to places, to people, to abstractions. Your sketchbook should mirror this progress of topics.

For weeks 1-4, I recommend that each entry present a specific physical object. Your first five entries could present things you can hold in your hand: a pencil, a coffee mug, a watch, a key chain, an ipod, and so on. The next five entries might present larger objects: a chair, a tree, a sweater, a car, a painting, and so on.

For weeks 5-8, concentrate on presenting places (a shopping mall, a restaurant, a room in your home, an office building, a club) and events (a meal, a conversation, an action in a sport, the way a particular person dances, a party).

During weeks 9-12, your sketchbook should focus on presentations of people. Start by presenting famous people, then friends and family, and finally: yourself.

For the final weeks, 13-15, your sketchbook should present some abstract concepts and ideas.

To count, entries need not be perfect, but they must represent a substantial effort. Always remember that you are striving for a classic style in your presentations. Hastily jotted notes, outlines, lists, or sloppy rough drafts are not sufficient—they'll count not at all.

The final grade for your sketchbook will depend on its completeness and on the improved quality of your writing.

Here are some model sketchbook entires:

Tanzanian Peaberry coffee beans

Tanzanian Peaberry coffee beans, when properly roasted, have a color between caramel and deep tan. Each bean is a nearly perfectly spherical ball the size of a pea, with a natural seam running across one side as if it were a normal coffee bean made of clay and rolled into a ball. Actually, this shape is produced by one special species of coffee tree which grows berries that bear only one bean apiece, while average coffee berries must support two beans each, which gives them the classic hemispherical shape. Since each berry supports only one Peaberry bean, the beans have an intense and inimitable flavor. This raw flavor makes for less roasting, and therefore a relatively light brown color. --Alexandra Griffin ©2000

11800 Twinlakes Drive

The hallway at 11800 Twinlakes Drives looks like the hallway of a mid-grade hotel. The lighting is always dim and the fixtures aren't fashionable at all but they aren't obtrusive. The walls are a very bland beige with textured blue wallpaper around the doorways. The wallpaper is edged by wood which is real, but with no particular polish or quality. Compounding this blandness is an unaesthetic cleanliness. The maids clean without thought to much of anything, including their paychecks, so while the place is never dirty it is never impressive, either. However, there is a large mirror across from the elevator which is good enough and useful since I only have a small mirror in my bathroom and never would know if there was a run in my stockings otherwise. --Olivia Stewart ©2000

My Neighborhood

The condition of the neighborhood in which I grew up displays both desperate poverty and overflowing excess. The sunken houses, discolored by rain, have walls that sag like wet cardboard and ramshackle porches that the slightest breeze might collapse, killing the several youngsters and dogs playing underneath. Oddly enough, these poor families, who often can't afford shirts for their boys or hairpins for their girls, accumulate mountains of junk in their backyards: rusted wheelbarrows, scorched pots, broken swing sets, fleabitten sofas. It is as if, despite their poverty and the uselessness of their trashy possessions, the poor are still driven by the all-American instinct to acquire. --Amanda Bernhardt ©2000

Forks

After almost two hundred years of problems with crazy foreigners, Americans eventually got fed up with what they felt was snotty dining nonsense and simply began wrapping all of their food in bread so that they could eat it with their fingers and not get the important part dirty. Fast food chains, combined with the wheel, flourished, creating a society that could steer with one hand and eat with the other. Americans became obsessed with mobility and forgot all about table etiquette, becoming rather like the early unimaginative cavemen who didn't know about forks and spoons. Forks evolved into something found only in the road and Americans managed to prove once again that history is tiresome. --Kieca Mahoney ©1998