

MIT, Inside, Live; Fall, 2013

## **Looking—at MIT Assignment #2**

Your second writing assignment is to select an object associated with MIT (at the MIT Museum) and look at it closely (as we have done with our objects in class). Freewrite about it. Then take the best of that freewriting and make it into a short (approx. 600 word) essay.

### **The objective of this exercise is:**

To free you up a bit as a writer. (No one will see or judge your freewriting, after all.)

To begin to get in touch with a more natural writing voice. (To the extent that we can write as we think and speak, our writing tends to become clearer and more engaging.)

To learn the art of “writing what is in front of your nose.” (Good writing often depends less on fancy foot-work than simply seeing what’s there, in the outside world and in your head, and being faithful to what you perceive as you try to articulate it in words.)

To practice “seeing.” (If you can slow down and really look, and look again, exploring all the angles and using all your senses, your writing will quickly improve.)

### **What to do:**

On our visit to the MIT Museum, find something that intrigues you. Keep it small—one object.

Look at your object carefully for 10 minutes **without writing**. During this period **draw a picture of your object**. Don’t worry about technique, just use this opportunity to “see” what’s in front of your nose.

Then write, getting as specific as you can in describing what you see. If thoughts occur to you at a more abstract level—about the object’s construction, its place in a larger context, some association from your own experience—that’s OK. But always try to get back to the thing itself in front of your nose and what you see, describing it in as specific and sensory a way as you can. This is what will enrich your writing the most.

You can take pictures at the end of your session, and you can come back if you want. You may also find museum staff available to provide some of the “back story” of your object or point you to a relevant source or two. But the main thing is to use this opportunity to freewrite as expansively and with as much focused attention as you can. Don’t worry about grammar, mechanics, perfect wording. Try to record as precisely as you can what you see in its intimate detail. If you need to take a break, go ahead; check out other stuff; then come back and look some more at “your” object.

Before you leave, write down pertinent information: title, artist, date, plus any other exhibit information you think you might want to use.

Then take what you've written and shape it. You can fool around with the sentences and with the order; you can add and, of course, subtract. You can include any information you've learned about the piece that speaks to what you saw, but you don't have to. Make it lean, make it clear and precise in its detail. That's the key to this assignment.

Include your name, the assignment, the date, and "1<sup>st</sup> version" in the upper right hand corner of the first page.

Give your piece a title that distills the essence of what you saw.

Provide four lines of introductory information: title, author, date, museum on the left below the title. (Check models.)

Format with double spacing, 12-point type, indented paragraphs. Do not add extra spacing between paragraphs unless you want to indicate an actual shift or pause.

Read what you've written aloud to yourself or someone else, and tweak for unclear spots, wordiness, glitches.

Give it a final proof-reading.

**DUE: Friday, Sept 20<sup>th</sup>, midnight.**

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