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## Letter of Introduction

This semester, I've had the chance to go thoroughly into the art of creative writing, studying nonfiction, fiction, and poetry in both free verse and formal forms. Drafting, editing, and sharing my work has helped me better grasp my writing voice and the approaches that bring a narrative or poem to life. The course pushed me to focus on my writing habits and challenged me to improve in ways I had not expected.

The four pieces I finished this semester demonstrate a variety of styles and approaches. Each task had different challenges, and they taught me about storytelling and self-expression. My nonfiction piece was my favorite to write. It allowed me to reflect on a personal event and turn it into an engaging narrative. As a result, I learned the value of voice and strong imagery in making a true narrative connect with readers. Writing nonfiction challenged me to strike a balance between honesty and clarity, which felt enjoyable and challenging.

The fiction element was a fun piece to write, as I took a fiction writing class last semester and learned the basics. This exercise highlighted the value of character development, timing, and storyline. I found myself constantly returning to the "show, don't tell" rule, reworking scenes to add more descriptive language and action rather than depending only on narrating. I realized how much a single picture or moment might carry the weight of a whole scene if well-created.

Poetry was difficult, especially formal verse poems. I had to think harder about each word because of rhyme and meter. I paid more attention to language as I tried to make each line fit the poem's structure and material. Free poetry was more liberating yet still precise. I learned rhythm and word sound from both formats, even while writing prose.

One of the most important skills I gained throughout the course was the use of voice and imagery in storytelling. Voice differentiates and individualizes a piece of writing, while imagery pulls the reader into the story's world. These aspects are essential, regardless of genre, and they were the focal point of my edits as I tried to improve my pieces.

Reading my peers' work was another key component of my growth. Their writings often highlighted ideas or strategies that I had not considered, motivating me to try with my own writing. Zosia Paul's work stood out for me throughout the semester. I've taken two courses with her and watched her writing improve in amazing ways. Her ability to mix vivid imagery with emotional depth made her pieces memorable and set a standard for the type of work I hoped to create.

The hardest part of this semester was diving into my stories and poetry. My early versions sometimes skipped emotions or details, leaving them unfinished. Feedback and rewriting helped me slow down and look into my scenarios and phrases to show rather than tell. I had to evaluate my choices and write deliberately in every piece of writing.

This course helped me to see creative writing as a process of discovery and refinement. Every piece of writing I finished, whether nonfiction, fiction, or poetry, provided an opportunity to learn and improve as a writer. While I still have a lot to work on, I'm leaving this semester with a stronger feel of my voice and a greater knowledge of how to utilize imagery and detail to create inviting work. I am appreciative of the things that I learned from the assignments, my classmates, and the writing process in general.

## **The CNF Essay**

### **Brief Introduction**

Presence is a nonfiction essay about the enormous effects of grief on love and family. It focuses on the death of my closest friend's father and how, in the face of loss, her family came together, creating a place of support and connection. Writing this piece pushed me to abandon excessive narration in favor of letting scenes and emotions lead the story.

One of the major improvements I made during editing was to replace explanations with action and images. By concentrating on particular moments—such as shared meals, quiet conversations, or caring gestures—I was able to demonstrate how love reveals itself even in tough situations. These adjustments increased the piece's emotional appeal and enabled readers to engage more intimately with the story.

During the process of creating Presence, I realized how important it is to create vivid, significant moments that allow readers to feel the story rather than just hear about it. These moments not only improved the story but also gave the structure a sense of completion. I am pleased with the final version, which shows the resilience and closeness of a grieving family without the need for additional rewriting. It's a narrative of love overcoming grief, and I hope readers will find it as moving as I did.

## **Presence**

By Grace Gallowitz

We gathered around the folding tables, watching as Alex popped the champagne bottle, marking the celebration of her high school graduation. Her vibrant, floral skirt in shades of orange and pink danced in the breeze as a storm approached on the horizon. Alex's two sisters and her mom gathered closely in front of her, their cameras raised as they captured the moment while she smiled and sprayed champagne all around. As her laughter echoed in the backyard, her friends, family, and I all celebrated her joy together. Her smile shone brightly, drawing our attention away from the approaching storm. She refused to allow a thunderstorm to disrupt her moment as a graduating star.

Two tents were set up securely on the backyard lawn, accompanied by foldable chairs and tables positioned underneath them. String lights were draped from the tent, illuminating the space where the dark clouds failed to let in any light. The lights twirled gently in the wind, revealing the path from which the storm approached. As they swayed gracefully, the lights started to go out, one after another. I looked around the tent surrounding me to check if anyone was paying attention, but the sole individual, apart from myself, who was gazing at the lights was Alex's older sister, Olivia. We watched the lights start to flicker one by one, and our eyes met as if we were sharing unspoken thoughts. It was their father.

In August 2023, Olivia was back at school for another year of college at the University of Miami. Alex, and the youngest sister, Estella, were both home; Alex painted in the shed in the backyard that was painted like a small red barn, with a hanging warm light over the two main doors. That shed was where she learned she could paint. Estella was in her bedroom, scrolling endlessly through social media, completely warped into the online world. The three sisters

received a group phone call from their mom, and that's when their lives changed. All three of them dropped to the floor, and it was almost like I could feel it. Their father was wakeboarding when he felt extreme chest pain and was rushed to the hospital. He never came back out.

By utilizing lights and electricity, their father was able to show his presence during the most significant moments, right when he was needed the most. In a moment when Alex longed for her father's presence, she wished for him to witness her transformation into the woman he had nurtured her to become. Olivia and I watched the lights flicker, sensing his presence as it entered the backyard. We sensed his smile, his gaze, his stance, and his sense of pride. Our smiles called to Alex, her younger sister, and their mom. They started to sense the presence as the wind swiftly intensified. The rain began to pour as everyone hurried indoors. We remained beneath the tent, sitting in the presence of his essence.

That night, after almost everyone had left, the girls, my mom, and I sat in the living room as the smell of rain and food seemed to linger out of the house. Plates and cups were lying on countertops and seats all around the main floor of the house, leaving the impression of a great gathering. There was a song by Pearl Jam playing on the surround sound speakers, and the girls' feet danced smoothly on the floor, their dresses gliding behind them. Estella then quickly grabbed something from upstairs and came back down, holding a white box with a label on it. She set the box down and continued dancing while their mom teared up. Their father's ashes were placed down in front of me, and all I could feel was a sense of helplessness. All I wanted to do was bring back their father for them, but I couldn't. Their mom began to cry while the girls went up to hug her. My heart started to ache, and I felt so deeply sorry for them.

In times of loss, we frequently experience a sense of helplessness and uncertainty in navigating our grief. As I observed the girls' strength and the reassuring influence of their father,

even when he was not physically present, I came to understand that healing can manifest in surprising forms. The flickering lights, the shared moments of connection, and the unwavering love that united the family were an indication of the lasting strength of the human spirit. It serves as a reminder that although death may remove a loved one from our presence, their spirit continues to reside within the hearts of those they have touched. Through their love, memories, and the subtle signs of their presence, we can discover comfort and maintain a sense of connection, even in their physical absence.

## **Short Story**

### **Brief Introduction**

My short story portrays a woman stuck between two realities: her everyday existence and a dream that seems equally genuine. Every time she wakes, she finds herself moving between the two, becoming more perplexed about what is real and what is imagined. The story goes into the complex issues of identity and perception, examining how our interpretation of reality influences who we are.

Writing this piece showed me the value of immersing myself in the thoughts of my main character. I concentrated on conveying her feelings and mental turmoil rather than having her tell them. Through changes, I deepened her viewpoint, letting readers sense her uncertainty and need as she swings between her two worlds.

The comments I got from my peers helped shape the final draft. Their views helped me find areas where additional emotion and depth would be needed to make the story more captivating. While I am pleased with the updated version, I feel the end can be stronger. Without the confines of a word count, I'd want to build on the story, seeing how it may end and what resolution—if any—my protagonist might find.

This story pushed me to think critically about character development and the balance of action and thought, and it has since become one of my favorite pieces to write.

## Another Life

By Grace Gallowitz

The sound of birds chirping filled the air, as if they were perched just outside my window—particularly sparrows. The warmth enveloped my skin, as though the sun hovered just inches from my body. The soft, airy caress of the fabric glided over my skin, a feeling so refined and gentle that I recognized it as silk. My hands glided over the texture, searching for a hint of recognition. I finally opened my eyes, yet the blaring sun obscured my vision completely. I sat up and became aware of my surroundings. Home.

“Liz, honey, are you awake?” My husband’s voice echoed from downstairs. My husband, Jacob. I rubbed my eyes, attempting to dispel the confusion. How long was I asleep for? I rose from my bed and made my way to the window to the left of it. I drew aside the beige mesh curtains and explored what I recalled as our front yard. The sky showed a gentle hue of blue, completely free of clouds. The children from next door played joyfully across the street, carefree and full of laughter, as their parents relaxed on the front porch, cigarettes glowing in their hands. The sunlight streamed through the window, illuminating the room with a soft glow, yet it seemed distant, almost surreal.

“Good morning,” Jacob rested against the door frame of our bedroom, startling me. He wore his plaid pajama pants, a purchase from a shopping outlet years ago, paired with a white t-shirt while holding a cup of coffee.

I put my hand to my chest, “You scared me.” I watched Jacob in his stance, the way his hand gripped the mug, the way his chest raised with each breath he took, the way his gaze read the words “You’re beautiful,” even though I looked like I had just rolled out of hibernation.

“You feelin’ okay? You’re jumpy this morning. I let you sleep in; it seemed like you needed it.” Jacob had always looked out for me, even if it inconvenienced him.

“Yeah, I had a really weird dream, and I woke up feeling funky.” I continued to watch the children play, the sun beaming off the scooters as they rode in circles.

“What about?” Jacob set the coffee on the nightstand and sat on the bed, gesturing that the coffee was mine. Curiosity ran across his face.

“It felt like I lived an entire life. I had a different job, different friends, and even a different house. Everything was different. But it felt... real. So real that when I woke up, for a moment, I didn’t recognize this place.” I grabbed a hair tie and threw my hair up into a messy bun. Even my reflection in the mirror felt unfamiliar.

“Wow, that sounds like some dream.” Jacob sounded concerned with a bit of amusement.

I picked up the coffee off the nightstand. The rich smell filled the air, but even that felt off-fainter, like a distant memory rather than the usual comforting aroma that anchored me in the mornings. “Something wrong with the coffee?” Jacob asked me, looking more concerned.

“No, no, it’s perfect; thank you.” I took a sip and forced it down, along with the small feeling of guilt. I didn’t say what was really bothering me; I didn’t know how. It wasn’t just the vividness of the dream; it was the pull, the deep sense of loss as if I had woken up from something precious and true. The life I had dreamed about wasn’t just vivid; it was full of memories, details, and relationships that didn’t exist. Yet, I missed them.

I managed to push through the day, imitating normalcy, yet the effort felt forced, similar to walking in shoes that were a size too small. Tasks that should have been straightforward—making breakfast and responding to emails—seemed obscure, as if I were acting for an invisible crowd. I chose to wander through the city, anticipating that the fresh air

would refresh my mind, yet even that proved useless. The familiar streets appeared strangely disconnected; the vibrant hues of storefronts seemed quiet, and the typical flow of people passing by felt serene.

I noticed every person passing by, attempting to comprehend my environment. As I scanned the crowd, my gaze fell upon a little girl whose eyes met mine as we approached one another. A wave of comfort washed over me instantly. I knew her. She was in my dream. She was my daughter. A wave of unease washed over me, and I felt my stomach drop at the thought that she might recognize me. Indeed, that anxiety proved to be precise.

"Mommy, look, she was in my dream." The little girl tugged on her mom's knit sweater and pointed at me. My body tensed up, and I swore I went completely pale. I could have been sick right there, but I kept myself straight.

Thankfully, the mother wasn't paying too much attention to the daughter, but the young girl kept her eyes on me. She almost had a look of excitement, as if she wanted to run up to me and give me a big hug. Or maybe that's what I wanted to do in that moment. Her pink dress, adorned with flowers, barely covered her knees, and she held a fake fairy wand that appeared to glow. She was everything I remembered her to be.

Jacob and I never had kids, but we still had time to have some. It wasn't a touchy subject; we just didn't have the time, nor were we ready for a big change like that yet. But seeing this girl out in public felt like I was still dreaming. I had loved her, cared for her, and raised her. She was mine until I woke up. But she dreamt about me too? How is that possible?

I began to feel chills up my arms, which caused me to snap back into the present. The sun was setting. There were fewer people out on the streets. Stores were closing and restaurants were

opening. How far did I walk? I immediately hauled a taxi and headed home, trying to get the little girl out of my head.

In my dream, I worked as a personal trainer, which is very much not like me. I had a husband who worked in a law firm, and we had a daughter named Kiley, who resembled the girl I had seen in the city, but it must have been a mere coincidence. Despite their identical appearance, they could not possibly be the same person. It seemed like the perfect life. I attempted to let go of this dream and carry on with my actual life despite the fact that the dream life was undeniably THE dream; no offense to Jacob. He prepared chicken, rice, and green beans for dinner, a meal that happens to be one of my favorites. I helped him with cleaning and took care of different chores around the house, all the while attempting to shut out this persistent dream that yearned to creep in. Should I let it in? We settled in and enjoyed a movie until he drifted off to sleep. I went upstairs and, after some time, settled into bed. It's almost like I rushed into bed, wanting to fall back asleep and awake in that world. That life. Is that what I want? Is it bad if that life is what I want? I could have never imagined my life without Jacob. But it didn't seem all that bad.

The heat of the sun did not touch my skin when I woke up. Cotton sheets grazed my hands as I moved uncomfortably in bed alone. My head was pounding as if I got incredibly drunk the night before. I reached for the glass of water I put on my nightstand the night before, but it was not there. I sighed and forced myself to sit up. I was not in the same bedroom I was in last night.

"Mommy, mommy, look," Kylie said as she held up a drawing she made in class. I remained frozen in place. I must have been dreaming again. I pinched myself to try to wake up, but nothing happened. Was this real? Which was the dream?

My catastrophizing was interrupted by a sparrow chirping loudly next to my window,  
which was the only thing that felt real.

## Free Verse Poem

### Brief Introduction

This poem explores the idea of light as a guiding force in life, even when it is not immediately apparent. It considers the subtle ways we move forward—by nature, intuition, or something greater than ourselves. The visual of light, wind, and a shifting path depicts how life's journey can be both unpredictable and purposeful, full of difficulties and discoveries that form us.

The biggest adjustment I made throughout the rewriting process was deleting the original rhyme and metrical patterns. This allowed the poem to seem more organic and reflective, matching life's uncertain nature. The change was necessary because it returned attention to the poem's message—the peaceful, consistent presence of guidance—even in the midst of life's turmoil. It also made the text flow more freely, prioritizing imagery and metaphor above structure.

The updated version has more vivid descriptions and complex metaphors, including comparing the path to "shadows cast on restless water" and dreams to "wildflowers at dusk." These changes strengthen the emotional effect, allowing readers to engage with the poem on a more intimate level.

I'm happy with the changes I made to this piece. The final design embodies the spirit of resilience and trust in life's path, and I feel it strikes the right combination of openness and significance that I set out to accomplish. I would make no additional changes.

## **Guided By Light**

By Grace Gallowitz

The light spills through, a ribbon of gold unspooled,  
Its warmth stretches toward me, a quiet beckoning.  
That wants to guide me through my existence,  
Like hands gently steering a vessel in open water.

I am a passenger on my own ride,  
On winding trails, thick forests, and sunlit clearings.  
Each moment drifts by, a fragment of something larger,  
Balancing past and present in my hands.

The path shifts beneath me, uneven and alive,  
Like shadows cast on restless water,  
Yet beneath it all, the earth hums steadily,  
A rhythm that endures through storm, fire, and silence.

I ride onward, my heart open to the unknown,  
Dreams unfolding like wildflowers at dusk.  
The journey itself becomes the destination,  
A pulse beneath my feet, drawing me forward.

## **Formal Verse Poem**

### **Brief Introduction**

This poem is an exploration of guilt and the immense loneliness it may cause. Through powerful imagery and metaphor, I attempted to show how shame can overwhelm and isolate, creating a sensation of suffocation and despair. Writing this poem taught me about the difficulties and pleasures of formal poetry, specifically, the discipline needed to keep a regular rhyme scheme while retaining meaning and emotional depth.

Working with formal poetry taught me the most about how structure may improve a poem's meaning. The limits of rhyme and rhythm pushed me to carefully look at each word and line, ensuring that they fit both the story and the format. This method taught me to be precise and deliberate, which helped me improve the overall effect of the work.

In the revised version, I used an AB rhyme pattern to enhance the poem's flow and readability. This modification was significant because it resulted in a smoother, more engaging rhythm, enabling emotions to connect more readily with the reader. I also improved the imagery, replacing more abstract statements with concrete analogies such as "waves that crash but never reach the sea" and "the lock is too rusted tight." These changes made the poem more vivid and evocative, which increased its emotional effect.

Through this process, I've learned to appreciate how formal poetry can elevate a basic notion to something complex and powerful. This poem expresses the weight of guilt in a fresh manner, and I am pleased with how the edits have improved the expression.

## **Shame**

By Grace Gallowitz

A hug that lingers, far too tight to bear,  
It grips my chest, a weight I cannot flee.  
The fragile whispers echoing despair,  
Like waves that crash but never reach the sea.

A shadow looms, extinguishing the glow,  
Its presence stalls the hope I try to find.  
A voice that mocks the shame it won't let go,  
Its cruel refrain entwined around my wind.

A wounded heart, still aching to be free,  
Yet caged by fear, the lock too rusted tight.  
No space remains for love or empathy,  
Just endless battles waged within the night.

The mind, a tyrant ruling from the dark,  
Shame digs the pit and leaves its bitter mark.