

# Personal *Mandala*



This is the beginning of your Personal Mandala project, and is the first of several mandala-based projects we'll do this quarter. We've chosen the mandala because of its long history as an art form and relevance to our quarter's work. The form is also very flexible and can be executed in many different media.

A sketch of your Personal Mandala and a draft of your Mandala Narrative writing will be due on Thursday of Week Three. Final Project presentation/exhibition will be on Thursday of Week Four.

## The first stage of the Mandala project is to develop a central idea for your design.

Each of your mandalas will have one thing in common: they will be based on your life. If you're having a hard time finding a focus, or if you'd like ideas for approaches to telling /depicting a part of yourself, the ideas presented here on autobiographical writing may help you get started. Some of you may be more comfortable beginning with brainstorming images and symbols; others will want to do some writing prior to beginning the graphic design process as a way to help generate ideas to anchor the symbols in. Still others may find themselves going back and forth between drawing and writing to develop a mandala and narrative.

Because there are such a wide variety of ways that you can choose from to approach this project, there is no set process to follow in creating your design and developing your writing. Look on this handout as a place to begin your individual process; you can borrow or adapt ideas, and synthesize various ideas into an individual process of your own.

### The goals of the project are:

1. To develop a vocabulary of symbols relating to a facet of your life.
2. To create a mandala design incorporating the symbols.
3. To develop and write a narrative related to your mandala design.
4. To take part in a critique and peer, faculty and tutor revision process on the graphic and text elements of the project.



There are a good many approaches to telling your story.

Experiment with storytelling; relate the following approaches to the types of mandalas we saw in the slide lecture--some explained hierarchies and relationships among deities, others told a sequential story, and still others were rich with interwoven symbols relating to a story.

The following approaches, detailed on the reverse, are recommended as challenges to start writing. Incorporate as many of these or other ways of telling your story as you like.

- A Critical Path in Your Life
- A Critical Moment
- Multiple Perspectives
- Interview
- Portrait
- Anecdote/Sequence of Events
- Genre-Piece
- Timeline
- Yesterday
- Encyclopedia/Dictionary
- Metaphor/Dreamspace

### ●Critical Moment

A “critical moment” is a time when you experienced a dramatic shift in how you think, perceive the world, or who you are. As you write about a critical moment, consider all the factors that “create” the moment.

### ●Multiple Perspectives

Describe yourself or an event in which you participated from multiple perspectives, real or imaginary. Think carefully about how people you know might observe you and how you “fit” into the lives and thoughts of others. If you are so inclined, choose a real event, real people, and ask them what their perspective was.

### ●Interview

Allow yourself to be interviewed by a friend or classmate or interview yourself on paper. Ask yourself all the right questions.

### ●Portrait

Write with as much detail as possible about your physical presence, your mannerisms, etc. Focus on appealing to both the senses and the intellect. Avoid telling stories.

### ●Dialogues

Write fictitious or real dialogues between yourself and others. Label them accordingly: “What I should have said when my boss treated me like sh\*\*,” or “My Conversation with Jon Stewart,” or, in the case of real dialogues from memory, identify the time and place of the conversation (and give it a catchy title). Utilize conventions for creating dialogue from fiction: use quotation marks, line breaks & tabs, attributive phrases (she said, he snorted, she screamed), and interludes of prose that communicate body language, movements, setting, and other ambience.

### ●Anecdote/Sequence

An anecdote is typically a tightly contained sequence of events, often a single stream of events in a short amount of time. They’re the kinds of stories we relate in casual conversation to reveal funny or painful experiences, tastes, and attitudes about the world. Write several anecdotes of approximately the same length. Consider how the sequence of anecdotes work all together.

### ●Genre-Piece

Convert (imaginatively, with creative license) a part of your life into a genre piece (mystery, science fiction, romance, fantasy, etc.). While conforming your story to conventions of the genre, don’t let the significance of the story be lost; rather, find ways to use the conventions to amplify what you think is important about your experience.

### ●Timeline

Draw a long line and start putting points on it: personal memories, images, important events in your life, things you remember that happened in the world in your lifetime, and so on. Detail these events above and below the time line as you would historical events on a traditional timeline. You may find it interesting to work with multiple lines for different aspects of your life.

### ●Yesterday

Describe yesterday (or any recent day) with as much detail as possible. Even more detail than that.

### ●Encyclopedia/Dictionary

Write the encyclopedia or dictionary of your life and who you are. Define words/ideas/places by what they mean to you. Make up you own words, places, concepts and define them.

### ●Metaphor/Dreamspace

Describe in great detail some of your dreams, or describe your experiences through metaphorical or surrealist devices. Don’t lose track of what you’re trying to get at by telling these stories: you may find it interesting to write an interpretation of what your choices signify, the meaning of the symbols and images that you come up with.

# PEER REVIEW INTRO

Writing skills are essential to communication, self-expression, intellectual inquiry, and so on. Autobiographical writing, though personal, though uniquely reflective of your identity even in its flaws and flubs, requires and benefits from critique and revision just as all other writing does. An important part of your work in this program will be the discussion you have with other members of the class about your own writing and about their writing. It is essential that you share your responses to your classmates' work and listen to their responses to yours. Your growth as a writer will depend in part on your ability to learn from your classmates and to help them learn from you.

Here are some thoughts to prepare you for the peer review process

In "Writing Without Teachers," Peter Elbow makes a useful distinction between "criterion-based" feedback and "reader-based" feedback.

Here are some excerpts from Elbow's chapter on FEEDBACK:

Some people don't need to be encouraged to seek feedback; indeed, they need to be restrained. To some of you, that is, I would like to say, "Stop worrying so much about how your words work, about how good they are; just keep your mind on your writing, have fun, get confident, write lots." In short, if you are a compulsive worrier, and keep leaking your attention away from what you are doing to how well you are doing it, forget about feedback till you have done enough writing and sharing and feel more secure. But some of you need to be encouraged to get feedback. Probably you have been burned in the past. After all, getting feedback on an early draft usually means getting criticized before you've had a chance to make your piece as good as you can make it. . .

Once we've begun the feedback process together, gotten a little more comfortable with each others' language and kinds of questions that need to be asked and answered, you'll want to think carefully about how feedback fits in to your writing process. You may find one or the other of the two kinds of feedback either extremely helpful or extremely hindering at different stages of the process. As you begin to recognize your creative process as a writer, you'll also want to ask yourself if you are satisfied with it. Does it work well for you? For all that we like to recognize different learning and working styles, our appreciation of difference should not leave us thinking that we have to be whatever way we happen to be right now. We can change. I encourage you to try different methods of working. If you are surprised by how someone else writes their stories or essays, try to do it yourself and see how it works for you.

More from Elbow:

**Reader-based feedback** ...instead of telling you how your writing measures up to preestablished criteria, tells you what your writing does to particular readers...fundamental questions

- a. What was happening to you, moment by moment, as you were reading the piece of writing?
- b. Summarize the writing; give your understanding of what it says or what happened in it.
- c. Make up some images for the writing and the transaction it creates with you.

**Criterion-based feedback** helps you find out how your writing measures up to certain criteria... fundamental questions:

- a. What is the quality of the content of the writing: the ideas, the perceptions, the point of view?
- b. How well is the writing organized?
- c. How effective is the language?
- d. Are there mistakes or inappropriate uses of language?