

Homework #1

- 1) WRITE a letter to me introducing yourself to me as a writer: What's your relationship to writing? What are your hopes (and fears?) for this class? What happened with you and writing in high school (or elsewhere)? Anything else about you & writing you want to tell me? (e.g., is English your second language, writing you've done on your own, what you like to read . . .)

1-1½ pages, word processed, single-spaced with space between paragraphs

- 2) READ Didion's "Why I Write," Updike's "Why Write?," and Louis Menand's "Bad Comma." Updike is a novelist and short story writer who has also written a considerable amount of literary criticism and essays on general topics, from Ted Williams' last time at bat to the genesis of Mickey Mouse's ears; he is one of the major American writers of the second half of the 20th century. "Why Write," like Didion's "Why I Write," was originally a talk. Didion is a highly-regarded novelist and essayist of the late 20th century with an especially distinctive voice. Menand teaches at Harvard and writes literary and cultural criticism for the *New Yorker* magazine.

Select a brief passage—a sentence or two—from one of these three pieces and respond to it. NOTE: I am not asking you to explain the passage but to amplify it, extend it, question it, talk back to it—in short, to think about it in relation to something you know or have experienced.

1 page double-spaced.

We will discuss all three pieces in class and will share your written responses in class.