

ESSAY #2 (out-of-class)—Narration (A Personal Essay), due September 16th. Please upload a copy of your essay to turnitin.com by 11:59 pm that day. There will be a mandatory peer workshop of your rough draft on September 11th (Wednesday). Please bring three copies of your rough draft to class on that day.

Assignment: This is an exercise in creative writing in which you will take a memory from your own life (a significant episode, a memory of a person, place or thing, etc.) and **write a 4-5 page personal essay on this subject.** This story should be descriptive (using details), and should be written in the first person. Your challenge is to make this essay interesting for your audience (which, this time around, will be me). For those of you who need a prompt, I would like you to write an essay about an incident, which happened to you between the ages of five and eighteen (in general—you are welcome to go below or beyond this timeline as needed), which changed your life in some way. This can be a traumatic or sorrowful event, a joyous event, a funny event, or one that somehow delineated the crossing-over from childhood or adolescence into a more mature way of viewing the world.

Pay close attention to the following elements of your essay:

Your first lines: These should be a “grabber,” something to make your audience want to read more. Anchee Min opens her essay “Becoming Madame Mao” with “What does history recognize? A dish made of a hundred sparrows—a plate of mouths.” Scott Russell Sanders begins his essay “Under the Influence” with “My father drank. He drank as a gut-punched boxer gasps for breath, as a starving dog gobbles food—compulsively, secretly, in pain and trembling. I use the past tense not because he quit drinking but because he quit living.” Your first lines should not only give a hint as to what your essay is likely going to be about, but also make your audience want to keep reading.

Conflict: Most personal stories contain a conflict which must be resolved, or show that there is something at stake for the person telling the story. Make sure there is enough conflict (and/or elements of surprise or drama) in your story to keep your reader interested.

Ending: What image do you want to leave in your reader’s mind? Do you want them to laugh, cry, be amazed? Think about this as you conclude your essay.

Sentence structure: It’s very easy to constantly start sentences in a personal essay with “I.” Vary your sentences. **READ YOUR ESSAY ALOUD BEFORE FINISHING YOUR FINAL DRAFT.** You will catch grammatical errors and will find more areas of the essay which need revision.

A successful essay will:

Create images using precise detail

Use sensory details

Have a clear beginning, middle, and end

Show me the scenes in your essay as if I were there with you—use clear, strong descriptions

Follow proper MLA format: http://www.csus.edu/owl/index/mla/mla_format.htm
Be creative and courageous in your storytelling—this is YOUR story!