

Gatewood's Classroom
Personal Reflective Essay

The summer readings and introductory activities have been assigned in order to increase your awareness and understanding of personal, familial, and societal issues. The readings examine issues of self identity, family dynamics, and social conflicts. At this point in your lives, you should be engaging such concepts and examining the ways in which they affect you and the world. You should be beginning a process of introspection and awareness so that you reach a resolution, vision, and plan of where you want to be and what you want to do. This is the year to start shaping your life before it starts to shape you.

For this paper, you need to tell me about *one event which has shaped your life for the better or worse*. First, I want you to *portray the event in vivid detail with figurative language and sensory detail*. Second, I want you to *be introspective and to draw conclusions from the situation*. What was the event and how has it influenced you? What human truths has it taught you? What have you learned that you wish to share with others?

Despite the style, narratives are usually told through a combination of *anecdote and analysis*, including *statements of philosophy* as a person writing to other people to share insights and perspectives. This narrative process is also a good activity in preparation for the personal essay response for college applications.

Think in terms of your summer reading. In *Dorris's Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, the author illustrates many specific situations which change the lives of his characters—Rayona's swim to the yellow raft, Christine's faith in Sister Alvina's letter, Lee's enlistment in the army, Rayona's decision to ride Babe, Ida's acceptance of Clara's proposal. In "A and P," Updike portrays a situation in which a teen takes a heroic stand in order to win the affection of a girl. In "How it Feels to be Colored Me," Hurston uses a trip to a jazz club to speak to the nature of humans.

In at least a **typed two-three page essay** written in Modern Language Association (**MLA**) **format**, you need to pick an event from your own life and discuss how it has guided or developed your philosophy, belief, perspective, or approach to life. You do not need a cover page; you simply need to **put your name, instructor name, course name, and due date in the upper left corner double spaced**. Also, **please avoid** essay topics about traveling abroad or doing charity work—these are the most produced and most generic essays that college application boards read. And **please, please, please do not** tell me that you are a hard worker and a good student.

Personal narratives typically fall into three categories—You will probably write using the memoir style by recreating an event and then examining it.

Chronicle—The chronicle is typically a factual and informative account of a person's life which is told through omniscient first or third person and is told chronologically. It traditionally serves as a historical record of daily life, discussing the changes in oneself and in one's culture over time. It is usually friendly and guiding as well as seemingly objective. A basic structure for the chronicle would involve moving the reader through a major moment(s) of your life in sequential order. On the other hand, you could describe who you are, where you are at philosophically, where you want to be in the future, how you will accomplish this vision, and how you feel about the likelihood of successful implementation.

Stream of Consciousness—The stream of consciousness is typically a stylized and literary representation of one's life which is told through first person and is told with a free associative, amorphous structure. The writer seeks symbols and metaphors from past experience as portents and harbingers for future events. The language moves fluidly and elides unimportant details, focusing on central symbolic events; the writer draws meaning from the particulars of one's life. As readers, we are typically locked in the head of the writer and can move freely forward or backward through time. Writers sometimes construct a frame story in which to develop a stream of consciousness narrative as they use an external situation from which to probe the internal reactions and associations. With stream of consciousness, reality is filtered through the perceptions of the writer.

Memoir—The memoir is typically an emotional yet instructional narrative which transcends spacio-temporal consistency, moving forwards and backwards between past and present and future. Such writings examine the past, using experience to inform and instruct current behavior. Readers should learn from the major events of the author. Typically these writings are autobiographical. Writers of memoirs hope that their experiences can be educational to others. As with the other narrative forms, the writer seeks transformational events from the past. The memoir requires the writer to excavate the past and to analyze the meaning of memories like personal psychological artifacts.