Essay #1 Literacy Autobiography

Rough Draft Due Wednesday September 17
Final Draft Due Monday September 22
Revision of Graded Essay Due Tues September 30 (Optional)
Length: 600 words (about 2 ½ pages)
Format: Double –spaced, Times New Roman 12pt. font
Grade: 10% of Final Grade


Topic Write a narrative about your life as a writer and reader, using the following questions as guidelines. **Focus on only one question.**

*How did you learn to write? Who taught you?*
*Did you first learn to read and write in another language? How has this affected your writing?*
*Have you had any physical or mental disabilities that challenged your ability to read and write?*
*Did a particular school that you attend make it easier or more difficult to focus on reading and writing?*
*Do you have a favorite writer or book? What appeals to you about this writer or book?*
*What kinds of writing/reading have you done outside of school or work?*
*Do you ever write creatively? (a story, a poem, a song lyric, a rap, etc.) If so, why?*
*Talk about a time you wrote something that you were particularly proud of or embarrassed about.

You are already started on this! When writing this assignment, you should use the informal writing assignments you’ve already completed as a reference: the self-portrait, education / literacy reflection, or your educational / literacy goals paper.

Please don’t hesitate if you have any questions. You can always email me: bmiller@qcc.cuny.edu or visit my office hours Monday 12 - 1PM or Tuesday 9AM - 10AM and Tuesday 2PM – 3PM in H456.
Helpful Hints for Writing this Essay

What a personal essay is. What a personal essay is not.

A personal essay is an experience or anecdote from your life that is connected to an idea. The goal of a personal essay is to use an experience as a vehicle to explore a larger theme or question. A personal essay is not just a story, although a story usually provides a framework for the ideas presented.

A personal essay’s basic structure.

The essay will have two primary components: an experience from your life related to writing/reading/language that you can draw meaning as well as a central question or theme you wish to explore in your essay. Pick the experience you want to narrate first – keep in mind that it need not be a monumental experience. You can arrive at your central question or theme by considering the following questions:

- Why is this experience significant to you?
- Have you had other experiences that are in some way related to the one you have decided to explore? What idea connects them?
- How has this experience influenced your personality or feelings?

Beginning and ending the essay.

As you consider the experience you will focus on for your essay, ask yourself how you can tell the experience so that it creates both a beginning and an ending. You might tell half of the story at the beginning, then tell “the rest of the story” at the end. Perhaps you can tell the entire story at the beginning of your essay, then echo or mirror certain elements of the story at the end.

Show and tell.

Personal essay writers don’t just tell about what happened. They show. Here’s an example to illustrate the difference.

Show: Once my brother Karl and I were at the dentist waiting for my mom in the waiting room. A couple of older ladies walked in and settled themselves in the two chairs next to Karl. “How are you, young man?” said one. (People like Karl. He has an honest face.) Karl murmured a reply and the two old ladies started to converse discreetly. A look of intense pain came over Karl’s face as he looked over at me. “Marilyn! I have a problem!” he hissed.


Tell: Once my brother Karl and I were at the dentist waiting for my mom in the waiting room. A couple of older ladies walked in and settled themselves in the two chairs next to Karl. One asked how he was. He murmured a reply, but when the two old ladies started to converse discreetly, a look of intense pain came over Karl’s face as he looked over at me. One of them, he whispered, was sitting on his toothbrush.