

Personal Narratives

Why I am who I am...

Personal Narratives

- For this essay you will need to write about one specific experience that changed how you acted, thought, or felt.
- Use your experience as a spring board for reflection. Your purpose is not to merely tell an interesting story but to show your readers the importance & influence of the experience.
- Narrative Characteristics:
 - Narratives make a point
 - Narratives convey action and details
 - Narratives present a conflict and create tension
 - Narratives sequence events
 - Narratives use dialogue
 - Narratives are told from a point of view

Thoughtshots Technique

- A thoughtshot lets you go deeper into your own mind, and it allows you to go deeper into the mind of someone you are writing about.
- Allows the writer to pause and reflect on a particular event or a detail.
- Kurt Vonnegut (author of “Slaughterhouse-Five”) said that “When we read we meditate with other minds.”
 - A thoughtshot lets you do that as a writer, and sets things up so your reader can do that, too.

Thoughtshots Example

- You could write
 - “My mother always sat down in front of the television after dinner.”
- Or you could use thoughtshots and write
 - “I don’t know why my mother always sat down in front of the television after dinner. Perhaps it was the only time she really had for herself. My sister and I always had to do the dishes. My step-father usually went out to the garage to work on the old Buick that he always thought he could get up and running someday. Maybe Mom just liked being alone with her game show. She always watched Jeopardy with Alex Terbeck. I think she thought Alex was handsome and smart...”

Baby Steps Technique

- Used to describe an action step by step - or baby step by baby step.
- Baby steps give the reader meaningful details.
- Another way to think of it is “Exploding the Moment” - when a moment is slowed down extremely
 - Think about how most movies slow explosions down so you can see the full effect of the blast

Baby Steps Example

- You could write
 - “He walked through the doorway.”
- Or you could use baby steps and write:
 - “He grasped the cold doorknob and turned it slowly to the right. He pushed the door inward. The hinges squeaked and cold air rushed past the opening door. The room was dark. He darted his eyes to the right. Nothing. He pushed the door open a little farther, and slowly moved his right foot into the room. His shoe creaked a bit as it hit the polished hardwood floor.”

Possible Topics

- Did you ever have a long-held belief or assumption shattered?
- Can you trace the change to one event or a series of events?
- Is there a particular experience that you observed that has had a profound influence on your life?
- Is there a person that who has greatly influenced you?
- Is there a decision that you had to make, or a challenge or an obstacle that you faced?
- Was there ever a moment in your life when you decided to reform, to adopt a whole new outlook?
 - How would you characterize your attempt? (Successful? Unsuccessful? Laughable? Painful?)
- Winning or Losing – Although more common than winning, losing is less often explored in writing because it is more painful to recall.
- Milestones – When you write about milestones, pay special attention to the physical details that will both advance your story and make it come alive for readers.
- Daily Life – You might describe practicing, rather than winning the big competition, or cleaning up after, rather than attending the prom.