**The Personal Essay**

**Assignment Overview:**

A personal essay is narrative (aka a story-telling device) with a factual tilt. It is an essay in which you reflect upon who you are or what you believe by discussing an important idea, event, experience, place, person, or aspect of your personality. In real life, personal essays are often used when applying for jobs, scholarships, or university/college entrance. They are also frequently published in anthologies, magazines, or journals (both published and online).

**Your Objective:**

Brainstorm, plan, focus, organize, create, and edit your very own personal essay

**Your Topic:**

**In statement form:** “The noun that has made me who I am today”

**In question form:** Who are you (think identity, personality, goals, skills), what or who is responsible for making you this way, and how did it/he/she do this?

**Your Length Requirement:**

5-7 paragraphs (or, 1.5-3 pages), double-spaced

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**STEP 1: Learn by Example**

1. Read “Show Them” by Martin St. Louis, then use it to help you compare and contrast the form of an Anecdote and a Personal Essay. Try to come up with 3-5 similarities and 3-5 differences! Consider word choice, organization, sentence fluency, ideas, details, level of description, length, voice, conventions, creativity, etc.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **ANECDOTE** | **PERSONAL ESSAY** |
| **Similarities** | * Replace with similarities * Replace with similarities * Replace with similarities | |
| **Differences** | * Replace with differences * Replace with differences * Replace with differences | * Replace with differences * Replace with differences * Replace with differences |

**STEP 2: Brainstorm Ideas**

1. In the table below, brainstorm 2-3 ideas for each type of noun.
2. Highlight what you believe is the BEST idea for each type of noun.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **People** | **Places** | **Events or Experiences** |
| * Replace with topic * Replace with topic * Replace with topic | * Replace with topic * Replace with topic * Replace with topic | * Replace with topic * Replace with topic * Replace with topic |

1. Choose the topic you think will make the BEST personal essay from the table above. For each topic, consider:
   1. How much do you know/remember about it?
   2. How easy or difficult will it be to write about it?
   3. How much of an impact has it had on who you are?
   4. How easy will it be to reflect on something you learned/gained from it?
   5. How impactful will it be for your audience?
   6. How interesting/relatable will it be for your audience?

**STEP 3: Identify Your Writing Variables**

1. In the chart below, identify the writing variables for St. Louis’ written piece, as well as the written piece you will be creating for this assignment**. HINT:** To uncover your central (aka main) idea, replace the bolded words in the sentence below with your topic, along with a short description of who you are today. Voila - main idea!

Main Idea: **(Replace with topic)** made me who I am today.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **St. Louis’ Written Piece** | **Your Written Piece** |
| **Form** |  |  |
| **Purpose** |  |  |
| **Audience** |  |  |
| **Central Idea** |  |  |
| **Context** |  |  |

**STEP 4: Focus Ideas**

1. In the space below, brainstorm a list of supporting details that will help you build upon and express your main idea.

**My main idea is:** Replace with main idea

Details that will help me explain this idea to my reader are:

* + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
  + Replace with supporting detail
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  + Replace with supporting detail

**STEP 5: Create Your Outline**

1. Decide whether you are going to create an a) a list-style outline or b) a mind-map-style using [www.mindmeister.com](http://www.mindmeister.com) outline for your essay.
   * Note: if you choose list-style, simply type it out within this document; if you choose the mind-map, take a screenshot (use the Snipping Tool) of your mindmap and paste it into this document as an image.
2. Use your outline to organize the supporting details you brainstormed in Step 4, as well as any new ideas you come up with, into 3-5 categories. Each of these categories will become its own paragraph in your essay! The more ideas you can brainstorm now, the easier it will be to write your essay later – FYI just because you write it down on your outline doesn’t mean you HAVE TO use it in your essay.