

## **The Personal Narrative (often used in scholarship essay writing)**

According to *Fastweb.com*, one of the most common scholarship essay prompts falls under the category of “Background and Influences.” The website explains this type of prompt in the following manner: “Who you are is closely tied to where you’ve been and who you’ve known. To learn more about you, some scholarship committees will ask you to write about your background and major influences.” The site then lists the following examples:

- Pick an experience from your own life and explain how it has influenced your development.
- Who in your life has been your biggest influence and why?

These types of prompts lend themselves to narrative writing as do many college application prompts. Therefore, you will write a narrative essay following the guidelines outlined in this assignment sheet.

### **The Narrative Essay: The Basic Task**

- Write an essay about a significant event in your life.
- Choose an event that will be engaging for readers and that will, at the same time, tell them something about you.
- Tell your story dramatically and vividly, giving a clear indication of its autobiographical significance.
- It would be natural to use a first-person, singular (“I”) narration for this essay; structuring your essay chronologically may also be a good idea in many cases.

### **Autobiography: A “Story” About You**

This narrative essay assignment is like a short story, except it is autobiographical, which means it is a *true* story about you, the author. Choose an event in your life that is significant or important to you (but bear in mind when you select a topic you will be sharing with classmates during peer editing). This should be a story that you want to tell. **Please choose an event that occurred prior to one year ago.** The perspective made possible by the passage of time, I believe, will help you write a more thoughtful and interesting essay. Your topic need not be overly dramatic or life-altering; however, try to find one that you are comfortable and excited to work with and one that lends itself to plenty of detail and description.

### **Description and Dialogue: “Showing” the Story vs. “Telling” the Story**

When recounting your story, you will want the reader to “be there” with you, picturing what you saw, hearing what you heard, and feeling what you felt. It is important in your essay, therefore, to provide detailed descriptions of the places and people involved. You may also want to include some dialogue, letting some of the characters in your story speak for themselves. We can learn a great deal about people's personalities by the way they talk and what they say. An exchange of dialogue can also reveal the emotions in play (two people are angry with each other), or indicate the relationships between the speakers (one dominant, the other meek), or simply

provide information about past or current action (like a story within a story). Don't overdo it with dialogue. Doing so will simply bog the story down.

### **Significance: The "Moral" of the Story**

In this essay, your audience will want to learn a little about who you are and, through you, something about the world or life as you see it. This "**something about world or life through your eyes**" is what we call the "significance" of the essay, but it need not be philosophically profound. Life is full of simple lessons and small insights. These are important, and readers appreciate little gems. Don't worry if, right now, you aren't sure what makes your story special or important. If you think your story is worth telling, even if you can't say why, then most likely it is. Often the moral occurs to a writer after he/she has completed telling the story.

### **Format:**

- Typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font.
- 1.0" margins (the default is 1.25", you *will* have to change it!)
- Concentrate on details, voice, and showing rather than telling.
- **Length:** 2 pages.