

## **Biographical Essay**

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Your first major assignment for this class will be the biographical essay. This essay is worth **15 points** or 15% of your grade.

- The biographical essay should focus on one event in your life that you think is important. This is not your whole life story. All of the events and details in the story should be related to only that one event.
- Your biographical essay must be between 2 and 4 pages long. The pages should be in 12 point font (times new roman or equivalent) and should be double spaced (meaning one line of text followed by one blank line—not two blank lines).
- Your essay should pay special attention to the important parts of creative writing: narrative arc, showing not telling, and dialog.

For this essay, you will be required to turn in three drafts:

- The first draft will be due on **September 22<sup>nd</sup>** (T/Th Class) or **September 23<sup>rd</sup>** (M/W Class) for peer review.
- The second draft will be due on **September 29<sup>th</sup>** (T/Th Class) or **September 30<sup>th</sup>** (M/W Class) for instructor feedback.
- The final draft will be due on **October 27<sup>th</sup>** (T/Th Class) or **October 28<sup>th</sup>** (M/W Class) for grading.

Late or incomplete drafts:

- All drafts must be complete, including the first draft. If a draft is incomplete, it will lose up to 5 points.
- All drafts must be turned in on time. Late drafts will lose one point per day (up to 5 points). Late drafts begin losing points at the **beginning** of class on the due date. If you do not have the draft at that time, it's late. Drafts more than 5 days late will not be accepted.
- Second and final drafts must include all previous drafts. The second draft must include the first draft, and the final draft must include the first and second draft. If you do not turn in previous drafts, you will lose up to 5 points.
- Second and final drafts must be changed and improved for the next draft. If a draft is turned in unchanged, you will lose up to 5 points.

Your final drafts will be graded on the following:

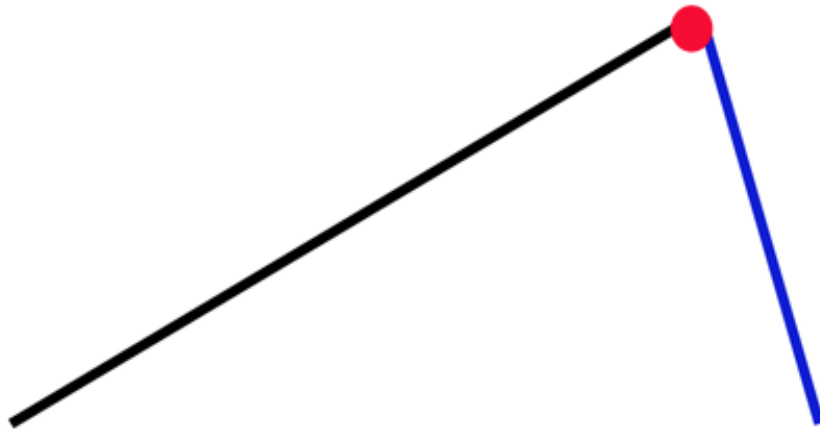
- Do you follow the assignment, including format and page length?
- Does the essay focus on one important event from your life?
- Do you have a clear narrative arc, including rising action, climax, and falling action?
- Do you attempt to “show not tell”?
- Do you use correct dialog?
- Is your essay clear and easy to understand?
- Are spelling, grammar, and word choice correct?
- Does the paper improve between drafts? Are the second and final drafts better than the first?

## Narrative Arc

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An important part of any story, fiction or non-fiction, is the narrative arc:

### **The Narrative Arc**



A narrative arc generally has three pieces:

- The rising action, which above is represented by the black line.
- The climax, which above is represented by the red circle.
- The falling action, which above is represented by the blue line.

### **Rising Action**

As you can see from the picture, the rising action is usually the longest part of the story. In a three-page story like ours, the rising action might be two pages or more. The rising action does many things:

- It introduces characters and situations in the story.
- It introduces a problem.
- It builds up to the climax.

In an essay like ours, there are two major kinds of problems, internal and external:

- Internal problems are something that is happening inside of a character. For example:
  - The character is sick.
  - The character is crazy.
  - The character doesn't know what to do.
  - The character is confused.
  - The character is angry.

- External problems are something that is happening outside of a character. For example:
  - The character is in danger from nature.
  - The character is in danger from another person.
  - The character is in danger a societal problem.
  - The character is fighting.
  - The character is arguing.

Many stories have both internal and external problems.

### **Climax**

The climax is often a very short part of the story, but it's the most important part of the story. During a climax, some sort of change must happen. For example:

- The problem or problems from the rising action are solved.
- The problem or problems from the rising action become worse.
- Something the character was expecting does or doesn't happen.
- The character thinks about his or her situation in a new way.

Because the climax is the most important part of the story, everything in the rising action must "build" toward the climax. This means:

- Characters introduced in the rising action should be involved in the climax (at least loosely).
- Events mentioned in the rising action must be important to the climax.
- Nothing and no one should be mentioned that has nothing to do with the climax.

### **Falling Action**

The falling action is usually the simplest part of the story. This part concludes your story and tells what happens next. Depending on your type of story and your type of problem, this might be one page or it might only be one sentence (such as, "And they lived happily ever after). Use the falling action to explain anything that wasn't clear yet, but make sure you don't put too much. Most readers can easily guess what will happen next.

## Showing Not Telling

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Description is a very important part of any creative essay. Details will help your reader become more involved in the story.

- Avoid using “be” verbs in descriptions. Use action verbs instead of simple adjectives.
  - The house is big. (telling)
  - When I looked up at the house, it towered over me. It felt like the roof touched the sky. (showing)
- Give details that help your reader to create an image. However, be careful of using too many details: just making a list of adjectives is not good writing. That kind of writing is called “purple prose,” and you should avoid it.
  - My brother is tall. (telling)
  - My brother can touch the rim of a basketball hoop without jumping. (showing)
  - My very tall handsome brother can touch the high orange rim of a regulation basketball hoop without jumping up off the ground (purple. Don’t do this. Try to keep it simple).
- Instead of being direct, use a short story that explains the situation and lets the reader come to the conclusion you want.
  - My grandmother is kind. (telling)
  - When I was young, I hurt my knee when I was playing outside. My grandmother carried me into the house and put me on my bed. She brought me some soup and set beside me, talking and laughing, until I forgot all about my knee. (showing)

### Practice

- I am smart.
- The woman is old.
- My mother is a good cook.
- The taxi driver was a bad driver.
- The fish smelled bad.
- That computer was expensive.
- Haeundae is crowded in the summer.
- I am not good at math.
- My friend is slow.
- English is difficult.