Midterm Writing Exam: Personal Essay (10%)

# What is a personal essay?

Personal essays are often anecdotal, experiential, and personal—allowing people to express themselves in a creative and, quite often, moving ways. A personal essay describes a personal experience, usually in the first-person singular. Its purpose is not merely to describe an anecdote, but also to illustrate a point of view or provide insight. The idea is to go beyond describing a list of events or facts: you want to make connections between them and engage in a meaningful reflection about them. *Educated* is an example of a very long personal essay, or sequence of personal essays.

## Other examples (please choose and read ONE before you write your plan)

Here are some great examples of personal essays:

1. 1: Zora Neale Hurston, ‘How it feels to be colored me.’  
   <https://www.thoughtco.com/how-it-feels-to-be-colored-me-by-zora-neale-hurston-1688772>
2. Mark Twain, ‘Two ways of seeing a river.’  
   <https://www.thoughtco.com/two-ways-of-seeing-a-river-by-mark-twain-1688773>
3. Nora Ephron, ‘A few words about breasts.’  
   <https://genius.com/Nora-ephron-a-few-words-about-breasts-annotated>
4. Sallie Tisdale, ‘We do Abortions Here.’  
   <https://harpers.org/2015/08/we-do-abortions-here/>

## Task:

Answer this question: How have you learned a valuable life-lesson? Write a personal narrative essay that responds to this question (450 words minimum). Your life lesson could be about:

* a personal difficulty that you have learned to overcome
* a personal value or life goal that you wish to pursue
* a personal quality that you have discovered in yourself

To do this well, just imagine that you are telling your story to a friend who is going through the same problems: You want to tell them what happened and what you learned from it, in a way that will be meaningful to them.

You also need to force yourself to explore college-level ideas. Every week in our personal discussions, we watch Youtubers explore aspects of everyday life, but in an educated, college-level way. They refer to texts they have read about the subject, videos they have watched, research they are aware of. You are strongly encouraged to do the same.

## Food for thought: Common values and life goals

* Becoming a better person
* Education and learning new skills
* Excelling at work, building my career
* Faith, spirituality, or finding meaning
* Family relationships, building a family
* Financial stability or financial independence
* Having fun, relaxing, hobbies
* Having material things, having a rich lifestyle
* Healthy mindset, life balance
* Making a difference in the world around me
* Physical fitness or health
* Spending time with friends
* Supporting family and friends in need
* Traveling and life experiences

# Structure:

## 1. Introduction:

Start your essay with an intriguing anecdote that is related to the topic you wish to explore in your essay. Finish your introduction with a thesis statement. The thesis statement states what your essay will be about (the difficulty, value, or personal quality) and explains what you will say about it (the lesson you learned about it).

**Thesis statement**

**What your text is about**

Learning to cope with anxiety…

**What your text will say about it**

…has allowed me to enjoy life more and be more in tune with myself.

## 2. Body paragraph 1:

Write about a **negative** event that shaped your perspective about the topic. It could be a paragraph about problems that you had before you learned your life lesson. The first sentence must be a topic sentence that clearly indicates the event you will describe (the topic), as well as the point you want to make about it (how it relates to the thesis, as an idea)

**Topic  
sentence 1**

**Topic for THIS paragraph**

My panic attacks…

**How it relates to the thesis**

… used to prevent me from fully enjoying life.

### How do develop a body paragraph

Develop the narrative with specific events and examples that will help the reader understand your experience. Always connect the events to your ideas: After you finish telling us an anecdote, explain how it relates to your ideas in a few sentences. Because we want college-level ideas, it’s a good idea to explicitly refer to specific ideas from the videos, reading activities, or *Educated*. Stay focused on your own ideas and story, though: I do not want to read video summaries. I want to read personal essays. Use precise words to clearly express your observations and your feelings.

Finish the paragraph with a concluding sentence that summarizes its overall idea.

## 3. Body paragraph 2:

Write about a **positive** event that shaped your perspective about the topic. It could be a paragraph about a positive experience that helped you learn your life lesson. The first sentence must be a topic sentence that clearly indicates the event you will describe (the topic), as well as the point you want to make about it (how it relates to the thesis, as an idea).

**Topic  
sentence 2**

**Topic for THIS paragraph**

Taking yoga lessons…

**How it relates to the thesis**

… has helped me relax and become aware of my own emotions and surroundings.

## 4. Conclusion

In your conclusion, summarize the idea you expressed in the first paragraph in about 2-3 sentences. Then, summarize the idea you expressed in the second paragraph in about 2-3 sentences. The final sentence should be a concluding sentence: the overall outcome of the described events and a reflection on their significance.

**Concluding sentence**

**A reflection on the significance of your story**

My experience with anxiety has taught me to accept my limits and to live in the present moment. But maybe it’s not a lesson only for people with anxiety. Maybe it’s for everyone.

# 102 Personal Essay (Midterm)

Name: Group:

# Writing: Developing arguments based on personal experiences

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **0-2** | **4** | **6** | **8** | **10** |
| There are almost no ideas, almost no anecdotes, or the ideas are disconnected from the anecdotes, or the text is much too short. | There are ideas based on some anecdotes, though maybe tangentially. | Somewhat developed college-level ideas based on some relevant anecdotes. | Developed college-level ideas based on developed relevant anecdotes. | Ideas and anecdotes are also particularly detailed or thoughtful. |

# Writing: Organization and essay format

| **0-2** | **4** | **6** | **8** | **10** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Work does not follow format requirements. | Unclear purpose; text contains paragraphs and some developed ideas, but parts are incoherent or underdeveloped; unfocused introduction and conclusion. | Somewhat clear purpose; text is overall coherent and contains two coherent development paragraphs; basic introduction and conclusion. | Mostly clear purpose; paragraphs are coherent and distinct; thesis statement and topic sentences; coherent introduction and conclusion. | Clear purpose; ideas are coherent and logically organized; clear thesis statement and topic sentences; effective introduction and conclusion. |

# Writing: Grammar and vocabulary

| **0-2** | **4** | **6** | **8** | **10** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Simple structures are used with many mistakes; somewhat unclear vocabulary. | Simple grammar is generally correct. Intermediate gr. may be absent, wrong or over-used; generic, repetitive or vague, informal vocabulary (guy, big, thing, someone, etc.). | Simple grammar is correct. Intermediate gr. is generally correct: “*he was looking,*” (past prog.), complex sentences, etc.; clear vocabulary with some academic terms. | Text is generally complex, and a variety of intermediate grammar is used correctly. Advanced gr. may be incorrect; clear vocabulary with some academic terms, and informal vocabulary is avoided. | Some advanced grammar is also used correctly, and as needed (“*he had looked*,” “*he would have liked*,” etc.); vocabulary is overall varied, precise and academic. |

# Writing: Language mistakes (1 mistake per X words)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 per 10 **2**  1 per 12 **3** | 1 per 14 **4**  1 per 17 **5** | 1 per 20 **6** | 1 per 27 **7**  1 per 35 **8** | 1 per 42 **9**  1 per 50 **10** |

**Total: \_\_\_\_ / 40**

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| Other comments: |

*Rev June 6, 2021*