Paper 1
Personal Experience Essay

Due:  Monday July 13  Draft
       Wed July 15  Final (+ all Preliminaries – see “What To Turn In” below)

Length:  at least 3 pages

Format:  Use this standard formatting system for this and future papers in this class. It will also meet most of your other professors’ expectations for college papers.

Your Name
Course number and title (Engl 101 Composition)
Professor’s Name
Name of Assignment and Version (Personal Experience Essay
Version and Prompt option (Prompt A Draft 1)
Date you turn the paper in

Your Essay’s Title, Capitalized Like This

Indent the first line of each paragraph. Always double space (after the heading).

Please DO NOT skip additional spaces between paragraphs. You can find an example of a paper formatted in this way on page 778 of your textbook Patterns for College Writing.

Papers absolutely must be typed and stapled. I will not accept unstapled papers.

Your papers do not need a title page. Usually, title pages are used only with papers of ten pages or more.
What is a Personal Experience Essay?

A Personal Experience Essay (also sometimes called a Personal Essay or Personal Narrative) is a type of narrative essay (the genre we’ve been discussing in class). Like all Narrative, it tells a story; in this case one that is both true and about you. The personal experience essay is a common form; you have probably read them in magazines, on the editorial, arts or “living” pages of newspapers, and in English or writing classes. The introductions to books are often written in the form of a personal essay. In this genre, the writer tells a story about his or her life in order to illustrate a larger point. Often, the essay tells of a moment of discovery in which the writer learned something about himself or herself. Often, that personal discovery has larger social implications which the essay, goes on to explore.

For example, a friend of mine recently published a personal essay called “The Mini-van.” It begins by describing her cluttered and juice-stained mini-van, then goes on to describe her stop-and-go progress toward a destination that is never named. At one red light, she grabs a snack to toss back to her toddler, who is crying in the back seat. At another, she grabs her notebook from the next seat over to scribble down a few lines of a story she’s working on. It goes on to explore the larger topic, how writers juggle their work and motherhood, and to comment on the value of this one possession, her mini-van, to that struggle.

How is a Personal Experience Essay written?

Personal essays are told from a first person point of view (“I … me … etc.). Narrative essays tell a story. Personal Narratives are most commonly written in chronological order. Because narrative essays are usually about events that have occurred in the past, they are most commonly told in the past tense (I drove up the street… As I was driving up the street…). Some narrative essays are written in the present tense (I am driving up the street…) to create an effect of immediacy. Flashbacks, speculations about the future and other devices that bend the chronological order are also common.

A Narrative Essay has two tasks: to tell a story and to interpret it. The most common strategies essayists use to accomplish them are to…

- first tell the story, then interpret it, or
- tell the story interpreting it as they go, or
- tell the story infusing it with suggestive details and imagery so that its meaning shines out.

Writing the Paper - Your 3 Tasks:

1. Before beginning to write this paper:

   Review the “Planning” and Structuring” sections of the “Narration” chapter of your textbook, *Patterns for College Writing* (pages 84-87). (Note: many of the terms, principles and requirements in this assignment description are explained in that chapter, so be sure you’ve read the whole thing!).

2. Write your Personal Narrative using one of these Topics/Prompts (choose one):

   A. Describe an experience in which someone treated you in a way that surprised you that later, looking back on it, you realized was influenced by larger social factors. Perhaps you were insulted, belittled or treated badly because of your race or gender; or perhaps someone made a presumption about you based upon your name, the way you dressed, your neighborhood or your way of speaking? Describe the experience itself as well as the point at which you
realized it was more than a personal or isolated event. Explain what social factors you believe were involved and why.

B. Write a letter to a specific person or small group in which you tell them a personal story in order to convince them to do or believe something. Be straightforward with them about what you want them to do or believe and how the story supports that. It should also have a deeper meaning or larger purpose and wider audience and be written to be published or distributed. In this letter, describe how the personal experience(s) brought you to the beliefs you wish to convey. Include descriptive details and information about the context within which you are writing.
[example: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail.”]

Whichever Topic/Prompt you choose, the story you tell should be true and yours. Write in the first person. Use chronological order, bending it as you see fit. You may write in either past or present tense, but keep your tense consistent through the essay. Infuse your narrative with details. Your essay should have a thesis (a central point); it can be stated or implied but should be introduced early in the paper. Support your thesis by interpreting the story in one of the three ways described above (in “How is a Narrative Essay Written?”). You do not need to have introductory, body and conclusion paragraphs, but your narrative should have a sense of wholeness, of beginning-middle-end.

3. After you have finished drafting your Narrative Essay (but before you turn it in):
   1) Reread it checking to make sure you have done everything underlined in the paragraph above.
   2) Review the “Revising” and “Editing” sections of the Narration chapter of Patterns (pages 87-89) and use both ‘checklists’ to evaluate and improve your draft. (Do this on a hard copy, so you can turn it in.)
   3) Finally, write a brief Writer Reflection describing your writing, revising and editing processes (about half a page; it can be hand written). Be specific about how you used the assignment description and the book. Staple this to your paper when you turn it in.

Note: revising and editing are required parts of this [and future] paper assignment(s), as is the Writer Reflection.

4. What to turn in with the Final version:
   1) your final paper, on top,
   2) earlier draft(s)
   3) evidence of revision editing checklists used
   4) all three of the freewrites you did in class during this unit (the three paper topics).