

*Essays - 1*  
**Personal Essay**

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- Each instructor develops her or his own assignments. Your instructor and the assignment sheet s/he has provided are the two best sources for guidance as you work toward a final draft. The handouts/tutorials for the types of essays feature general guidelines to help you write solid essays, but should be treated only as supplements to your instructor and the assignment sheet.

**Purpose**

- To share an important event, person, place, or object in your life, usually through the use of narrative techniques including vivid detail and dialogue.

**Example Introduction (by Fred)**

*My father taught me how to give. Throughout my childhood, he found ways to create unique, exciting experiences for me. To do that, he often had to work late to make an extra sale, or he had to spend hours organizing parties; one time, he even traded a car so that I could have a dirt bike. This could have spoiled me, but instead it made me believe in the value of giving. Through his generosity, my dad showed me that investing in the happiness of others enriches both their lives and yours. No time better exemplifies this lesson than the time my father called in several favors and took a day off work so that I could meet Yao Ming.*

**Topic**

- Pick a subject that matters to you. You are who you are because of the people and events in your life; try to determine which influences have had the biggest impact on the person you have become.
- Freshmen often write about car accidents, break ups, parents, proms, graduation, and starting college. If you write about one of these topics, be especially mindful of details and a voice that make the story distinctly your own.
- Narrow it down. For reasons that will become clear in the Specifics section below, it is best to choose a narrow topic. Instead of your senior year, write about the last day of school. Instead of the last day of school, write about getting out of your last class. The more compact the time period, the better developed and impactful your description of it can be.

Example: *Fred will use the Yao Ming story to show how hard his father worked to give him “unique, exciting experiences.”*

**Significance**

- The entire paper should hinge on why the topic is meaningful to you.

Example: *Fred’s paper about his dad says pretty plainly in the introduction why his father is worth talking about: he taught him the value of giving.*

## How Fred's Essay Ends

*Yao lumbered back into the hall, out of sight. Dad stood in a pool of glimmering light reflecting off the hardwood. His phone buzzed, but he turned to me with a warm smile, ignoring the call.*

*"I thought he'd be taller," Dad joked.*

*I just hugged him. I wanted to show him how much he meant to me, so I wrapped my scrawny arms around him, breathed in that stinging aftershave, and said, "Thanks, Dad." His voice caught in his throat as he said, "You're welcome." I knew the day had meant as much to him as it had to me. For a person like my dad, making other people's day makes his day.*

### Specifics

- 👂 Bring the topic alive for the reader so that she can experience it as you did. This helps your reader understand why your event, person, place, or thing had such a profound impact on you.
- 👂 Details. Appeal to your reader's five senses to create an experience.
- 👂 It is especially good if you can work these details into action, so the "plot" keeps moving while the "setting" and "characters" are presented.

Example: Notice in Fred's conclusion above how the aftershave detail appears within an action Fred takes: hugging his dad.

- 👂 Dialogue. To help your reader "hear" the people involved in your essay, give them a voice. Note that it is not terribly important that you present what people said word-for-word, though you should try to be honest.

Example: When Fred's dad says he thought Yao would be taller, it gives the reader an idea about who he is, specifically what kind of sense of humor he has.

### Structure

- 👂 In the case of narratives, a chronological order is often the way to go. For other kinds of structures, see the Sam Houston Writing Center handout/tutorial on Organization.
- 👂 A narrative can be "lived" by your reader so that s/he can experience the significance of your topic and understand why it matters to you. This is another reason (1) to narrow a long event down to a single, representative event or (2) to think of a specific event that illustrates the importance of your person, place, or object.

### Voice

- 👂 Take advantage of the flexibility that many instructors allow with this essay. Find a writing style that shows your personality. Eventually, you will be writing more formal essays with many strictures. For this one, try to put your voice on the page. This can bring the material to life just like details and dialogue can.