

ENG 101/Advanced Composition
Summer Project
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Suggestion:

Since this course is a writing intensive, college-level course, a lap top or tablet with keyboard would be incredibly useful.

As part of your essay heading, please include your WritePlacer score.

Part I: Read and Annotate

Woe is I by Patricia T. O'Connor 3rd Edition
ISBN 13: 978-1573223317

Eats, Shoots and Leaves by Lynn Truss
ISBN 13: 978-1592402038

Part II: Write a Personal Statement

Read the following and complete the indicated tasks.

In Advanced Composition, the process of writing will be paramount. The summer project will allow you to work with that process. The Personal Statement you write will serve two purposes: it will reveal your writing ability, and it will be a paper you can use for a college application.

If you plan on attending college, you most likely will be required to write a personal statement. The personal statement allows the reader to get a feel for who you are as a person. It not only includes the achievements and accolades you have earned up to this point, but it also speaks to the obstacles you have overcome.

There is no right way to write this statement; however, it must provide additional information not included in the general application, and it must describe what and how events have shaped you.

Characteristics of an Effective Personal Statement

But before you begin to write your Personal Statement, remember:

An effective essay is thoughtful and honest. It reflects who you are, but also shows you have a good perspective on your past, as well as an idea about your future. It gives the reader a compelling picture of who you are, and it includes your goals, values, achievements and roadblocks.

An effective essay will use appropriate grammar and syntax, clear and compelling academic language, and will be devoid of errors. It will be the precise length requested.

An effective essay will clearly answer the question, and will have an introduction that begs the reader to keep reading.

Most importantly, as with any writing, **an effective essay** is not written in one step. You will need to brainstorm, determine theme, write a draft, and edit before you can consider your work complete.

Assignment A: Brainstorming

Just as with any essay, you must brainstorm to gather all your ideas and thoughts for your statement. This step does not include any editing, and no ideas are censored.

One way to start the editing process is to honestly answer the following questions:

- What are my strengths?
- What are my weaknesses?
- What is special about me?
- What kind of person am I?
- What do I care about?
- Why is (BLANK) more important to me than (BLANK)? (Fill in the blanks.)
- What is it like growing up in (BLANK)?
- What is it like going to school at (BLANK)?

You are to completely answer these questions and save the information.

You will be submitting this the first day of school.

Assignment B: Focus Thoughts

Once you have completed the above, examine your life and experiences by completing the following:

- Begin to focus your thoughts by examining your actual experiences uncovered through your brainstorming. Complete the following statements with detailed information.
 - An achievement that made me feel terrific...
 - Something I have struggled to overcome or change about myself or my life...
 - An event or experience that taught me something special...
 - A "real drag" of an experience that I had to get past...
 - Someone's act of strength or courage that affected me...
 - A family experience that influenced me in some powerful way...
 - A lesson, class project, activity or job that had an impact on my academic or career goals...
 - A time I blew it, failed, made bad choices, and how I got past it...
 - Some memorable event or advice involving an older person...
 - An event that helps to define me, in terms of my background...

You are to completely answer these questions and save the information.

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Assignment C: Response to Thoughts

Choose one or two of your favorite responses from the list above. Check to make sure your written description addresses the following three questions. If it doesn't, add details so that the experience you describe will be vivid to a reader who doesn't know you.

- What were the key moments and details of the event?
- What did I learn from this event?
- What aspect of this event stays with me most?

- What does this event reveal about me?
- What makes it special or significant?
- How does this event make me special or make me stand out?

**You are to completely answer these questions and save the information.
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The Writing Process and your Personal Statement

A typical personal statement is 300-500 words in length. It includes an introductory paragraph that captures the main idea of the statement, four to six body paragraphs that include details about your experiences, and a conclusion that wraps up the ideas.

Choose **one** of the following prompts for your Personal Statement:

- **Prompt #1:** Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.
- **Prompt #2:** Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.
- **Prompt #3:** Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.
- **Prompt #4.:** Describe a character in fiction, a historical figure, or a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.
- **Prompt #5:** A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.

Assignment D: Write your Introductory Paragraph

Your introduction captures the main idea of the essay, and is where you establish the tone of your personal statement, set the scene, define its theme, and generally hook your reader by sparking interest with details, quotes, and clear/specific language. The thesis statement is not a three-prong statement.

**Write your introduction and save.
You will be submitting this the first day of school.**

Revise your Introduction

Below, find examples from a few of the introductory paragraphs from Personal Statements (both good and bad) that were turned in to University of California, Berkeley and can be found at <http://students.berkeley.edu/apa/personalstatement/introductions.html>. Read the statements and decide whether you think they could be used:

Here are some sample introductory paragraphs. Read them and determine if you think they are Good or Not...

1 INTRODUCTION. On September 16, 1990 I experienced the worst feeling of my life the feeling of incompetence. It was a feeling of indescribable disbelief. My mother, my only parent,

fell down the stairs of our home. It was then that I knew that I had to become a doctor to help people who were suffering like my mother. By attending your college, I will be able to fulfill my dream and to give back to my community through medicine. Good or Not?

1 ANSWER. Although this writer attempts to be specific in his introduction through the use of the date ("September 16, 1990"), overall this introduction is vague and bloated with words that don't convey an image. The writer says that he felt "indescribable disbelief" when his mother fell down the stairs, but we don't know what "indescribable disbelief" actually means: was he stunned into inaction? did he scream? Without the details, the writer's attempt to hook the reader fails. The opener also contains errors in punctuation ("On September 16, 1990 I experienced the worst feeling of my life the feeling of incompetence.") and uses the same word ("feeling") too many times.

2 INTRODUCTION. My father divorced us when I was in seventh grade. At that time, I was going through what my mother called my "difficult stage" because my world revolved around school, friends and boys, and "family" was often put on the back burner. I was unprepared for the resulting family crisis; my father, the man who nurtured my passion for art, literature and my love of languages, would no longer be a part of my life. At the time, I thought that I could not go on. Now I realize that my father's rejection, while extremely painful, gave me a resiliency and strength of character that I did not previously know I possessed. Good or Not?

2 ANSWER. This opener is quite strong. The writer's description of her father's action as a "divorce" is very vivid, and much more descriptive than if she had written that he "left" her. The writer also exudes a quiet confidence; she shows us she is smart by describing how her father helped instill her passion for "art, literature and...languages." We also know that she is by no means a perfect person; her honesty in describing her own failure to give her family a priority in her life is poignant, and the reader wants to learn more about her, how she resolved her crisis, and what she has learned from it.

3 INTRODUCTION. It was once said that "We have nothing to fear but fear itself," and that is a motto that I have lived by for all of my seventeen years on this earth. It is a motto that I have based all of my academic endeavors on. It literally came into effect one Wednesday morning earlier this year. I got called into the House One Principal's office at our school. I walked towards the office a little pondered. I had never been called into that office before, because that principal only handled the math and science departments of the entire school. I doubted that the principal even knew me. When I entered the office I was greeted by a group of familiar faces that I knew from my physics class. Our principal told us to have a seat and relax. The reason that we were called in was that there was going to be a Science Competition happening that Saturday and the school really wanted us to enter into it. The principal said that she knew it was short notice, but based on our performances in all our science classes she knew that we could pull it off. She stated that we were some of the only high school juniors and seniors who had completed and gone beyond the required science courses. (I personally had already taken a semester of both Physics and Physiology that year, and two of the other girls that were in there with me had already completed AP Biology.) Good or Not?

3 ANSWER. This writer is going to describe her greatest accomplishment, but she takes much too long to make her point. The opening sentence relies on a cliché ("We have nothing to fear but fear itself") to make its point, and the essay relies on the vague word "it" much too often. In addition, some of the writer's word choices are inappropriate ("I walked towards the office a little pondered"--"confused" or "worried" would have been more appropriate) and indicate a tendency to rely on big words when simpler ones will do. The writer is also a bit wordy ("all of my seventeen years on this earth;" "It literally came into effect"). The introduction also contains

irrelevant information ("that principal only handled the math and science departments of the entire school.") and does not provide the reader with a sense that the writer has reflected on her experience and extracted its larger meaning. We are not quite sure, for example, how the statement about fear connects to the rest of the paragraph or what the main idea or thesis is.

**After considering introductions 1 - 3, revise your introduction, as necessary.
When you are satisfied, save your work.**

Now that you are satisfied with your introduction, write your first draft.

Assignment E: First Draft

A draft is a work in progress. Composing often involves going back and forth among planning the essay, generating ideas, organizing the contents, and editing the results.

A first draft attempts to get something down on paper and capture the essay's meaning. A first draft is often the skeleton of the paper; it contains the overall structure, but may lack a clear theme, vivid language, fully developed paragraphs, and strong transition words and phrases.

Use your first draft to:

- Formulate a working introduction
- Organize your ideas

**Write your first draft and save.
You will be submitting this the first day of school.**

Assignment E Continued: Revise Your Draft

Step One: Concentrate on the whole essay by examining the essay's frame: the introduction. Ask the following questions:

- Will my reader know where my introduction ends and where the body of my essay begins?
- Will my reader know where the body of my essay ends and where my conclusion begins?
- Will my reader know which sentence is the main sentence in my introduction, and which is the main sentence in my conclusion?

Step Two: Examine the essay for continuity

- Make sure that the key points work together conceptually and are unified by your essay's theme.

Step Three: Create an outline of your draft

- Your outline should include:

Thesis Statement: Your thesis statement as written in the introduction.

- A. Topic sentence from the first body paragraph
 1. Example used in first body paragraph that supports the theme
- B. Topic sentence from the second body paragraph
 1. Example used in second body paragraph that supports the theme

Continue until your work is complete.

Examine the outline: Does the organization make sense? Does the topic sentences indicate a conceptual progression of ideas? Does each paragraph's topic sentence focus on your thesis, and does each example illustrate your main idea?

Step Four: Based on the above, revise your personal statement, making sure that the skeleton of your Personal Statement includes sufficient examples, the ideas are fully developed, and it contains meaningful paragraphs.

All assignments are to be printed, put into a folder, and submitted on the first day of school.

Things to consider when writing:

- Choose your words carefully. Don't think using big words will make you seem more intelligent. Often, it appears as though the paper is on Thesaurus overload, and the reader will wonder if you even know what the word means.
- Be who you are.
- Avoid filler words.
- Avoid using words such as: So, basically, and other stuff, really, goals and dreams, everyone, all people, things.
- Do not use second person.
- Use active verbs rather than passive. Re-read your essay and locate all forms of "to be" and substitute those words with active voice. For example: Don't say: My love of literature was fostered by my freshman English teacher. Say: My freshman English teacher fostered my love of literature.
- Use powerful diction to help you stand out.
- Do not use any contractions.
- Avoid predictable (and stereotypical college essay phrases) such as "I learned a lot," "I learned to work with others," "It was a fun and challenging experience" "I learned that everyone is different," etc.
- Use normal font – no bold or italics. Use size ten or twelve. Standard fonts work best: Times, Palatino, New York, and Courier.
- Avoid these common errors: fragments; run-on sentences (comma splices); redundancy ("The reason...is because"); spelling errors; slang or colloquial (local) language
- Avoid blunders.
 - To do that, make sure you avoid the following:
 - Repeat information contained elsewhere in the application.
 - Complain about a circumstance rather than explain it.
 - Discuss money or a college's ranking as a motivating factor for applying.
 - Rely on gimmicks rather than substance.
 - Make claims that are not backed up by the application.
 - Have mechanical errors or errors of usage, clichés, or meaningless prose.
 - Turn in an essay that is too long or too short.

Summary of Assignments	Due Date
Assignment A: Brainstorm	Printed and in folder to be handed in first day of school
Assignment B: Focus Thoughts	Printed and in folder to be handed in first day of school
Assignment C: Response to Thoughts	Printed and in folder to be handed in first day of school
Assignment D: Introduction	Printed and in folder to be handed in first day of school
Assignment E: Essay	Printed and in folder to be handed in first day of school