



College Writing 101

Writing a Memoir: Beginning and Ending to Drafting your memoir...

Course Outline – Week V

Writing a Memoir -See assignment guidelines for Essay #2

Writing a Memoir -Beginning and Ending & Guiding Your Reader, And Using Dialogue, Description and Narration.

Class Outline – Week V

- **Attendance**
- **Lecture :** Beginning and Ending to writing your first draft of the memoir.
- Assignment Detail
- Conclusion

Writing a Memoir

Essay Assignment #2 - The Memoir

We write memoirs to explore our past --- about shopping for a party dress with Grandma, or driving a car for the first time, or breaking up with our first love. Memoirs focus on events and people and places that are important to us. We usually have two goals when we write a memoir: to capture an important moment and to convey something about its significance for us (NFG).

Recall a time when a person or event taught you something about yourself, something that you could not fully understand until now. Write a memoir that describes the person and/or narrates the event. Include vivid details that would allow your reader to experience your memoir fully. Be sure to make clear what significance the person or event had on your life (NFG).

Writing a Memoir

Essay Assignment #2 - The Memoir

Writing about yourself sounds simple. But it could also be the hardest essay that you will write this semester. Unlike more formal genres of the essay where the format is already given, in a memoir you must develop your own structure. Unlike academic essays where a formal voice is appropriate, here you must find a voice that suits your personality and your story. Here are some guidelines for those who aren't sure what topic to choose, or what structure to give their essay:

Writing a Memoir

Choosing a Topic for your Memoir:

This is a short essay (at least 2-3 pages), so you need a narrow focus. Write about one, specific thing that has been important to you such as: a person, place, experience, event, day, moment, relationship etc. Review the examples we covered in our class text (NFG), in particular, “Us and Them”, “Black Men and Public Space” and “All Over But the Shoutin”.

Remember that in fiction, the main character is usually more interesting if s/he changes during the story. The same is true in a personal narrative. Choose a focal point which was also a turning point: how did this thing help make you who you are now? What were you like before, and after this thing entered your life?

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Audience:

Personal topics are stories you feel comfortable telling in public. Private topics are stories you do not want to share in public. Do not write a story for this class that leaves you feeling highly embarrassed, panicked, scared, or so on. You may need or want to write about that topic, but not in public.

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Structuring the Memoir:

Just as a research paper has an introduction, body, and conclusion, you might find it easiest to have a “before” section (introduction), a detailed story, and an “after” section that reflects on the story and concludes. You are free, however, to jump right into the story and explain the background later; to use flashbacks and flash forwards and to use other techniques of fiction. In regard to organization, consider the following:

- You can organize by time: **what happened in chronological order.**
- You can organize **by space**: a story about each different room in a house, for instance.
- You can organize other ways: a list of the meanings a thing had for me, with a story about each one, for instance.

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Finally, make sure you include both narration (the story itself), and reflection (your thoughts and feelings about the story).

Reflection helps readers find personal connections to your story - you can use this section to answer the eternal question that is said to often haunt writing: “so what?” or in the case of a memoir “Why is this significant?”

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Evaluation:

I will be evaluating you on several elements including the following:

- The ***sharpness of the details*** you use to evoke experience
- The ***thoughtfulness with which you reflect*** on the experience
- The grace of your ***language***
- The ***mechanical correctness*** of your prose

Writing a Memoir

*Always Consider the
Rhetorical Situation

Writing a Memoir

Drafting Your Memoir

- Establish a schedule with deadlines
- Don't wait until the last minute to write. Computers crash, printers jam, life intervenes in unpredictable ways (NFG)

Writing a Memoir

Starting to Write

- Write quickly in spurts
- Break down writing tasks into small segments
- Expect surprises
- Expect to write more than one draft

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So You Have Writer's Block!

- Walk away and return later (actually return)
- Try **free writing** (any one of several ways to generate text).

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- Try researching your topic
- Talk to someone, Brainstorm
(Your reading & writing center
can help with this!)

Beginning and Ending (NFG 331-342)

Beginnings are important in that they attract the reader's attention, and give them some information about what is to come.

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-power-of-a-great-introduction-carolyn-mohr>

Beginning and Ending

- **How you begin depends on your rhetorical situation** (purpose and audience).
- **Academic audiences generally expect your introduction to establish context,**

Beginning and Ending

(explaining how the text fits into some larger conversation, addresses certain questions, or explores an aspect of a subject).

Beginning and Ending

- Most introductions also offer a brief description of the text's content, often in the form of a thesis statement.
- See examples on pps 331-332

Beginning and Ending

Ways of Beginning

- Explain the larger context of your topic (pps 333)
- State Your Thesis (pps333)

Beginning and Ending

- Forecast Your organization (pps 334)
- Offer background information (pps 334)
- Define key terms or concepts (pps 336)

Beginning and Ending

- Connect your subject to your readers' interest or values (pps 304)
- Start with something that will provoke readers' interest (pps 336)
- Start with an anecdote (pps 337)

Beginning and Ending

- Ask a question (pps 337)
- Jump right in (pps 338)

Beginning and Ending

Ending/s –

- The last words readers read are important.

Ways of Ending:

- Restate your main point (339)

Beginning and Ending

- Discuss the implications of your argument/your stance (pps 339)
- End with an anecdote (pps 340)
- Refer to the beginning (pps 340)

Beginning and Ending

- Propose some action (pps 341)
- **Always: Consider the rhetorical situation -**
(Think about the message, the audience and the larger context you are writing in).

Guiding Your Reader

- When you write, you **need to provide cues to help your readers navigate your text** and understand the points you are trying to make.

Guiding Your Reader

- Titles help to guide your readers
- It Names the text
- Provides clues to the content

Guiding Your Reader

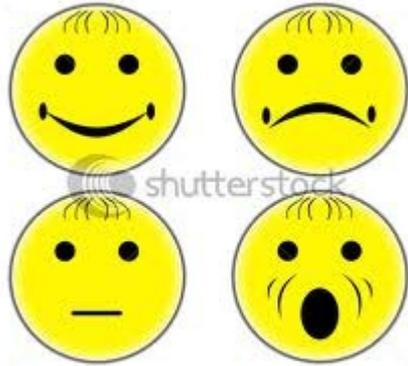
Thesis Statements:

- Identifies the topic of your text along with the claim you are making.
- Helps readers understand the essay.

Guiding Your Reader

- Helps the writer **focus*** both their thinking and their writing

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Describing

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=25&v=RSoRzTtwgP4&feature=emb_logo
- When we describe something, we indicate what it looks like-and sometimes how it sounds, feels, smells, and tastes.
- Descriptive details are a way of showing rather than telling...

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□ Why use Detail?

The **goal of using detail** is to be as specific as possible, providing information that will help your audience imagine the subject or make sense of it.

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- Specific details are also more effective than labels, which give little meaningful information.
- Instead of saying someone is a moron or really smart, **it is better to give details so that readers can understand the reasons behind the labels**

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- Sensory details help readers imagine sounds, odors, tastes and physical sensations in addition to sights.

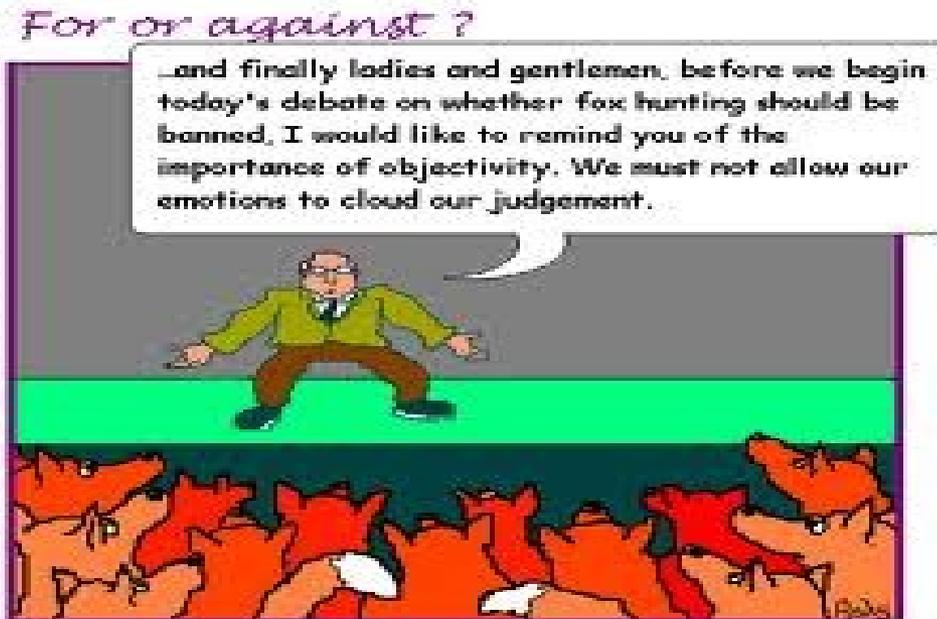
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- For a memoir about an event, you might choose details that are significant for you, that evoke the sights, sounds, and meaning of your event
- You might even choose to use a metaphor:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=163&v=A0edKgL9EgM&feature=emb_logo

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Objectivity and Subjectivity

- Descriptions can be written with objectivity, with subjectivity, or with a mixture of both.



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- **Objective descriptions tend to be uncolored by personal opinion or emotion, i.e. police reports, news writing, scientific writing...**

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- Subjective descriptions allow the writer's opinions and emotions to come through.
- *i.e. A house can be described as comfortable with a lived in look...*

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The use of Vantage Points

- Where you locate your self in relation to what you are describing will determine what you can perceive and what you cannot.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqAee-QsjMU>



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- Stationary Vantage Point - Seeing your subject from one angle only (NFG pps 403)
- Moving Vantage Point- what a writer recounts of what he saw when passing through (not stationary). (NFG pps 403-04)

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- Multiple Vantage points - captures many perspectives (pps 403-04)

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- Dominant Impression – the overall feeling that the individual details add up to. The dominant impression may be implied, growing out of the details themselves.

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- Organizing Descriptions (p406)
- Considering the Rhetorical Situations (p406-07)

Writing a Memoir

The use of Dialogue



- Dialogue is a way of including people's own words in a text, letting readers hear those people's voices – not just what you say about them.

https://www.ted.com/talks/nadia_kalman_three_anti_social_skills_to_improve_your_writing/transcript?language=en

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- Dialogue is a way of bringing in voices other than your own, of showing people and scenes rather than just telling about them.
- It can add color and texture to your writing, making it memorable.

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- Most important, dialogue should be more than just colorful or interesting. **It needs to contribute to your rhetorical purpose, to support the point you are making.**



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Integrating Dialogue into Your Writing

- **Punctuating-** Enclose each speaker's words in quotation marks, and put any end punctuation inside the closing quotation mark.

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- **Paragraphing** – when writing dialogue that includes more than one speaker, start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.

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- **Signal Phrases-** He said... She said ...
- **Interviews-** a kind of dialogue with different conventions for punctuation. When transcribing an interview, give each speaker's name each time he or she speaks, starting a new line but not indenting. Do not use quotation marks

Writing a Memoir



Consider the Rhetorical situation:

- Purpose affects use of dialogue ...
- Audience
- Genre
- Stance

Writing a Memoir

The process of Narrating



Once upon a time, there was.....

- A good narrative can lend support to most kinds of writing.
- They need to be composed carefully, placed in a clear sequence, include pertinent detail and be appropriate for the rhetorical situation.

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- **Sequencing-** When we write a narrative, we arrange events in a particular sequence.
- Writers typically sequence narratives in a chronological order, reverse chronological order, or as a flashback

Writing a Memoir

- **Chronological Order-** tell the story chronologically, starting at the beginning of an event and working through to the end.
- **Ex. Maya Angelou's brief narrative from an essay about high school graduation (pps 419-420)**

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- **Use Reverse Chronological Order** – Begin with the final action and work back to the first.
See Leopold's narrative (pps 420)
- **Resumes are one genre where chronological order is used as well.**

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- **Flashback** – flashbacks can be used in the middle of a narrative to tell (set the stage) about an incident that illuminates the larger narrative:
- **Ex. Williams's piece (pps421)**

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- **Time Markers** – help readers to follow a sequence of events (pps 421).
- Most obvious time markers are **those that simply label the time, such as the narrative entries in a diary, journal or log.**

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- Including Pertinent Detail
(pps 423-424)

- Opening and Closing with Narratives
(Pps 425-426)

Writing a Memoir

Conclusions:

- Write
- **Follow the Course Outline - Read the assignments**
- **Ask questions when you don't understand.**