

# FSTY 1313 Rhetoric & Composition II

## Project 1 Literacy Autobiography

### Overview

You have made it to college, so you are a highly literate person, regardless of whether you think of yourself as a reader or a writer. This assignment challenges you to answer a simple but important question: How did you get to be the highly literate person you are today? More specifically, this assignment asks you to make an argument about what led to your development as a literate individual. You will use evidence from your experience to support that argument.

For this project, we will define the term literacy quite broadly, to include multimedia literacy, computer literacy, and information literacy in addition to the traditional categories of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Your essay should develop a thesis about which elements of your experience were most important in your growth into the reader, the writer, the speaker, the technologist, etc. that you are today.

### Why Do This?

The focus of this course is on learning more about how readers and writers, including you, approach reading and writing activities and how they try to meet specific goals in specific situations. The best way to start your course journey is to reflect upon, and make meaning of, your own particular development as a literate person (broadly defined) and to clearly communicate the meaning you've made of your experience to an audience.

### Strategies

These strategies provide broad guidance, but are not algorithmic steps, such as a Betty Crocker brownie mix recipe. If your ingredients are fresh, your oven is working, and you follow the steps on the box, you are all but guaranteed success in baking box brownies. By contrast, the activities of writing and revision are recursive and generative. You often have to go back to go forward. Writing and revision also help you invent content—writing is not just the act of transcribing completed thoughts. So be open to scrapping what is not working and developing or redeveloping your ideas as you go.

First, consider several possible events and angles. Rather than latching onto the first idea that pops into your mind, take some time to generate a long list of possible topics. Think about important milestones in your literate life (learning to read, using a computer for the first time, starting your first journal, a significant writing event), then write down as many details as you can about each of those events. For example:

- Who were the people involved?
- Where did the events take place?
- What physical objects did you use?

You may find that some events evoke stronger memories and feelings than others, and you may even discover that the process of writing down details helps you remember things you thought you had forgotten.

After you have a long list of possibilities, select a specific event (or series of related events) and focus your writing where you believe that you will be able to make a specific argument. The best arguments are highly specific, full of details that paint a vivid picture for the reader, so before you begin to draft the essay, sketch out the fine points of your event.

Next, try to articulate the point that you want to make with your essay. In other words, "so what?" "So what?" is the question guiding all of your writing this semester. The answer to this question will lead to your thesis. A sample thesis might look like this: "The most important element in my developing literacy was X." While you'll want to make the thesis in your final draft more engaging, this sample thesis will help you get started.

Finally, determine the sequence of sections in your essay. Do you want to start by establishing who you are and why you are writing, or do you want to dive right into recounting an experience?

Draft your essay by any means that works best for you (writing by hand, using voice recording, writing on the computer). Do not try to generate and edit text at the same time. Resist the urge to check your word count as you write, and do not stop writing just because you have reached the minimum word count. By nature, everyone's very first drafts are messy, and that's perfectly OK. You will have time to revise your own narrative and to get feedback from your classmates about what you have written.

Though this is a primarily textual genre (a written essay), you may include selected visual or even audiovisual elements if you believe that they are necessary, rather than merely decorative.

Revise and polish your essay. As you read through your first draft (read it aloud, please), you will discover that you are pleasantly surprised by some parts of your essay and deeply unhappy with other parts. At this point, it will help to get some advice from me, from classmates, from the intern, or from the Writing Center.

We will spend a day in class peer reviewing one another's projects, and you will have time outside of class to revise based on the feedback you've received. When you have revised your narrative and are happy with it, make sure to proofread it by reading it aloud and by running a spell check to catch errors. Note: don't automatically accept every suggestion the spell-checker gives you. It flags unexpected text; it does not think. You cannot outsource your thinking to Microsoft.

Make sure your essay has a thesis or guiding idea that answers a "so what" question. Also make sure you give several examples to support your thesis/guiding idea.

**Your rough draft must be uploaded to Canvas before class on Monday, September 19. You will also need to bring a copy to class for peer review that day. I will return your draft to you with feedback. Submit the final essay as a .doc file through Canvas by 11:59 pm on Friday, October 7.**

### **Nuts and Bolts**

- This essay is worth 100 points or 25% of your grade.
- As a rule of thumb, you will need between 1000 and 1200 words to do this assignment well.
- Follow MLA style for margins, font, headings, and page numbers. (You can find this information on the **Purdue OWL**).
- Focused, engaging title
- Not only are you allowed to use the first person, I cannot imagine you writing this project without it.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

### **Focus and Purpose**

- Makes a clear, substantive point about the importance of an event or events involving literacy in writer's life. Main point might also focus on what the author's literacy experience reveals about the literate development in general. Main point might suggest ways that teachers and other adults can hinder or help those who are developing literacy.
- Selectively includes details and events that all relate to the larger point of the narrative.

### **Development**

- Shows abundant evidence of reflective thinking and grappling with meaning.
- Answers the "so what?" question using details and examples from writer's life as evidence.

### **Organization**

- Shows abundant evidence of connections between events in narrative and the writer's point.
- Shows careful effort to structure a coherent experience for readers.

### **Style**

- Shows careful effort to use standard edited English, (except perhaps where there is a clearly good reason not to, such as dialogue).
- Avoids clichés.
- Sentences sound like educated speech (i.e., avoids both bureaucratic/pedantic style and overly informal style—again, except perhaps where there is a clearly good reason not to).

### **Proofreading**

- Essay is free of typos and misspellings that would distract the reader from its message.
- Essay is formatted properly (see guidelines above).
- Essay is punctuated properly.