

*Notes to instructors are in red; please delete before sharing with students.
Assignment updated summer 2025.*

Short Assignment 1: Why UW-Madison?

Purpose

In this first sequence, you'll use narrative strategies to explore concepts, ideas, and experiences. Narrative, or story, can be a way to approach abstract concepts and ground them in the reality of lived experiences. As we use narrative to understand these concepts, we begin an inquiry process that prompts further questions about lived experiences and realities beyond our own. To help us think beyond ourselves, we need to consider an external audience who does not share the same lived experiences as us. So, we can use narrative to describe an idea in the hopes of helping our audience understand our experiences and consider what similarities/differences exist among experiences.

Learning Outcomes

- To identify, develop, describe, and discuss a concept or concepts through narrative
- To use personal observations or experiences and descriptive language rhetorically
- To evaluate narrative evidence and make decisions about how best to present it
- To practice writing as a process through planning, drafting, and revising
- To organize and develop your own ideas about a topic
- To learn to make choices for effective communication in a specific rhetorical situation
- To reflect on the writing process and explain rhetorical choices

Assignment Description

You will write a **narrative about a moment or memory that describes why you chose to attend UW-Madison**. You can describe applying to UW, being accepted to UW, your first time on campus, or anything else you think best tells the story of “why UW.” Your goal should be to tell an outside audience—whether they are high school seniors, your parents, or college freshmen at another university—a **story** that helps them understand what it feels like to find a college they want to attend. At the end of your narrative, you will connect your personal experience to a larger idea about college right now that goes beyond this particular moment to a broader issue facing college students.

There are three keys to this short assignment:

- **Story:** what happened? Give concrete sensory details that provide your readers with narrative stepping stones.
 - Provide a **beginning**, a **middle**, and an **end** to this experience. What happened first? What happened next?
 - Consider the **stakes/arc**: why is this story important? What is at risk? What needs to change?
 - Help your audience follow you (or the main character) through this experience.
- **Place:** describe the **setting**. Where did this story happen? What details can you provide? Explain this place through your senses. How can you help your reader feel like they are there?
- **Audience:** you will be telling this story to someone who is not a UW-Madison student. You can choose who: a parent? A best friend? A high school teacher? A neighbor? Whoever you choose, make sure you provide them a **resolution** or **take away** – a “so what” – that connects to larger concepts and ideas about life as a college student. Also, make sure your voice and storytelling is appropriate for your audience. *You will not address this audience explicitly in your paper, but you might define them in your writer’s memo.*

Details

- Length: Approximately **2 pages**
- Formatting: Follow the guidelines in the syllabus
- Include your **name** and a **title** for your piece
- Include a **reflection**: At the end of your draft on a new page, include a brief reflection of 1-2 paragraphs that shares your process for writing this piece, who your audience was, what assistance you received on this draft, what you feel you did well in this draft, what you struggled with, and what you would like feedback about. See more in the Writer’s Memos Instructions document on Canvas.

Writing Process Timeline

- Draft and submit your initial assignment by ____.
- Participate in peer workshop on _____. (Note to instructors: peer workshop is not included in the model calendar, but feel free to add one in if you like.)
- Submit the final copy (revised using instructor and any additional feedback) in your Midterm Portfolio by _____. (Note to instructors: you can decide if you wish to ask students to revise their short assignments.)

Evaluation Guidelines

(Note to instructors: you may use these recommended guidelines in your rubric or use it to guide holistic feedback)

- *Development or Evidence*: Is the story developed with concrete details? Does the story have a structure that provides the reader with a coherent narrative (beginning, middle, end)? Does the story provide the reader with a sense of the stakes/importance of the narrative? Is the setting/place developed enough where the reader can visualize where the story took place?
- *Purpose and Audience*: Does the student explain why the narrative is important? Is the relevance of the project to the student or others clearly articulated? Does the student address the “so what?” question effectively? Is the potential impact of the project made clear?
- *Arrangement and Organization*: Does the overall organization and arrangement suit the rhetorical situation? Are the concepts well-developed and connected?
- *Style*: Is there clear control and purposeful use of language? Did the writer use variety, repetition, or other strategies to effectively emphasize and communicate ideas? Is the diction appropriate and deliberate? Is the writer’s personal voice evident?

Technology and AI Guidelines

(Note to instructors: we recommend engaging students in the process of developing these guidelines, though in the first sequence, you might provide more guidance)

- *You may use technology or tools to aid your learning and writing in the following ways:*
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- *You may not use technology or tools to replace your learning and writing in the following ways:*
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- *You should document any assistance you received in your reflection, whether from tools, technologies, people, or strategies to acknowledge that writing is a process and a complex social activity.*