

Summer Assignment: Writer's Autobiography

For your first writing assignment in this class, you will write a short autobiography of yourself as a writer. The goals of this assignment are:

- 1) To reflect on yourself as a writer—how you've grown and how you define yourself as a writer.
- 2) To help your teacher (me) get to know you better, both as a writer and as a person.

Your autobiography should be in the form of a letter addressed to your teacher. It should be 5 paragraphs long and written using your best grammar, punctuation, and personal writing style. See my letter on the next page as an example.

To guide your letter writing, please use the following outline and questions. *You do not need to answer every question in your letter*; use them more as a guide to help you think of what to write about in each paragraph. You can, of course, also include any relevant information that isn't covered in the questions. Please be as honest (no judgements) and specific (give examples and details) as you can.

Paragraph 1: Your childhood writing experiences

- What are your earliest memories of learning to write or writing?
- How did you feel about writing when you were a child?

Paragraph 2: Your school writing experiences

- Consider your required school writing assignments throughout the years. Were there any writing assignments you found you really liked? What about them did you like?
- Were there any you couldn't stand? What about them did you not like?
- Were there any that you tolerated but later found you were glad to have written? Explain.

Paragraph 3: Your current writing habits

- Do you write outside of school? This could be poetry, journaling, newspaper, letters, anything. If you do write on your own, why? If not, why not?
- How do you write? Do you keep a journal? Do you ever go back to things you've written in the past?

Paragraph 4: Your writing preferences

- What are your writer preferences – favorite genres to write (poetry, stories, argument, articles, reviews, novels, etc.)? Why do you like to write in this genre in particular? What about these types of writing grab your attention?
- What do you think really makes a "good" piece of writing?
- What is your current view of writing (you can be honest here). Do you see value in it? Why or why not? You can also include in here any current struggles with writing.

Paragraph 5: Your writing goals

- How do you want to grow as a writer in this class? Why?
- What do you hope to accomplish or learn in this class? Why?
- What role do you expect or hope writing will play in your future? Why?

Your letter must be handwritten (if this will present any issues for you, please let me know) and turned in on the first day of class. If you have any questions or need any help, please feel free to email me: sgoldstein3@cps.edu. Happy writing!

Dear future Dual Credit English 101/102 students,

It will probably come as no surprise to you that I adored writing as a child. I learned to read and write very young, and I immediately loved it. I used to write little “books” made of construction paper covers (which I illustrated) and lined paper inside with stories, poems, and illustrations about my life. I remember one about my summer vacation and another about the migration of monarch butterflies (my favorite butterfly then and now). My family always encouraged me to write, so I did. I mostly wrote autobiographically—journaling, reflections—but I also wrote some stories and poems.

My experiences with writing in school were also positive, for the most part. In middle school and high school, I don’t remember ever getting feedback on my writing that was constructive; my teachers were largely impressed with my writing skills and never pushed me to really work on writing as a skill. In retrospect, I wish they had. Learning how to draft and revise and rewrite before I got to college would have been useful, because the Pomona College English department had much higher expectations when it came to what makes good writing. I remember getting some of my early papers back and feeling my stomach drop at the sight of all the corrections and questions and suggestions. I had one professor who circled every time we used the verb “to be” (which, to him, was the most boring and unoriginal verb one could use) and drew lines connecting them like constellations across each page. Another professor once wrote across the top of a paper (which I had, admittedly, written the night before) something along the lines of: “You can do better than this.” So there were some body blows to my sense of myself as a writer in college. But, I always loved my creative writing classes: the professors were brilliant and intimidating, and having them read my writing was exhilarating and terrifying. But they pushed me to write more intentionally, more critically, and more authentically. I’m so grateful to them.

Currently, I don’t write creatively very often. I try to keep a journal going and I’ll write the odd short poem here and there, but it’s not a habit I’ve kept up as an adult. I want to change that. Especially now that I am teaching college-level writing, I think it’s important for me to practice what I preach, so to speak. I’m going to look for ways to build a writing habit into my daily life this year. Last year I did a lot of writing alongside my DC English students, so I hope to continue that, as it helps me stay grounded about what I’m asking of you all.

In terms of my writing preferences, I tend toward shorter genres: poetry, journaling, short stories, essays. I think it’s because I love reading short works, so I want to write them. I love how a writer can say so much in only a few pages and how I as a reader can consume an entire piece of writing in one sitting and be able to re-read and reflect on it right there. Although I also love reading longer texts (novels, plays, etc.), writing anything long intimidates me: do I really have that much to say? That said, I (obviously) think writing is one of the most important skills a person can develop. To be understood by someone else—maybe someone you’ve never met or never will meet or who doesn’t even exist yet—how is that not a superpower? I think writing is one of the most powerful ways we have of connecting with other people.

My big goal for this year is to improve the curriculum I created last year. Now that I have a year’s experience teaching this class under my belt, there are so many things I’m excited to improve, add, or try out this year. Another goal I have—just as important—is to continue figuring out what this class wants to be and what you all want it to be. I hope to learn how to be a better writing teacher and a better writer myself, and I hope to see growth in every single one of you as writers. I’m excited to do this with you!

Sincerely,

Ms. Goldstein