

ESSAY 1 — LITERACY NARRATIVE

Write a 300–500 word (1–2 page) autobiographical narrative that focuses on an experience you’ve had with reading, writing, or language.

Literacy Narrative

A *literacy narrative* uses story elements (plot, character, setting, conflict) to recount a writer’s personal experience with language in all its forms — reading and writing, acquiring a second language, being an insider or outsider based on literacy level, and so on. Your narrative should focus on a single incident or event. You might explore a positive or negative experience you’ve had in learning to read or write and show how that experience changed the way you thought about the value and importance of literacy. Or you might present a breakthrough moment in your development as a literate person and explain how that moment created a new sense of yourself as a reader, writer, or learner.

The following questions may help you think of an event for your literacy narrative:

- What obstacles have you encountered (and perhaps overcome) in learning to read or write?
- What are your most vivid memories of reading or writing?
- What unexpected problems with learning to read or write have you encountered in school?
- What issues have arisen from: learning a second language? being bilingual? speaking a nonstandard dialect? having a speech or hearing impediment or a learning disability?
- What teachers or mentors have helped or hindered your development as a literate person?

Thesis

Your essay must have a thesis. For your literacy narrative, your thesis will be an explicit statement of the insight your story provides about the significance of reading, writing, or language. The thesis will state what you learned from the experience or how it changed you.

Evidence

To make the insight articulated in your thesis powerful and convincing, you must support it with concrete evidence. Your narrative will provide evidence from your own experience to support your thesis. The more vivid and compelling your story is, the stronger your evidence will be.

Structure

The structure of a good college essay depends entirely on its Thesis Statement. A well-structured essay presents an explicit thesis early on that forecasts the essay’s structure. Every element of the essay helps support and develop that thesis. The Introduction engages the reader’s interest in the issue the thesis raises. Each paragraph in the Body of the essay develops and supports a single point that helps confirm the thesis. (Body paragraphs should always begin with a one-sentence statement of the paragraph’s main point: a Topic Sentence.) The Conclusion restates the essay’s thesis and summarizes its argument. In a well-structured essay, a

reader could read just your thesis and your topic sentences and have a perfectly comprehensible outline of your essay.

STRUCTURE OF LITERACY NARRATIVE

Introduction (1 paragraph)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hooks the reader's interest.• Ends with a thesis statement (the insight your story provides).
Narrative (2–3 paragraphs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports and develops your thesis with evidence from your personal experience.
Conclusion (1 paragraph)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Briefly summarizes your thesis insight.• Returns to the “hook” from the opening paragraph.

Style

Make your prose as clear and concise as possible. Don't waste your time (and mine) trying to sound impressive. Write, instead, in a conversational voice: the clear, plainspoken, engaging voice of a person talking about a subject they find interesting. Don't let your essay run longer than what you have to say. Make every word count. One sentence that has something to say is better than a paragraph that doesn't.

Audience

Think of the audience for your essay as an individual, not a vaguely defined group of people. Imagine a single reader just as intelligent and well-informed as yourself. Your essay should hold that reader's interest and provide them a new insight into the importance of reading, writing, or language.

Drafts

You will develop your essay through pre-writing exercises and multiple drafts. You will submit a Mind Map for your essay on **January 22**. You will turn in an Informal Outline on **January 27**. Your outline will help you write a First Draft. Your First Draft will suck big-time (all first drafts do), but its awfulness will show you what you need to work on to make subsequent drafts better. On **January 31**, your fellow students will assist you in a Peer Review workshop by pointing out just where your draft needs improvement. You will submit your Final Revision on **February 14**.

Proofreading

Before you submit the Final Revision, proofread your essay carefully and thoroughly, correcting any errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and MLA formatting. Slapdash spelling, sloppy punctuation, semiliterate grammar, or slipshod MLA formatting seriously undermines your credibility as a writer — your *ethos*, in rhetorical terms. **Therefore, essays with excessive errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, or MLA formatting will receive no higher than a D.** If you need to know how to spell a word, look it up in a dictionary. Do *not* trust a computer to proof your spelling. Spell-checkers tell you whether you've spelled a word correctly, but they can't tell whether you've used the correct word. (For example: “They proofread there essays carefully” contains a misspelling.)

If you have questions about grammar, punctuation, or MLA format, consult *A Writer's Reference* or ask your instructor.

Evaluation

In evaluating your essay, I will consider each of the following: your essay's thesis, its structure, its use of evidence, and its prose style. (See the "Grading Criteria for Major Essays" on the Syllabus.)

SCHEDULE FOR ESSAY 1 — LITERACY NARRATIVE

Mind Map	January 22	Brainstorming Writing Exercise
Informal Outline	January 27	Outlining Writing Exercise
Peer Review Workshop	January 31	THREE copies of your First Draft.
Final Revision	February 14	Revised Draft, First Draft with Peer Reviews, Outline, and Mind Map (in a two-pocket folder with your name on the front cover).