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## Writing a Personal Essay

### *Using Your Own Life Experience to Make a Point*

**Project Summary:** “Write about what you know.” That is the most common advice given to aspiring writers. It is solid advice, because we are each experts on our own lives. We know the details of our daily lives, we think about the meaning and significance of those events, and we connect our experiences to the world around us—our family, school, and social lives. Not surprisingly, personal narratives and essays are often used for state writing assessments. In this writing project you are going to write about an important aspect of your life—something you are good at away from school. We all have talents, skills, and interests outside of school. Some of us have interests and skills with music or dance; others with making things; still others are good at collecting, fixing, or using things. In your personal essay, tell about something that you have a talent or interest in and why it is important to you.

**Writer’s Purpose:** This assignment is a personal essay. That is, your writing needs to do more than just recall personal information or events. It is intended to make a point. Your goal with this piece is to make your writing interesting but also to inform the reader about why this interest, activity, or skill is important to you.

**Writer’s Role:** You will write as yourself, a thoughtful and reflective middle school student.

**Audience:** For this piece, your audience is someone who is not already familiar with this skill or interest you have. You will need to give a thorough explanation about your interest or skill and explain its importance in your life.

**Form:** This will be a multi-paragraph personal essay.

#### **Focus Correction Areas:**

1. Attention-getting lead (use a “hook” to grab attention) \_\_\_\_\_ points
2. 5W’s + How (tell about your skill or interest, how you developed it, and why it is important to your life) \_\_\_\_\_ points
3. To be determined \_\_\_\_\_ points

**Procedures:** To prepare your autobiographical sketch, you will complete several activities:

- ✓ **Type One Writing:** Write five lines or more about something outside of school that you are pretty good at and enjoy. It could be a sport, a hobby, an interest, or a skill that you have developed.
- ✓ Before you begin writing, create your own simple graphic organizer to generate and organize your ideas. To make some notes, create a two-column matrix like the one on the next page. Remember: Good writers anticipate and answer questions the reader might have. Use the matrix to think about answers to the 5W’s + How questions.

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**5 W's + How**

**Notes**

<b>What?</b>	
<b>Where?</b>	
<b>When?</b>	
<b>Who?</b>	
<b>Why?</b>	
<b>How?</b>	

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- ✓ You will work with a partner to ask and answer some questions about the activity or skill. After looking at your partner's graphic organizer, ask your partner several questions to clarify or find out more about the activity or skill.
- ✓ We will review techniques presented on the Tip Sheet for Interesting Leads. Then you will write two different leads for your piece, using two different strategies.
- ✓ Draft your personal essay. Due date: \_\_\_\_\_.
- ✓ Read your draft in a one-foot voice, and make any changes you feel will improve your analysis.
- ✓ Work with a partner to get feedback on your essay; double-check your FCAs to make sure you have done a good job in those areas.
- ✓ Write a second draft with all of your improvements. Due date: \_\_\_\_\_.



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## Tip Sheet

### Interesting Leads for Personal Essays

Here are some techniques you can use to make your leads more interesting and grab the reader's attention:

**Sounds or Noises** Begin your essay with noises or sounds associated with your topic.

Example: *Ssssss. I love the sound of onions sautéing in the pan.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Dialogue** Start with a person talking right at the outset.

Example: *"I don't believe you learned that whole routine that quickly," laughed my coach.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Action** Open in the middle of something happening. Use strong, vibrant verbs.

Example: *I toed the starting line. I breathed deeply and tensed my legs, dreading the crack of the starter's pistol.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Question** Pose a thought-provoking question at the beginning.

Example: *Have you ever wondered how the magician always picks the correct card? I have.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Definition** Define a word or a term at the beginning of your piece.

Example: *Soil is small pieces of rock and decayed matter. I use it to grow my plants.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Quote** Start with a quote from an authority or from someone important to your composition.

Example: *My dad always said, "The first mile is the hardest." So I started training for the race.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Unusual Fact or Detail** Give information that is accurate but surprising.

Example: *Box cameras were first sold in 1888. Now most photographs, like mine, are digital.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Setting Description** Lead with a description of a place or time relevant to your topic.

Example: *There were mirrors on three walls in the studio. There were skylights overhead, so the light was almost blinding. My first dance lesson would surely be a memorable experience.*

Your example: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_