

### Definition of genre

An autobiographical reflection requires you to consider events and experiences in your life and analyze them in the context of topics or themes relevant to a particular course or academic subject.

### Questions to ask

- Read the assignment carefully and consider its specific goals: do you need to provide an entire life history or hone in on a few specific aspects?
- In light of the assignment's and course's objectives, focus on how experiences in your life have impacted your beliefs, opinions, and ambitions. Consider events in which you have participated, people you have met, places you have visited, and challenges you have faced. What lessons have you gleaned from these various experiences?

### Actions to take

- Think about how your narrative ties into the particular subjects and questions examined in the course; this should help you decide which specific events and episodes in your life that you wish to highlight or discuss in the assignment.
- In any autobiographical reflection, emphasize "reflection." Description of the events in your life provides the background for this type of assignment, but your reflections on those events and their ramifications for who you are and who you have become furnishes the substance of the essay.
- An effective autobiographical sketch will generally not be a fact-laden chronology of your life. Although some of these details may be important, you should concentrate on drawing insights and lessons from particular events and experiences in your personal history. A well chosen episode is often a far more interesting and effective illustration of a given point than a laborious timeline of your first 18 years.
- Keep in mind that you are writing this reflection in the context of a particular academic discipline. If you cannot relate a certain detail to the subject at hand, it is probably best to leave it out.

### Helpful link

[http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media\\_items/read-assignment.original.pdf](http://twp.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/read-assignment.original.pdf)

This handout explains how to read a prompt closely.

**Example prompt**

A Personal Writing History: Transforming Experience into Words (from EDU 170, Spring 2005)

Overview: Who are you as a writer today and how did you get to be this way? In this essay, focus on transforming your formative experiences as a writer into words: orienting your readers; creating a common world of feeling between yourself and your readers; leading your readers through that world; and moving carefully with words, sentences and paragraphs to create your own personal writing history. Suggested length: 3-4 pages

Preparing to Write:

1. What are your earliest recollections of writing?
2. Have any members of your family or teachers encouraged you to write?
3. What do you find easy, frustrating, difficult, and/or challenging about writing?
4. What special habits do you have as you write?

Writing the Essay:

1. Draw on memory. (Who you have been and what you have experienced helps define who you are as a writer.)
2. Tell a story.
3. Establish a site or sites. (Locate your readers in a place where they can understand what you have to tell them.)
4. Use details.
5. Use ordinary language.
6. Draw analogies as needed. (The central power of metaphor is its ability to express something that is complex, elusive, or abstract in terms of something that is concrete, immediate, and familiar.)