

Assignment: The Personal Essay – A Cultural Autobiography

Length: 3-5 pages

As a way of addressing your own personal relationship with the terms *culture* and *community*, I'm giving you the opportunity to explore and present who you are by writing a cultural autobiography. This assignment is broken into a four-step process below.

Step 1: Ask yourself some questions

What should you think about when designing a reflective, self-analytic story of your “total way of life” and the experiences that have shaped who you are? It's a pretty tall order, so let's begin with the basics. First, go through and provide answers to some of the primary demographic categories:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Socioeconomic status
- Parental status
- Marriage status
- Sexual orientation
- Education level

Once you have this basic list, you want to begin to consider other elements of your experience and environment that are not usually measured as statistics.

- Where did you grow up?
- Where did you go to school?
- Who was/is in your family?
- What are some of your favorite places?
- What was the most important/saddest/happiest moment of your life?
- In what ways has your culture been taught to you?
- What objects or artifacts are or have been important to you?
- What was your first job?
- How would you describe your style?
- What's your native language?
- When did you learn to read/write?
- What's your career goal?
- How would you define success?

Step 2: Turn your answers into a companion narrative

Try to consider the stories that accompany your answers. Then, choose one experience that stands out to you as meaningful in terms of who you are today. Or, you may choose many experiences/stories. You have the choice to write about one experience in detail, or, about many experiences that make up a chronological timeline of your life.

Step 3: Organize your ideas

Once you decide what you will write about, create a rough outline as a way to organize your paper. Write out your ideas and put them in the order you want to say them. Also, think about how you would like to introduce the essay and how you would like to conclude it – you can always write the introduction and conclusion after you write and organize the paper.

Step 4: Write your essay

As you tell the story, reflect on how the experience has shaped how you value and evaluate the world around you, as well as how it has shaped your thinking and your behavior. In other words, how was this experience important to you both as an individual and as the member of a cultural community? Ultimately, you should present a paper that explores who you are and why – what do you think are the opinions, beliefs, assumptions, stereotypes, and biases that serve to form you and your opinions, and, even more importantly, where do you think they come from? You do not need to answer ALL of these questions in your final essay; rather, they are areas you may choose to explore.