

Learning Targets

- Collaboratively select an experience that will be engaging to readers.
- Evaluate how writers use structure for effect in a personal narrative.

Before Reading

1. Krakauer’s Chapters 14–15 and O’Connor’s text both offer examples of personal essays. Create a Venn diagram in your Reader/Writer Notebook to compare the two texts. Consider content, but focus on organization and style in your compare and contrast. In what ways are they similar and different?
2. Now review the Scoring Guide for Embedded Assessment 1. What grade would you give each author, based on the criteria and descriptors? Be prepared to share your answer with the class.

Choosing a Topic for a Personal Essay

Now that you have examined models of personal essays, it is time for you to make a decision about the subject of your own personal essay.

Revisit the list of experiences you generated in Activity 4.14 (you may want to add to or revise your list now), as well as the text you generated in the free write for Activity 4.15. In particular, think of experiences that led to a lesson of some kind, since reflection is a crucial element of the essay.

Think carefully about the experiences you have listed. To produce the kind of reflection that is characteristic of a personal essay, you will probably need to avoid selecting an experience that happened in the recent past. It is difficult to reflect on an experience at first; usually, people need some distance from the event to see it clearly.

Second, it is important that you choose an experience that is significant—an experience that changed you in some way, an experience that taught you something important, or an experience that reveals something about your character.

3. Review your list and choose an experience that is significant to you and write briefly about it.

LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Self-Editing/Peer Editing,
Summarizing, Sharing and
Responding

My Notes

Summarize the experience.

How did you feel at the time of the experience?

Summarize your reflection on the experience.

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Making Your Choice

My Notes

4. If you find that you cannot fully complete any of the columns in the chart, consider choosing a different experience about which to write or try telling your experience to a partner, who will take notes on the details and descriptions in your story.
5. Share your initial thinking with a partner. As you do so, ask each other additional questions (Who? What? Where? Why? When?) to provoke each other to expand on the specific details of the event. After sharing with a partner, add details to the first column.
6. With a topic in mind, consider how you might organize your piece. To do so, compare and contrast how Krakauer and O'Connor organized their pieces.
7. Talk with your partner about these different options: Which approach did you like better? Which would be easier? Which would be more sophisticated?

Check Your Understanding

Go back through your draft and annotate at least one example of a response and one of a reflection in your text.