Personal Essay Assignment

Write a personal essay on any topic you wish, keeping in mind the elements of a personal essay we have seen and discussed in our readings.

In writing, consider:

- **Opening with a grabbing beginning**: something that will make the reader want to read on. This could be in the form of dialogue, a startling statement, a question, imagery, etc.

- **Using your VOICE**. This is not a formal essay – we should hear your voice come out in it in the way you talk to your reader. This is something we noticed with each writer we read – a distinct, personal voice.

- **Our favorite saying, "Show don't tell."** Show us what you're feeling – don't tell us. Trust your reader to understand the emotions or the experiences without a list of adjectives and adverbs.

- **The overall point you are trying to make**. Whether you write about a funny experience or difficult ordeal, your essay should leave readers with a main idea or theme when they are done. For example, Robert Fulghum's humorous essay on his church Christmas pageant is not just a funny story, but a commentary about how people throw themselves into the holidays, and we should just learn to sit back and enjoy the chaos. Tina Fey's essay "All Girls Must Be Everything," uses several anecdotes to say that it is impossible for women to meet today's beauty standards. David Sedaris's essay, "Six to Eight Black Men," discusses the ridiculous nature of nationalistic pride. Lisa Zeidner's essay, "My Mother Wears Army Boots," suggests that tough moms are just as great as more conventional, traditional moms. What do you want your essay to say?

Read the rubric on the reverse side of this sheet to evaluate your work.

Rough draft due: _____

Peer editing in class on: _____

Final draft due (with this rubric attached!): _____

Creative Writing Rubric – Nonfiction

	PURPOSE/FOCUS & ORGANIZATION	CREATIVITY & ORIGINALITY	DEVELOPMENT: DETAILS & IMAGERY	VOICE OR TONE & WORD CHOICE	GRAMMAR/MECHANICS & SENTENCE STRUCTURE
6 95-100	• Establishes clear and thoughtful purpose; focused and engaging • Insightful and profound • Well-organized with grabbing beginning	• Shows great originality • Unique, thoughtful, and creative • Skillfully incorporates literary techniques to achieve meaning	• Richly developed • Uses vivid and compelling imagery	• Rich vocabulary • Vivid language • Distinctive and original voice	• Sentence variety and sophisticated sentence patterns enhance style • Virtually no errors in structure and usage • Very few or no mechanical errors, with complexity
5 85-94	• Establishes and maintains a clear purpose and focus throughout the writing • clear & meaningful intent; fluent • Organized • Good beginning	• Shows use of imagination and creativity • Uses literary techniques and devices to achieve meaning	• Contains details that are specific and interesting • Fully developed • Uses imagery	• Strong vocabulary • Generally successful in using rich language • Personal expression or distinctive tone enhances writing	• Few or no errors present • Departures from convention appear intentional and are effective
4 76-84	• Purpose and focus are clearly established • May or may not be organized • Beginning could be stronger	• Attempts creative handling of topic • Shows some use of imagination • May include some clichés	• Details are pertinent and provide a mental picture for the reader • Attempts to use imagery	• Successful vocabulary • Attempts to use rich language	• Moderately successful in using more sophisticated sentence patterns • Some errors or patterns of errors are present that do not interfere with communication
3 70-75	• Purpose and focus must be inferred – not clearly stated • Sometimes confusing • Lacks organization • May lack strong beginning	• Could be more creative or imaginative • Lacks originality • Relies on cliché	• Details are adequate to develop ideas but limited in depth • Details are not always clearly elaborated • Limited imagery	• Acceptable vocabulary • Generally correct usage Attempts personal expression or appropriate tone	• Attempts to use more sophisticated sentence patterns • Multiple errors
2 65-69	• Attempts to establish a purpose • Focus is not fully clear • Lacks clarity • Disorganized or confusing	• Lacks creativity, originality or imagination; dry or repetitious • Mostly cliché	• Thinly developed • Details lack elaboration – merely listed or unnecessarily repetitious • Important details are omitted/lacks imagery	• Simplistic vocabulary with limited, inappropriate and/or incorrect word choice • Noticeable errors in usage (subject/verb agreement)	• Numerous errors are apparent and may distract the reader • Little or no sentence variety • Errors in structure or usage interfere with meaning
1 60 or below	• Purpose and focus are not apparent • Unclear or convoluted	• Lacks creativity • May appear rushed or ill-planned	• Not developed • Details are minimal, inappropriate, random, or non-existent	• Personal expression or appropriate tone not evident • Inadequate vocabulary • Too brief to evaluate	• Errors interfere with understanding • Lack of sentence sense • Too brief to evaluate