

# FSTY 1313 Essay 1: Literacy Narrative

## (Worth 10% of your grade; due on September 15)

### Overview

Even though you may not think of yourself as a dedicated reader or talented writer, if you have graduated from high school and chosen to go college, you are a highly literate person. This assignment challenges to you to answer a simple question: How did you get that way? More specifically, this assignment asks you to tell a story—a *narrative*—about some aspect of your development as a literate individual. For this essay, we will define the term *literacy* quite broadly, to include multimedia literacy, computer literacy, and information literacy in addition to the traditional categories of reading, writing, and speaking. Your essay should recount a specific experience (or series of experiences) from your life to show how you became the reader, the writer, the speaker, the technologist, etc., that you are today.

### Why This Assignment?

The focus of this course is on learning more about how readers and writers, including you, approach reading and writing events to address specific goals. The best way to start your course journey is to reflect upon, and make meaning of, your own particular development as a literate person (broadly defined).

### Strategies for Writing a Successful Narrative

The following strategies provide broad guidance, but they aren't a series of algorithmic steps like you'd use to bake a cake. If you have a Betty Crocker cake mix and you follow the steps on the box, you are all but guaranteed success in baking that cake. By contrast, the arts of writing and revision are recursive and generative. You often have to go back to go forward. Writing and revising also help you invent content—writing is not just the act of transcribing completed thoughts. So be open to scrapping what is not working and developing or redeveloping your ideas as you go. With those warnings in mind, here are a few strategies for writing a successful literacy narrative:

- **Consider several possible events and angles.** Rather than latching onto the first idea that pops into your mind, take some time to generate a long list of possible essay topics. Think about important milestones in your literate life (learning to read, using a computer for the first time, starting your first journal), then write down as many details as you can about each of those events. Who were the people involved? Where did the events take place? What physical objects did you use? You may find that some events evoke stronger memories and feelings than others, and you may even discover that the process of writing down details helps you remember things you thought you had forgotten.
- **Select a specific event and focus on it.** Once you have generated a list of possible experiences, you should choose one event (or a series of connected events) that you believe will allow you to tell the most meaningful story. The best narratives are highly specific, full of details that paint a vivid picture for the reader, so before you begin to draft the essay, sketch out the fine points of your event.
- **Next, try to articulate what point you want to make with your essay.** What is the moral of the story or the take-away lesson for the reader? In other words, “So what?”

- **Finally, determine the sequence of sections in your essay.** Do you want to start by establishing who you are and why you're writing, or do you want to dive right in to the story?
- **Draft your narrative.** At this point, don't worry about writing perfect sentences or looking up words in the dictionary; just write! Use whatever method is most comfortable for you, whether it is drafting on the computer, writing in a notebook, or recording yourself talking out loud. Resist the urge to check your word count as you write, and don't stop writing just because you have reached the minimum word count. By nature, first drafts are incredibly messy, and that's OK. You will have time to revise your own narrative and to get feedback from your classmates about what you have written.
- **Revise and polish your narrative.** As you read through your first draft (read it aloud, please), you will discover that you are pleasantly surprised by some parts of your essay and deeply unhappy with other parts. At this point, it will help to get some advice from me, from your classmates, from our intern, or from the Writing Center. We will spend a day in class workshopping one another's narratives, and you will have time outside of class to revise your work based on the feedback you've received. When you have revised your narrative and are happy with it, make sure to proofread the essay one last time (again, read it out loud) and run spell-check to catch any errors.
- **Submit the essay.** When you are ready to submit your essay, save the document as a Word-compatible file, titled as follows: "Full Name Literacy Narrative.doc" (e.g., my file would be called "Quinn Warnick Literacy Narrative.doc." To submit your essay for grading, upload your file to your Google Docs account and share it with me before you come to class on Friday, September 10. In addition, bring a printed copy of your essay to class that day.

## Evaluation Criteria

Your essay will be evaluated using the following criteria:

### Communicability and Organization

- Does the essay use coherent language and flow smoothly?
- Does the arrangement of the narrative reflect careful thought and planning?

### Content and Development

- Does the narrative use specific details to tell a compelling story?
- Does the story serve a larger purpose? In other words, does the author make connections between the event(s) described and his or her development as a literate individual?

### Style

- Does the essay use a consistent tone and point of view?
- Does the essay employ stylistic choices that are appropriate for the genre and audience?

### Grammatical Conventions and Mechanics

- Does the essay adhere to the conventions of standard written English?
- Your essay should contain no fewer than 600 words and no more than 900 words.
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