

## OVERVIEW

For your first paper, we will read what is known as memoir. "Memoir" comes from the combination of the Latin roots for remembering and memory (the "mem" part) and for "to write" (the OIRE—if you know French you can see that). So you are writing memory. What do you remember about a certain event *and why*? It is the "and why" part of that sentence that will give you the essay. You don't remember things—and remember them in a certain way—for nothing. Tap in to the why, and you'll have your essay.

Sometimes students think I'm asking them to write autobiographies. Autobiographies are attempting to chronicle every little tiny thing in your life, a memoir is interested in *snap shots*. So the focus of your writing should be on some parts of your life—even one story of your life—but not all of it. Don't fall in to the trap of trying to tell me too much. This is particularly true in the short memoir, which you are writing. The tighter your focus the stronger your writing and analysis will be.

Don't think just because you haven't been the victim of tragedy or illness or brutality that you have no story. Everybody has a story. All of the essays we will read feature a writer trying to figure something out about their lives. And that is what you are being asked to do here.

## DETAILS

A quick search on the interwebs yields the following: *Top 12 Most Unbelievable Celeb Prenups; Top 9 Things That Happy People Do; Twenty-three Things that Only New Englanders Understand; Top 15 Best Animal Smiles of All Time*. Here is the thing about these lists: they've got a single focus (the title is the thesis).

***Your job for the first paper is to write a Top Five Memoir.*** A Top Five is great for so many reasons, but, namely, you've got five pages of paper to write and five top things to write about. See how that works out?

Your job is to write a Top Five list based on your memories about ***one*** of the following:

- Top Five Songs
- Top Five Books
- Top Five Movies
- Top Five TV Shows
- Top Five Video Games
- Top Five Food Memories
- Top Five outfits (clothes)

## The Rules of the Top Five Memoir

**1. You will need to have an overall title to your Top Five list that reflects the thesis of your Top Five.** For instance, my working title: *"Top Five Songs That Tell You All About How My Crazy Family and My Uncle Mike's Restaurant Turned me Into An English Professor."*

Other options: *"Top Five Books that Explain how I Ended Up a Bad Student But a Great Reader;"*  
*"Top Five Movies that Explains My Wonderful, Complicate, Super-Close Relationship with My Sister;"*  
or *"Top Five TV Shows That Explain How I Got To Be A Nerd;"* *"Top Five Outfits that Explain why My*

*Mom and My Aunt Lee are My Style Icons in Fashion & Life."*

I can't do video games because that's just never been my thing. But I think you can see where I'm going with this.

**2. You should number and bold the title of each of your Top Five entries and you should only have five--no more or less.**

**3. You can't just have a title, and you can't just tell me something means a lot to you.** I need a memory for each of your Top Five (we'll work on this in class). You have to SHOW me what you are trying to describe, rather than just TELLING ME. That's what you are aiming for here. Scenes.

**5. You need to have an opening and a closing to your Top Five, like an introduction and a conclusion in a traditional essay.** You need to set up your Top Five thesis in the opening paragraph. And, in your closing, you need to demonstrate how you've grown and developed your thesis throughout your Top Five.

As you can see, our first paper has a formula to it. This should make it easier in some ways and harder in other. It makes it easier because it gives a natural structure to the essay. Harder because if you don't pay attention to the rules, you'll mess up the paper.

### **HOW I WANT THE PAPER TO LOOK WHEN YOU TURN IT IN TO ME**

- Papers should be 1500 words about 5 pages, double-spaced, in 10 or 12 point Times New Roman or Garamond fonts, with one inch margins all the way around.
- Do not use a cover page. Instead, put your name, the date and Torda/ENGL101 in the upper left corner and call it a day.
- Have a title that goes something like this "Top Five Songs/Books/Video Games etc That Explains YOU FILL IN THE BLANK "
- This paper will make up the majority of your mid-semester (with me anyway) portfolio.

### **HOW I WILL EVALUATE THIS PAPER**

**This paper is worth 20% of your final grade. In order to earn a "B" on this paper, you need to turn in/show up for the following:**

- **A paper that follows the format exactly as described above and in class.**
- Show up for the workshop in class with a complete draft of your paper.
- Turn in the workshop reflection your reader fills out (in-class) during the workshop.
- Turn in your revision plan reflection that you completed (in-class) in response to your reader's workshop comments
- Turn in a 1500 word draft to me on the day it is due with a reflection on what you feel is successful about the paper and what you want help with (in-class)

**In order to earn an "A" on this paper, you must meet the requirements for a "B" and**

- Write thoughtfully about how you used your revision suggestions in your paper as part of your reflection on what you feel is successful about the paper and what you want help with.
- Turn in a 1500 word draft to me that reflects the ideas we discuss in class about writing a good memoir: not just telling me what you remember but why you remember it; a strong, clear thesis that embodies the why; evidence that supports your thesis from the five songs/books/movies/etc that you focused on.

**In order to earn a "C" on this paper, you must turn in/show up for the following:**

- Show up for the workshop in class (see the syllabus for when that is) with a complete draft of your paper.
- Turn in a 1500 word draft to me on the day it is due (see the syllabus for when that is) with reflection on what you feel is successful about the paper and what you want help with.

**If you don't meet any one of the requirements for a "C" paper, you will fail the paper for that 20% of your grade.**