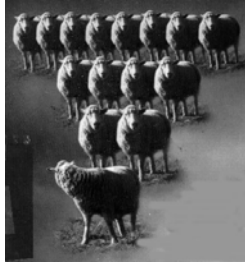


## Paper #1: Expressive Writing



**Objectives:** (1) to choose, from among the ones presented, a form for expressive writing: the memoir, the open letter, or the response to literature; (2) to craft a message about personal experience that will appeal to a public audience; (3) to practice techniques for generating ideas (brainstorming, freewriting, mind-mapping); (4) to practice revision, and in revising to consider the larger rhetorical situation: the ways in which the needs of the writer, the subject, and the audience can all be successfully accommodated in a piece of writing; (5) to practice careful editing and proofreading.

**Directions:** Choosing one of the genres we discussed in class—the memoir, the open letter, or the response to literature—write a 3-5 page essay that explores, explains, discovers, describes, or recreates in a compelling way some aspect of your self, your identity. The paper should be written in a first person point of view to go along with its expressive purpose.

**Thinking about the topic.** The materials we’ve discussed in class all express ideas related to the broad topic of “IDENTITY.” By telling stories, they explore ideas related to the important question of how we come to define ourselves, the ways we define ourselves, the process of defining ourselves.

What is true for the characters in these stories and essays is also true for every individual. We are also at work on our identities all the time. Consciously or unconsciously, we are always in the process of “finding ourselves,” discovering who we really are. It’s a dynamic process. As one student put it in her paper, “College is about a time in a person’s life where they are free from...restrictions...and now they are becoming their own person and who they want to be.” Finding out “who you are” might mean exploring your past (in a memoir), or it might mean exploring your present—current ideas and attitudes or events that make you feel strongly enough about something to want to express them to a particular audience (in an open letter). Perhaps this assignment leads you to explore how you define yourself in light of your response to one or more of the stories or poems we discussed in class (or a work(s) choose on your own).

Whatever your choice, the expressive essay provides you with an opportunity to explore some chosen aspect of your self, your identity, with the purpose of communicating who you are to the world around you. This is an opportunity to write a paper that announces to our classroom community who, in this aspect, you really are, who you wish to be, or who you have been. You will ask yourself, “Who am I?” You’ll ask yourself, what moments, experiences, attitudes, memories, responses help you understand who you are? Are there cultural influences (values, beliefs, behaviors, symbols, etc.) do you incorporate into your sense of self? Is it possible for you to contextualize your individual experience by relating it to the culture around you?

### **Generating ideas about “Identity”**

- What is “identity”? Is this a question that’s ever troubled you or that you’ve ever given thought to? What might be the cause of an “identity crisis” and who might be likely to have one? In the absence of “crisis,” why might it be useful to explore the topic of identity?
- Who defines who you are? Do you define yourself all by yourself, or do you have help? Can a person define oneself without help? Who have been your powerful influences—parents, friends, community, the “larger culture,” the shopping mall, your political leaders, the mass media?

- What roles do you play in your everyday life that help you define who you are? Which of these roles do you find most influential? Have you ever assumed a role that was an uncomfortable fit at first but which in the end had a profound effect on your sense of who you are? Do you find yourself burdened by any of your roles?
- Do you see yourself as essentially an individual or as essentially like everyone else? Are you more comfortable on your own, or being “part of the crowd”? Which do you think is considered more “normal”? (Why?) Is it possible to “do your own thing” and still feel accepted? Is it ever a source of conflict, a source of trouble when you have the desire to go against the grain?
- What do you consider the most “authentic” aspect(s) of your identity? Consider “authentic” to mean that aspect or those aspects of your self which haven’t been imposed on you from outside (pre-packaged and ready to wear), but which you developed more intimately, either following your own inner resources or the example of those close to you.

### ***Getting started on the memoir...***

- Create a mind map with the word “Identity” in the middle. Branch out in as many directions as you can think of. Which avenue of inquiry most appeals to you? Brainstorm some specific information relating to a few of the categories you think you’re most interested in. As you think about your “interests,” for example (if that’s one of your categories), can you think of any interesting stories behind how you developed, or are in the process of pursuing, that interest?
- Brainstorm a list of influential people in your life. Is there an interesting story to tell? Is there something you want to explore about your relationship with this person, or your memory of him/her, and specifically how you think this person might have influenced your identity?
- Brainstorm a list of the groups you find yourself affiliated with (anything from a religious affiliation, to a sports team, to a group of friends). How does your affiliation with this group influence your identity? How did you become connected with this group? Is there a story anywhere in there somewhere?
- Probe any areas of conflict you feel when you think about your “identity.” Freewrite for a little while to help you discover in more detail what the conflict is all about. Consider making this conflict the central focus of a meditative essay, a “self-exploration.”

### ***Getting started on the open letter...***

- Try the exercises in *The Call to Write*, p. 135: “Identifying a Topic” and “Writing a Statement of Purpose.”

### ***Getting started on the response to literature...***

- Which of the poems and/or stories had the most meaning for you personally? Freewrite to explore the thoughts and/or feelings these texts evoked in you. What ideas or feelings seem most significant to you?
- Does the literature remind you of anything significant in your own life? How does the story or poem resonate with your own experience? How can reflecting on the differences and similarities help you clarify your own identity as distinct from the character in the text?