**The Personal Essay Assignment**

The Personal Essay is piece of writing, usually in the first person, that focuses on a topic through the lens of the personal experience of the narrator. It can be narrative or non-narrative. It can tell a story in a traditional way or improvise a new way for doing so. Ultimately, it should always be based on true, personal experience.

Creative nonfiction utilizes many of the literary elements we typically associate with fiction, including characterization, setting, scene, description, and theme. You might even use dialogue, those sparingly as it can be difficult to ensure accuracy. You should keep all these in mind as you are writing your personal essay, and aim to show the reader your experience rather than simply tell us in a straightforward, expository manner. The bottom line is, don’t forget the *creative* part of the genre; this is not an academic essay.

The point of view is established as first person, and your personal experience should be written in past tense. While you may use chronological events, you’ll need to pick and choose what to include in order to create tension and pull the reader along. Reflection and opinion are likely to be woven through. In other words, you may shift in and out of present tense to include reflection on your experience, current events, topical opinions. The structure of a personal essay is flexible. Research is not required, but is sometimes appropriate. Use signal phrases if you do refer to other writers/sources in your essay.

**Assignment:**

Write a personal essay of approximately 1,500 words that is based on true, personal experience and sheds light on a particular topic. In selecting your subject matter, think about what you’d like to say about the topic, and what makes your personal experience interesting or relevant to the reader. What can someone who doesn’t know you take away from the essay?

Consider everything we have read thus far from Lee Gutkind when writing your essay. Your goal is to capture the truth of the experience as you remember it. It’s ok, for example, to create dialogue to best represent how your conversation probably went even if you don’t remember what was said word for you. It’s not ok to invent a conversation that never happened.

**Formatting Considerations**:

Title your essay

Double space

Indent every paragraph

Dialogue – new line/paragraph for each new speaker (remember, use sparingly!)

You might use a blank line between paragraphs or \*\*\* to show time jumps

Include word count in your heading on page 1

Include last name, title, and page number on all pages