

Essay #2 Descriptive Personal Essays

1. **Shine the light of Truth.** Remember a memoir is not a therapy session or an opportunity to vent. Shine a light of truth, but don't dwell on hatred, revenge or self-pity. Crack open your story to get at the deeper meaning. A memoir does not equal self-absorbed. Nor does it equal downer. While there's a good chance that you'll uncover difficult moments and sad truths, also write about the good times and the times in between. Strive for balance.
2. **Uncover your memories.** We each have our own particular methods to stir our memories. Look through family photos, read old letters, diaries and magazines from important years in your past. If you discover that a memory has taken hold while you're going about your ordinary routine, attempt to trace it to its source to track the association in your current world. What were you doing or thinking about when the memory surfaced?
3. **Tell a story.** Like a novel, a descriptive essay needs a beginning, middle and end, but it also needs to incorporate many fictional techniques. Create a **hook** with the opening. Write some parts of your story in **scenes** called **anecdotes** so that the reader feels as if he or she were close up as the story unfolds. You'll need conflict or the story will drift and become static. Use setting details and dialogue whenever possible. (A caveat here: do not reconstruct long passages of dialogue from actual conversations held twenty years ago.) A descriptive essay is not a mere list of events or memories; it's a story.
4. **Employ Concrete Sensory Detail.** Concrete means specific: A beat-up Mercedes, not a car. Sensory means tell your story in terms of the five senses: sight, sound, taste, touch, smell. Detail means: Choosing the right details to convey the most meaning in the fewest words.
5. **Look for Levels of Meaning.** On the surface, your descriptive essay is about *x*, but at a deeper level it's about the universal truths of *y* and *z*. This part develops after your first draft as you revise your essay. Don't try to inject meaning or symbolism; let it arise naturally.