

Autobiographical Incident Essay



Background

After reading several pieces of non-fiction, including an autobiography or biography, it is your turn to write about an autobiographical incident. This type of essay is about **you** as it reveals your opinions and emotions.

The focus of this essay should be on something interesting and memorable that happened in your life. Notice that an "incident" is a brief period of time (less than one day...maybe even less than an hour!). The tone can be happy, sad, angry, etc. as long as it aligns with the overall message: **what you learned from this experience.**

Checklist

- ✓ First person point of view
- ✓ The exposition should provide background information (who, what, where, etc.)
- ✓ The body should tell what happened—remember a story's structure and provide rising action that builds to a peak that readers want to read on to discover
- ✓ The final paragraph(s) should explain the outcome as well as why this incident is important, what you learned, or how it changed you
- ✓ Length Requirement is 2-3 pages in 10 or 12 point font
- ✓ Remember the elements of good writing:
 - **Ideas and Content** (narrow and meaningful topic with clever insight)
 - **Organization** (chronological order and proper transitions)
 - **Voice** (obvious and personal tone)
 - **Word choice** (active verbs and description)
 - **Sentence Fluency** (varied length and structure provide smooth rhythm and proper pacing)
 - **Conventions** (correct grammar, lively punctuation, and solid paragraph structure)

Evaluation

You will be evaluated using the 6+1 Traits of Writing rubric.

Point Value

60 points

Sample Essay

In this model, writer Laura Baginski shares an entertaining incident involving herself, her mother, and a tomato. Pay special attention to Laura's attitude (tone) throughout the piece. Also notice how she "shows" instead of just "tells" the story.

Note these things:

- **Specific examples of her mother's words of wisdom are provided. Having characters speak brings them to life in your writing.**
- **The main focus of the writing is the monkey bars affair.**
- **The writer goes to extremes in describing her dangerous situation.**
- **The drama increases until the messy end of the incident.**

Tomato on the Brain

"If you keep crossing your eyes like that, young lady, they'll stay like that and you won't ever get married." My mother was at it again. She went on to say, "It's true. There was a little girl in Bolivia who crossed her eyes just like you do and then it was permanent. She died all alone." Words of wisdom from my all-knowing mother. She seemed to have a lethal warning or terrifying story about anything that gave me the slightest bit of pleasure. "If you keep eating candy like that, your teeth will fall out and then you'll look like those disgusting hillbillies you see on TV."

I never listened to her. I would sit there with my eyes crossed, shoveling chocolate into my mouth just to show her. Defying my mother was a kind of mission for me. She knew this, and it terrified her all the more.

One day I was hanging upside down from my knees on my monkey bars. I glanced around the yard. Hanging there, the world was completely rearranged; the trees looked like feather dusters, the basket of vegetables underneath me seemed to replace the clouds, and my dog seemed to be flying. My mother was laboriously caring for her precious yet weed-infested garden. She worked in such jerking, hummingbird-like movements that watching her form an upside-down position was a special and amusing treat.

Wiping sweat off her brow, she peered at me over her shoulder and shook her head. "You know, if you hang upside down like that, all the blood rushing to your brain will make your head blow up."

I smiled. A challenge. This was what I had been waiting for. The sheer excitement of the possibility of my head exploding motivated me to hang there longer.

After five minutes, my temples began to throb. My heart felt like a big lump of pain and seemed to weigh at least 200 pounds. My entire body was numb. I could feel all the blood rushing to my brain like a flash flood. My mother's wise warnings jabbed and replayed over and over in my mind. I was suddenly gripped with the realization that my head was indeed going to blow up.

I tried to get down, but paralysis seized me. In a panic, I closed my eyes and envisioned fragments of my head strewn around the yard. I saw myself transformed into fertilizer for my mother's garden, my severed eyes and nose in my father's tomato patch, dripping off the lilac patch, flowing down the fence . . .

Suddenly, darkness washed over me and I was falling, sinking . . . until my head struck something offering little resistance. The impact jolted me out of my trance.

As my eyes tried to focus, I reached my hand to my head, checking to see how much of it was left. What my hand discovered was soft, mushy, brain-like. Struck with terror, I brought my trembling hand to my focusing eyes. It was oozing, it was red, it was . . . it was . . . a tomato!

Peer Revision Worksheet

"Remember the writer is a human being. Your job is neither to impress him/her with your cleverness nor earn his/her affection with false praise. **What the writer needs is an honest, specific reaction with constructive suggestions which are not directions but simply suggestions.** Everything you do should support the writer during the writer's search for a subject and a voice." -Lester Fischer

1. What words/phrases in this piece are particularly effective?

Introduction:

Body Paragraphs (identify which one):

Conclusion:

2. What words/phrases in this piece are **not** very effective?

Introduction:

Body Paragraphs (explain which one):

Conclusion:

3. What figurative language devices does the author use?

Alliteration

Onomatopoeia

Imagery

Personification

Hyperbole

4. Summarize the incident in one sentence:

5. Are there mechanical matters (spelling, punctuation, and the like) at which your writer should take another look before the final revision?

Introduction:

Body Paragraphs (explain which one):

Conclusion:

6. Underline any words or sentences that seem unnecessary, because they don't fit into the story (organization) or they are irrelevant to the story.

Three things I really like about this piece are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Three things I would change or add to improve are...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Additional Comments:

6+1 Traits Rubric: Peer Evaluation

Ideas and Content

5 Focused, Clear and Specific (The writing is full of words that keep my attention and show what is important about the topic.)

3 Some Really Good Parts, Some Not There Yet (I usually knew what the writer meant. Some parts would be better if the writer told a little more about what's important.)

1 Just Beginning to Figure out What to Say (When someone else reads this paper, it will be hard for them to figure out what it is about.)

Organization

5 Clear and Compelling Direction (The writer has chosen an order that makes me want to find out what's coming next.)

3 Some Really Smooth Parts, Others Need Work (The order of the story mostly makes sense.)

1 Not Shaped Yet (The order of this incident is jumbled and confused. I'm feeling dizzy!)

Voice

5 Individual and Powerful (The writing sounds different from the way everyone else writes.)

3 Individuality Fades In and Out (What the author truly thinks and feels shows up sometimes.)

1 Zero Personality (I can't tell what the author thinks or feels.)

Word Choice

5 Extremely Clear and Visual (The author picked specific and lively words for the right places.)

3 Correct but Not Striking (The words get the message across, but don't capture my attention.)

1 Confusing (I'm often asking, "What did you mean by this?)

Sentence Fluency

5 Varied and Natural (The sentences are clear and easy to read about.)

3 Routine and functional (Some sentences are choppy and awkward, but most are clear.)

1 Needs Work (Because there isn't enough "sentence sense" yet, this paper is difficult to read)

Conventions

5 Mostly Correct (There are very few errors; It wouldn't take long to get this ready to publish.)

3 About Halfway Home (A number of mistakes need to be cleaned up before this is publishable.)

1 Editing Not Under Control Yet (It took me multiple readings to really understand what happened.)

6+1 Traits Writing Rubric

Ideas and Content

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- This paper is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the central theme.*
- A. The topic is narrow and manageable.
 - B. Relevant, telling, quality details give the reader important information that goes beyond the obvious or predictable.
 - C. The writer seems to be writing from knowledge or experience; the ideas are fresh and original.
 - D. The reader's questions are anticipated and answered.
 - E. Insight—an understanding of life and a knack for picking out what is significant.

Organization

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- The organization is compelling and moves the reader through the essay.*
- A. An inviting introduction draws the reader in; a satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of closure and resolution.
 - B. Thoughtful transitions clearly show how ideas connect.
 - C. Details seem to fit where they're placed; sequencing is logical and effective.
 - D. Pacing is well controlled; the writer knows when to slow down and elaborate, and when to pick up the pace and move on.
 - E. The title is original and captures the central theme of the piece.
 - F. Organization flows smoothly.

Voice

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- The writer speaks directly to the reader in a way that is engaging. The writer crafts the writing with an awareness and respect for the audience and the purpose for writing.*
- A. The tone of the writing adds interest to the incident.
 - B. The reader feels a strong interaction with the writer, sensing the person behind the words.
 - C. Writing is honest, personal, and engaging.

Word Choice

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Words convey the intended message in a precise, interesting, and natural way.

- A. Words are specific and accurate. It is easy to understand just what the writer means.
- B. Lively verbs add energy while specific nouns and modifiers add depth.
- C. Choices in language enhance the meaning and clarify understanding.
- D. Precision is obvious. The writer has taken care to put just the right word or phrase in just the right spot.

Sentence Fluency

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The writing has an easy flow, rhythm, and cadence. Sentences are well built, with strong and varied structure.

- A. Sentences are constructed in a way that underscores and enhances the meaning.
- B. Sentences vary in length as well as structure. Fragments, if used, add style. Dialogue, if present, sounds natural.
- C. Purposeful and varied sentence beginnings add variety and energy.
- D. The use of creative and appropriate connectives between sentences and thoughts shows how each relates to, and builds upon, the one before it.
- E. The writing has rhythm; the writer has thought about the sound of the words as well as the meaning. The first time you read it aloud is a breeze.

Conventions

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The writer demonstrates a solid grasp of writing conventions with few errors.

- A. Spelling is generally correct, even on more difficult words.
- B. The punctuation is accurate, even creative, and guides the reader through the text.
- C. A thorough understanding and consistent application of capitalization skills are present.
- D. Grammar and usage are correct and contribute to clarity and style.
- E. Paragraphing tends to be sound and reinforces the organizational structure.
- F. The writer may manipulate conventions for stylistic effect—and it works! The piece is very close to being ready to publish.

Comments:

Total: _____/60

