Writing Your Personal Story

Video Transcript

One aspect of humanity that seems to span across cultures is the impulse to tell stories. All the way back to the Homeric epics of ancient Greece and before, we have numerous examples of humans sitting around sharing stories with each other. Even in today’s technology-driven society, we tell a lot of stories. Whether we’re out with friends recounting an embarrassing memory, we have a frustrating coworker, or we had a great vacation, we love to share our stories with others. Some storytellers are, of course, better at sharing these stories than others.

So, what makes a good storyteller? Good storytellers do several things:

• They set up the story in an engaging way that piques the listener’s interest.
• They use powerful and descriptive language that keeps the listener excited.
• They use sensory language that engages the listener.
• They don’t overwhelm the listener with useless details.
• They provide enough information that the listener doesn’t get confused or need additional background.
• They tell stories with purpose that have meaning to the listener.

These are great principles of storytelling, and they are also great principles of story writing. Story writing can, in many ways, be even more difficult than storytelling, since we can watch the faces of our listeners and change our delivery if we see they are losing interest. In story writing, we have to anticipate what our readers will find interesting, since we can’t change it on the fly.

Fortunately, writing personal essays can be very similar to writing academic essays. You begin with a topic, and then you shape you purpose around your audience’s values and needs. Even in terms of structure and organization, personal essays can be similar to academic essays. The differences are mostly in the kind of language and the kind of evidence we use to support our overall purpose.
Whether you’re good at telling stories, or whether you’re better at writing academic essays, it can be helpful to think of their similarities, so you can draw on your writing strengths.

What kind of writing comes more naturally to you? Do you feel confident writing in more structured, academic genres? Or do you prefer writing about your own personal experiences?

About this transcript:

- Transcript title: Writing Your Personal Story
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