

Name:

# College Writer Summer Assignment

*Read the attached personal narrative essays, and complete the attached "Evaluating Narrative Worksheet" for each story.*

## Evaluating Narrative

**Directions:** As you read the five assigned essays from the book *100 Successful College Application Essays*, complete one of these "Evaluating Narrative" worksheets for each (see all attached here.) Each answer should be a well developed paragraph.

### Essay 1: "Bridges" -Baffour Osei (p. 56)

1. Evaluate the piece's opening. How does the writer "hook" the reader? Explain why it is effective.
2. Where did the writer utilize writing strategies? Identify at least three various strategies, and refer to and cite specific examples. How did they enhance your experience reading the piece?
3. How did the writer choose to organize the essay? (Ex. chronological, descriptive, flashbacks, etc.)
4. How did the writer choose to conclude the piece? Is there a resolution?
5. What did you learn about the writer through your reading of the story? (In other words, what is the point or message of the story/what positive traits were conveyed and/or lessons were learned?)

**Baffour Osei**  
**College: Duke University**

BRIDGES

When I lived in Ghana, I would ride my bike home every day after school . . . but little did I know that it would almost cost me my life.

Soaking in sweat from the sub-Saharan heat, I came to a fork in the road. My options were to take a shorter path with a bridge, weakened severely by recent storms, or to take a longer path, which, though significantly more arduous would ensure my safe passage. As a reckless thirteen-year-old boy, I wanted the fast way.

I pedaled out onto the bridge quickly, hoping to fly across, when suddenly the support structure began to give way. Slamming on the breaks, I could feel the metal begin to contort beneath my wheels and was thrown by the jarring motion against the guardrails. The bridge was falling.

I now had a new decision to make: whether to continue forward and hope to make it across or to crawl back the way I had come. Though it would have been safer to crawl back, I pressed forward, pushing my bike up the other side and then climbing up myself.

I feel very blessed that my foolhardiness did not cost me my life, but this story has become significant to me in a number of ways. In a way, it helps to illustrate many of my character traits, namely, my willingness to take risks and the fact that I do not let fear hold me back. Though, yes, this has led me into some interesting predicaments at times, being a risk-taker also gives me the courage I need to try new things and to excel at them. One example of this is how I came from having never played team sports in Ghana to making and remaining on the championship-winning varsity football team in one of the most competitive conferences in the West.

The other main reason why this event is so meaningful to me is that it helps to demonstrate some of the basic challenges of daily life

for many Ghanaians. It is almost unthinkable to picture towns and villages dependent on roads that can collapse or become unserviceable without warning. My hope is that with a college education, I can return to Ghana and work to alleviate some of the issues plaguing my country. Collapsing bridges, a lack of running water and unpredictable power outages are not things that many of my peers have experienced, but for me, these things were a fact of life. Though many have grown to accept these problems as commonplace, I believe that they need not be. As of right now I am unsure if I will become an engineer or a humanitarian aid worker, but I know that getting a college education will allow me to explore these ideas and be around bright and creative students, and instructors, who can help me develop a plan for how I can have the most positive impact on my country and hopefully affect lives of millions.

## Essay 2: Untitled -Angelique Henderson (p. 85)

6. Evaluate the piece's opening. How does the writer "hook" the reader? Explain why it is effective.
  
7. Where did the writer utilize writing strategies? Identify at least three various strategies, and refer to and cite specific examples. How did they enhance your experience reading the piece?
  
8. How did the writer choose to organize the essay? (Ex. chronological, descriptive, flashbacks, etc.)
  
9. How did the writer choose to conclude the piece? Is there a resolution?
  
10. What did you learn about the writer through your reading of the story? (In other words, what is the point or message of the story?)
  
11. Read the post-essay commentary. What positive/negative critiques were made? Do you agree with the comments? Explain.

**Angelique Henderson**  
**College: New York University**

"Visiting hours are from 3-4 and 6-8."

The room was dimly lit and wherever light did shine, it only did so sparingly. He stood there, in that white, ghostlike gown that draped down to his ankles. Standing only feet away, it was still as if I couldn't see or touch him, only worthy enough to admire his unfamiliar 5'5" silhouette. He didn't appear to recognize me much either and instead gazed at me like a stranger he was seeing for the first time. Still, his eyes were both calling for me to help him and leave him alone at the same time. He is my brother.

How could your own brother not recognize you? My best friend asked me this question and all I could say at 10 is, I don't know. The answer didn't change much when I was 11, 12, or 13 either. The only thing I did know was that my brother had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and had to be admitted to a mental ward at least twice a year since.

The whole circumstance puzzled me. The days, weeks, and months added that I spent at different wards from 3-4 or 6-8 on these occasions left me with many unanswered questions. Why my brother? What exactly is this condition? But most importantly, how am I to study or concentrate on anything when I have a brother who doesn't recognize me some weeks then sits beside me at the dinner table other weeks and asks me about school?

Now that I am 17 years old, I have acquired enough knowledge on the matter to make some sense of the situation. My brother suffers from extreme mood swings. "Well don't girls have that, isn't that called PMS?" I asked my mother that at 14. The answer was no and when I witnessed my brother pace back and forth through the house,

then cry, then exert hostility to all those who came in his path whether it was parent, sibling or police officer, I knew why the answer was that way.

I suffered bipolar with my brother even though I don't have it. When his mood swings were occurring, I was there. When he was in the mental ward, I was there. When he didn't recognize me, I was there. I've spent so much time there, hiding from him, crying, visiting mental wards, questioning and answering, and now I want to learn. Learn all that I can in the life span that I am given about everything that I can. Now he is 22, takes his medication regularly, and is doing pretty well . . . and I'm still here. Now I want to do pretty well. I've always been here and now it's time to be where I'm destined to be, at my own mental ward called college. The patients there are cured and released after the acquisition of special letters like B.A. or M.A. I know where I'm supposed to be now.

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**COMMENT:**

This essay has it all—it's a five-star essay in a three-star world. The grip of an opener, the hook pulls the reader in, the journey starts with a child's voice (very useful tool, I might add) and transitions into a young adult's. The writer flings the doors open to her family and invites the reader into the sideshow, knowing the spectacle to be seen is normal life for her. The writer shares the command her brother has over her life, how she managed to rise above, how this has shaped her path and acquiesced there is chance it can all crumble. The writer is exposed and vulnerable while still maintaining innocence. I would hand this back to the writer with the words "thank you" and wish her all the best. (BLB)

### Essay 3: "In the Barn" -Julia D. Kyle (p. 98)

12. Evaluate the piece's opening. How does the writer "hook" the reader? Explain. Evaluate the piece's opening. How does the writer "hook" the reader? Explain why it is effective.
  
13. Where did the writer utilize writing strategies? Identify at least three various strategies, and refer to and cite specific examples. How did they enhance your experience reading the piece?
  
14. How did the writer choose to organize the essay? (Ex. chronological, descriptive, flashbacks, etc.)
  
15. How did the writer choose to conclude the piece? Is there a resolution?
  
16. What did you learn about the writer through your reading of the story? (In other words, what is the point or message of the story?)
  
17. Read the post-essay commentary. What positive/negative critiques were made? Do you agree with the comments? Explain.

**Julia D. Kyle**  
**College: Princeton University**

IN THE BARN

To the casual observer, my family might have seemed fragmented. My older brother Josh and I lived with our mother in Philadelphia. My two younger half-brothers, Allan and Kent, lived with their mother in the small town of Pipersville. The four of us spent every weekend together with our father, who lived in a nineteenth-century farmhouse near Doylestown. The farm hadn't been worked for decades, but the huge, slightly decaying barn still stood.

Whenever I think of my childhood, that barn looms large in my memory. Adults almost never went in there. I think they were a little

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afraid of it—and with good reason, too. The floorboards had rotted in some places, and unless you knew exactly where to walk, you risked falling through onto the concrete area below which had once housed the cows. In some rooms, ceilings were half caved in, and the superstition developed among us children that if we spoke above a whisper in those rooms, the ceilings would fall in on us.

But for the four of us, the barn held more than fear. Sometimes the barn was awe-full, almost holy. We would stand quietly in the still of the afternoon and watch myriad particles of dust glitter in the rays of the sun that slanted through the cracks in the walls. We could hear the almost inaudible creakings and moanings of beams which had held together for a century and were trying to last yet another day.

Sometimes the barn was interesting. Josh (whom we considered omniscient) would tell us how farmers used to build without nails, show us barn swallows' nests, or explain how bats can fly without sight.

Sometimes it was challenging. Josh would lead us on expeditions to the top of the rickety silo, or to the uppermost windows which could only be reached by creeping precariously along the beams.

Sometimes it was terrifying. We would go into the barn at night and tell ghost stories. Some, I later found out, were well-known, like the Tell-Tale Heart, but the ones that still send a shiver up my spine were those we created just for ourselves. I remember one dark night when the wind was blowing through some wire, making a high-pitched wailing noise that sounded like demented laughter. The story that night was about four children (three boys and a girl, of course) who were killed, one by one, by the barn. Each time, just before it killed the next child, the barn started laughing. After that, whenever the barn "laughed," we would remember that night.

My father moved to another house several years ago. The barn has been boarded up so "children won't wander in and get hurt." Josh has married, and we're all too old now to be frightened by ghost stories. Yet sometimes we drive past the barn and those memories flood back, and I know that inside its crumbling exterior, the barn holds a part of us intact forever.

COMMENTS:

This is an excellent essay. I don't know if the essay hints at the character of the writer or whether she'll do well in college, but she should do well in a writing course! (BPS)

Brava! Julia, Princeton would be lucky to have you. What beautiful tension is created here, what understated home truths are revealed by the barn! This is a writer. She is also someone who manages to reflect in a way that is fiercely independent. She is truly transcendent and, best of all, she writes so well that instead of having to take her word that she is a writer the readers know it to be true. (SAB)

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**Essay 4: "Tell Us About Yourself" -Dawn N. Skwersky (p. 177)**

18. Evaluate the piece's opening. How does the writer "hook" the reader? Explain why it is effective.
  
19. Where did the writer utilize writing strategies? Identify at least three various strategies, and refer to and cite specific examples. How did they enhance your experience reading the piece?
  
20. How did the writer choose to organize the essay? (Ex. chronological, descriptive, flashbacks, etc.)
  
21. How did the writer choose to conclude the piece? Is there a resolution?
  
22. What did you learn about the writer through your reading of the story? (In other words, what is the point or message of the story?)
  
23. Read the post-essay commentary. What positive/negative critiques were made? Do you agree with the comments? Explain.

Dawn N. Skwersky  
College: Mount Holyoke

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

Q: What is so great about being deaf?

A: Hey, I can't believe someone finally asked me that! Ok, here's a list:

—If someone is singing off key I can turn them off with a switch.

—Airplanes aren't so loud.

- In the morning when my dog wakes everyone up with his barking—I stay asleep.
- People can yell in my ears.
- Music sounds great without my aids because I have low frequency hearing, which is what most music is.
- Nothing is too loud. If, in a rare instant, something is too loud, I can switch the noise off.
- I learned to read lips; I usually have face-to-face contact with people when I talk.
- I developed a predilection for watching subtitled movies and close-captioned TV shows.
- I am a lifer at a school for the hearing.
- Um . . .

Q: WHOA! A school for the HEARING? How did you end up there?

A: My parents placed me in the school. The funny thing is that I never thought I was any different. My parents raised me as if I were a hearing kid.

Q: Wasn't it tough?

A: Yeah, especially when I got older, the guys think I like them because I'm always looking at them, but that's how I read lips.

Q: Hey, but that's still a good excuse to use to stare at guys anyway.

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you take notes in class?

A: That was tough, but I was able to handle that. You see, my success in taking notes depended on

- a) my lip reading skills
- b) the professor's voice and enunciation skills
- c) my position in the classroom
- d) all of the above

However, if the teacher was too hard for me to understand (enunciatively) then usually a friend of mine took notes for me.

Q: Did you take any foreign languages?

A: Why do you ask?

Q: I was wondering if you could lip read in other languages.

A: As a matter of fact, I've taken French for five years. In the third year the classes were conducted *tout en français*. It was hard at first, but I was able to adapt to this situation. I guess I have a gift in lip reading languages.

Q: That's awesome. What is bad about being deaf?

A:—Phone conversations are difficult. Not too many people have TTY's (Teletypewriters) or TDD's (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf).

—I can't hear everything around me. For example, it is hard for me to keep up with everything that is said in a social discussion, unless I can see everyone so I can lip read what is being said.

—People usually need to repeat things for me.

—I hate to do the dishes.

Q: Wait a moment! Dishes are irrelevant!

A: That's true, but I said that because doing the dishes bugs me and there is one thing that really bugs me about being deaf.

Q: What is that?

A: I don't like it when people turn their backs to me because they think I may be dull or because they hate repetitions. How can a person judge me who doesn't know me? As for repetitions, the more I talk to a person the fewer repetitions there are. In any case, I've learned through experience that those people who don't take their time when they talk to me aren't true friends.

Q: One last question, is there anything you really want to do in life that you just can't keep secret any longer?

A: Yes, there is.

Q: Ok! let me hear—no, on the other hand, let me lip read it!

A: I WANT TO SPEND MY COLLEGE YEARS AT MOUNT HOLYOKE!

COMMENT:

Let's forgive the ending. It shows a nice sense of humor and much maturity and self-awareness. The writer exhibits good control. (JMcC)

**Essay 5: Untitled -Joseph Libson (p. 207)**

24. Evaluate the piece's opening. How does the writer "hook" the reader? Explain why it is effective.
  
25. Where did the writer utilize writing strategies? Identify at least three various strategies, and refer to and cite specific examples. How did they enhance your experience reading the piece?
  
26. How did the writer choose to organize the essay? (Ex. chronological, descriptive, flashbacks, etc.)
  
27. How did the writer choose to conclude the piece? Is there a resolution?
  
28. What did you learn about the writer through your reading of the story? (In other words, what is the point or message of the story?)
  
29. Read the post-essay commentary. What positive/negative critiques were made? Do you agree with the comments? Explain.

**Joseph Libson**  
**College: Princeton University**

At the risk of transforming this application into a tract on the wonders of wrestling, I nonetheless wish to discuss my recent vacation through hell. Hell, by the way, is not located under the earth. No, the current residence of Satan is Edinboro, Pennsylvania. Hell opens for two weeks every summer and the operators slap on the snappy title "J. Robinson's Intensive Wrestling Camp." The daily routine for this camp is so rigorous that graduation with honors consists of receiving a black shirt with the daily schedule inscribed on the back in mute testament to the existence of this habitation of fallen angels. Each camp session the dropout/casualty rate varies from 25 to 50% (even with an avowed policy of no refunds). I cannot describe the total impact of this place but I can sure as J. Robinson's Intensive Wrestling Camp try.

We wake at 6 A.M. every morning. If your group is lucky you lift weights, if not you run. This exercise is not a typical long-distance endurance run, but rather sadistic combinations of endurance and sprint running. One section, deceptively called the 'Buddy Carry,' involved running with a partner about my size. The instructor ran us down a long country road about three miles from camp. At his signal, I carried my partner on my back at as fast a pace as I could muster. At the halfway mark we switched and he carried me. The indescribable pain that accompanied this operation almost broke me. But, of course, the "almost" is what the camp is all about. The run lasted an hour and a half. We showered, ate breakfast, and crawled back to our rooms to catch a nap before Technique Session. Technique Session is a two-hour "easy" practice that is as difficult as normal wrestling practice at most schools. After the first session I was convinced that I didn't want to see the "hard" practice. I was right. Hard practice is live wrestling for two hours. I have never been so tired as after a hard practice. But, it made the technique sessions seem really easy. I never got used to hard practice. Every day panic would



creep into my thoughts. "This is never going to end. I can't keep this up any longer." Invariably I survived the practice and staggered to shower and dinner, after which came the fourth session. This was almost a repeat of the morning session in difficulty but was preceded by a motivational talk, during which most of us practiced sleeping standing up. Days passed until finally, on the schedule board, in the section devoted to the Hard Practice drills, appeared the words

### RED FLAG DAY

Curious, how such innocuous words could inspire such terror. The rumors of Red Flag Day had been circulating throughout the camp since day two. When it finally arrived, dread filled every wrestler's heart. One hour and forty minutes of nonstop wrestling was assigned, with no breaks or instruction periods where a wrestler might catch his breath. If regular hard practice was difficult, this was surely impossible. But, we did it, most of us, and we did it twice. On the last day, before the end of the camp session we had another Red Flag Day; this one was two hours long. To graduate with honors a wrestler had to have 500 points. Everyone in camp started with 800 points, which could be lost through bad room checks, discipline problems, or not working hard enough during practice. Two minuses and one plus were awarded during every practice. I have never worked so hard for anything as the one plus I received in one practice during that hellish two weeks. The last exercise of the camp was a twelve-mile run. It was unbelievably easy, for we all knew that after the run **IT WAS ALL OVER AND WE COULD GO HOME.**

In spite of my sarcasm, it is probably obvious that the camp was one of the greatest experiences in my life. It taught me that there are very few limits to what achievement a person can attain. Having the coach yell, "Sprint, dammit!" when all that you desperately desire to do is fall down and sleep right there not only conditions your body, it also disciplines your mind. This mental strength has enabled me to

work harder at anything that I try. One cannot endure an experience like that camp and not be the better for it. I am no exception.

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**COMMENT:**

This essay is good because, although the experience occurred at a wrestling camp, the writer avoids the trap of letting wrestling become the focus of the essay, but just barely. What this piece does do is show that the writer can endure physical hardship and pain without quitting, over a relatively long period of time. In that sense the scope of this essay is a bit one-dimensional. (AST)