Instructions

1. Choose **one** topic from  the list of personal essay topics (A)
2. [Write an essay](http://cll.lms.athabascau.ca/mod/assignment/view.php?id=11601) of approximately 1000 to 1200 words (about four double-spaced typed pages) on your chosen topic. Expect that if your essay goes over the length requirement, your essay could be returned to you for revision.
3. Begin your research. You might start with a general Google search and then a Google Scholar search, but you will also need to visit the AU library databases to find sound academic articles. Note: When you’re first learning about a topic, Wikipedia might be an appropriate place to start, but **always** move on from Wikipedia. As an open source, it is not sufficiently trustworthy for academic purposes. Therefore, do not use quotes or paraphrases from Wikipedia. This is not a source your tutor will want to see on your citation list. Be equally careful of other questionable websites since they are in abundance.
4. Find two to four reputable secondary sources and review them carefully. **At least one** source should be from a peer-reviewed journal article accessed through the AU library databases. Please go to *Acting on Words* and read the segment called “Primary and Secondary Sources” in the chapter called “Finding Information: Types of Sources” or go to<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/education/008-3010-e.html> for a sound explanation of primary and secondary sources.
5. Based on the research you found as well as your own brainstorming, develop a straightforward thesis that is sufficiently limited in scope (meaning something you can do justice to in a short essay).
6. Create an outline.
7. Consider speaking with your tutor to review your thesis and outline if necessary .
8. Begin the first draft of your essay.
9. Make use of at least two (and no more than four) secondary sources within your essay by adding quotations and paraphrases. Then, every time you paraphrase or quote, follow these four steps:
	* Introduce each source
	* Present the research
	* Credit the source parenthetically
	* Discuss

In other words, include quotation (and paraphrase) sandwiches in your essay. Don’t just drop in quotations or paraphrases from sources into your essay. (Some experts call these hit and run quotations).

1. Create a Works Cited or References page, and make sure to take this seriously. Do not guess, and do not use a software program. Doing this correctly is not difficult, but it does require you to pay very close attention to detail. We expect you to do so.
2. Revise and edit your draft. You should have produced and edited at least one preliminary draft before you hand in the final copy.
3. Consider using the Write Site’s coaching services
4. Study the assignment checklist and answer the questions honestly.
5. When you’re ready, upload your assignment through the assignment .
6. In English 255, we prefer MLA citation and format style.

A. Personal Essay Topics

No matter which topic you choose, be certain that you consider your audience **before** you begin writing. There is little worse for readers than slogging through a personal essay that has no apparent purpose or relevance. Readers should be motivated in some capacity by your personal essay. In other words, we all have stories, but if we share them, we have to have a reason (as far as readers are concerned) for doing so. We tell personal stories so others can be encouraged, motivated, comforted, informed, and the like. So, ask yourself the all-important “so what” and “who cares” questions, and answer honestly. Ask yourself what, beyond sharing your own story, you want readers to know or feel or learn when they read your essay.

1. **Write a personal narrative essay. Be sure to focus on a single, well defined incident with an explicit beginning, middle, and end from which you learned something about yourself, another person, or life itself. “My life with my alcoholic father,” for example, is too big a subject for a short narrative essay, but “The time my father hit rock bottom” is very likely to be sufficiently limited. Good subjects for personal narrative essays include the following: a move, a birth (if it’s exceptional in some way) or a death, a birthday or an anniversary, the loss of a prized possession, a moment of triumph or defeat. Your thesis should make a point about what this experience taught you. You may state this thesis explicitly or you may prefer to imply it.**
2. **Write a personal descriptive essay about a person, place, or thing. Be sure to establish a clear dominant impression that conveys the point you want to make about your subject. All the details in your description should fit with this dominant impression. Try to include a broad range of sensory impressions: not just how your subject looks but also how it sounds, feels, smells, moves.**

**It’s often easier to establish this dominant impression through contrast: the changes in a place or a person or the difference between what you thought something would be and what it actually was. (Locate the essay “Two Ways of Viewing the River” by Mark Twain for a good example.) It’s also often easier to write an effective description of a person by describing a room or a location that you associate with him or her. (See if you can locate the short story “The Boat” by Alistair MacLeod for a good example.)**

You will probably include some narration in a descriptive essay and some description in a narrative essay. Remember, however, that the descriptive detail in a narrative essay should help you to tell your story, whereas a chronological narrative sequence in a descriptive essay should help your reader to get a picture of what you are describing.

You may question the idea of using sources in personal writing, since the personal essay is commonly understood to be informal whereas research methods and documentation techniques are associated with more formal, scholarly styles. Despite this general truth, many personal essays use quotations or paraphrases (or both) from a variety of sources. Some personal essays begin with a reference to another writer’s reported experience – a natural way to incorporate a source. Others incorporate small bits of information from reputable sources that add credibility in the form of background, context, or detail.

**NOTE**

If you are writing a personal essay, you can use first-person point of view.

Checklist for Research Essay (personal or expository)

After you have completed your analysis, use the checklist below to evaluate how well you have done.

* Did you use MLA or APA guidelines to format your essay? Did you check your formatting against examples in the textbook or on the Purdue Online Writing Lab site?
* Is your thesis the last sentence of the first paragraph, or do you have a good reason it is not (such as you’ve written a personal essay so your thesis is implicit, or you used your first paragraph to explain or justify)?
* Did you consider including an essay map/preview statement with your thesis sentence?
* Did you follow the assignment parameters by integrating at least two reputable sources in your essay?
* Did you **introduce** your sources properly? Did you **present** your sources according to MLA or APA formatting requirements? Did you **credit** your sources parenthetically? Did you **discuss** the quote or paraphrase?
* Does your in-text citation properly match the corresponding Works Cited or References entry? Check this **very** carefully – remember that the first word of the citation has to match the first word of the corresponding entry.
* Did you make sure to do your in-text and Works Cited or References entries correctly? **Did you check each citation word for word and punctuation for punctuation** against an example from the textbook, the Purdue Online Writing Lab . Did you create a suggestive, emphatic conclusion rather than one in which you unnecessarily repeat the main supporting points?
* Did you revise very carefully for grammar and mechanics?