

TO: Students in EEC 222w  
FROM: Dr. Elizabeth Sandell and Dr. Ronald Browne  
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SUBJECT: Autobiography assignment

We have been reading and discussing elements of culture that are sometimes called “micro-cultures.” Micro-cultures refer to sub-groups, each with their own language, behavior rules, and expectations. The next step in the process is to synthesize what you have learned into an autobiography – all about you.

Goals for this project include:

1. Foster a sense of connection and attachment to your primary cultural groups.
2. Describe your behavior in core aspects as a member of a cultural community.
3. Increase ‘self-awareness’ of your own, unique experiences around cultural differences and commonalities.
4. Analyze the degree to which you feel connected to your own cultural community.

The autobiography you write in this course may become part of your professional autobiography, used later as you apply for internships, employment, or graduate school. It's tempting to jump right in to write. After all, it IS about you, your family and your own history. But before you begin your project you must understand what is already known and what has yet to be studied. The autobiography summarizes and synthesizes what you know about your own cultural heritage and how involved you are in your own micro-cultures.

You may choose one of several genres to present your autobiography. You may write in a story format, as an academic research paper, poetry, radio play, a graphic novel, or something else. Regardless of which genre you select, describe your own background with rich detail. Synthesize. Summarize. Show relationships between ideas.

Length: minimum of five, double-spaced pages; 12-point font; 1-inch margins (in addition to the cover page).

Step 1: Collect information. Interview family members. Read family scrapbooks. Review your own journals or diaries. Brainstorm your ideas about your cultural background. Examine census data about persons who share your characteristics. Think about how you are like them and how you may be different.

Step 2: Draft a thesis statement. The thesis is a sentence or two that explains the main topic of the paper. It will be based upon your background because all of the information you write will describe and reflect on your own micro-cultures.

Step 3: Create an outline of the material you plan to write. Write about a minimum of 8 elements of your cultural identity.

- What are the main points you want to make?
- Which stories or anecdotes fit into each of those main points?

- How do the elements of your micro-cultures relate to one another?
- What is the best way to organize your information? The relationship between your micro-cultures will probably suggest one of the following.
  - o Topical
  - o Chronological
  - o Problem-cause-solution
  - o General to specific
  - o Specific to general
  - o What is known to what is unknown
  - o Comparison and contrast

Step 4: Write sections about each of the main points. Summarize your main points in paragraph topic sentences. Support your topics and main points with evidence (stories, examples, anecdotes, etc.). But most of all focus on your argument. Readers don't want to read a "patchwork quilt" of stuff, nor do they want to read a series of definitions. Think of yourself as telling a story instead.

Step 5: Write an introduction to establish a contract with the reader. Introductions try to grab or "hook" the reader's attention. Your readers will want to know, right from the outset, what you will be writing about. Introductions include a clear statement of purpose. Your readers will also want to know what you specifically want to say about a certain topic. For this reason, writers often include a thesis statement near the end of the introduction.

Step 6: Write a conclusion (to summarize in a nutshell what has been presented in the paper). Conclusions often echo (not repeat, though) the main idea/thesis stated in the introduction. A conclusion provides a sense of "looking back," a sense of showing the reader the ground that has been covered. What difference does it make that you understand more about your own cultural identity? Just as an introduction tries to "hook" the reader into reading more, the conclusion tries to leave readers with an endnote that resonates well after the reader has put down the paper. Often, leaving readers with a final, lasting impression means suggesting larger implications or showing how the main/idea thesis applies to the future.

Step 7: Submit your paper to a tutor for feedback, as described by the instructor during class. When prompted, ask for feedback on the organization and sentence structure of your paper. Allow at least 3 days for the tutor to respond to your submission. Use the tutors' feedback as part of the basis for your edits.

Step 8: Edit. Revise. Read your paper aloud to get a sense of the rhythm and structure. Edit. Revise. Compare the sections of the paper so that you have given equal weight to the main ideas. Edit. Revise.

Step 9: Upload your work to D2L dropbox: the first draft, the feedback from the tutors, and the final version of your paper.

Eighty percent of the points will be based on the development of content about your micro-cultures. Write about a minimum of 8 elements of your cultural identity.

1 Life and Family / Community Background: Describe elements of your life and experiences, including your 'family of origin' and community cultural backgrounds. Describe people who were significant members of your family as you were growing up. What did those people teach you? How did they influence you? What roles and behaviors were expected of you because of your place in the family?

2 Socioeconomic Status: Describe your socioeconomic status and the privileges or lack of privileges that resulted from that status.

3 Race: Describe your race, including relationships that were influential in defining your own culture. Keep in mind that our culture is not so much defined by the color of our skin, but in the responses of other people to the color of our skin.

4 Ethnicity: Describe your ethnicity. Include a description of your families national or group heritage. Discuss the 'so what' about the consequences of this background, including values, beliefs, and relationships that were influential in defining your own culture.

5 Gender: Describe your gender. Again, keep in mind that our culture is not so much defined by the biology of our physical bodies, but in the responses of other people to our gender.

6 Sexual Orientation: Describe your sexual orientation, including experiences or relationships that were influential in your development.

7 Language: Describe your first and later languages. Was your first language the dominant culture's language? Were members of your family fluent in two or more languages? How did that give you an advantage in education?

8 Religion/Spirituality: Describe your religion or spiritual worldview. How did you acquire your worldview? What difference does your spiritual worldview make in your life?

9 Exceptionalities: Describe your exceptionalities (talents). Keep in mind that our culture is not so much defined our abilities, but in the responses of other people to those abilities.

10 Special Needs: Describe your special needs (abilities or disabilities). Keep in mind that our culture is not so much defined lack of abilities, but in the responses of other people to those abilities.

11 Age: Describe your age and your position in your family of origin. Describe any special expectations or privileges that come to you because of that position.

12 Generation: Describe the characteristics that are common to persons in your generation. How do these characteristics contribute to your cultural identity.

13 Geography or Region: Describe the geographical or regional influences on your cultural development. Where did you grow up? What were the cultural characteristics of that area? Was your family mobile (e.g., in the military or in pastoral or missionary work)? What were the consequences of mobility or lack of mobility?

Twenty percent of the points will be based on academic writing performance:

1 Academic Organization: Title page (title, author, date and place of publication), introduction, structure, and conclusion, with APA formatting and style.

2 Academic Voice: Use 'active voice,' in which the subject performs the action of the verb and the direct object is the recipient of the action. Do not use 'passive voice,' in which the subject of the sentence is really the object or goal of the action and the main verb phrase includes the verb 'to be' and the past participle of the action. Write formally and professionally, not informally.

3 Academic Word Choice: Rich, detailed, non-repetitive, and appropriate word selection.

4 Academic Sentence Fluency: Word patterns and sentence structure appropriate to academic writing.

5 Academic Conventions: Spelling, grammar, punctuation, and paragraphing.