

ENGL-1001-XXX

Assignment 1: Literacy Narrative

Deadline: To be announced
Minimum: 800 to 1000 words

For your first assignment, you must compose a *literacy narrative*: a reflective, analytical account of your own development as a reader or writer. No one in our society (or any society) learns how to read and write in a vacuum; as the literacy scholar Maryanne Wolfe once wrote, “We were never born to read” (*Proust and the Squid* 3). Therefore, everyone has a story to tell about growing up with expectations for literacy. Your goal in this assignment is to consider the causes of your literacy development (teachers, parents, friends, books, the Internet, etc.) and analyze the effects that they have had on you.

Although this assignment is a narrative, it is also a type of *causal analysis*. One of the problems with causal analyses is that many of them are speculative, written by people who weren’t there when it happened. However, you are the ultimate authority on your own literacy. As such, you are in the best position to analyze the cause-and-effect relationship between your current habits and your past experiences.

To write a causal analysis, you must analyze conditions, influences, and precipitating causes. These terms come from Jeanne Fahnestock and Marie Secor’s *A Rhetoric of Argument*:

- **Conditions** include the physical setting of an event, the historical time, the social climate, or any other feature that seems to make an event more likely. For example, school life sets up a specific climate for reading.
- **Influences** are conditions that affect the rate at which an effect takes place or the degree to which it happens. For example, teachers and parents may have been a strong influence on your growth as a reader-writer.
- **Precipitating causes** build upon conditions and influences by forcing something to happen. For example, an assignment that you had to complete may have changed your mind about reading and/or writing.

To prompt your thinking, consider these other types of analysis:

- **Language Analysis:** What do you think of when you read “literacy”? Does literacy involve only reading and writing? Does texting or web-surfing count as literacy? Are there many “literacies” or just one “literacy”? What makes you think this way? Has “literacy” ever been defined for you before?
- **Process Analysis:** What is the process for reading and/or writing that you have been taught before now? Who taught it? What were the steps in that process? Do you see any value in that process? Is that process teachable?
- **Habit Analysis:** How often do you write in your spare time? How much do you read on a weekly basis? Now that you have been given this assignment, how will you plan to start it? When? Where? How do your reading and/or writing habits affect the way you see yourself as a “reader” or “writer”?

- **Event Analysis:** What event do you think shaped you most as a reader or writer? What happened? Where did it happen? Who was involved? What conditions led to that event taking place? What was the result?
- **Audience Analysis:** When you have written things in the past, whom did you write them for? What were your audience's expectations? Do you think that you addressed those expectations adequately?

After you have organized your thoughts, your next task is to draft your narrative. The word "narrative" is loaded with presumptions about literary quality and creativity, and you may feel unprepared to tell a story. However, keep in mind that a story is, at its most basic, a sequence of events that traces some kind of change or development. Your narrative does not have to be literary; it needs only to trace your development as a reader and/or writer (in whatever way you define those terms).

My Expectations: By the time I finish your narrative, I should know substantially more about your history with literacy as well as your current opinions about reading and writing. Furthermore, the story you share should ideally give me a better sense of the conditions and influences that gave you those opinions. I hope that you have fun with this assignment, and I look forward to reading your work.