

Interview Essay Template

In your literacy narrative, resume/cover letter, and narrative essay you have revealed a good deal about yourself. The interview essay will tell someone else's story—someone who is significantly older (at least fifteen years older) and who may also be from a different situation or culture than your own. Specifically, it will tell the story of how a significant experience—or set of experiences—has shaped the mature person s/he has become. By focusing on a significant experience, you will reveal your interviewee's path – toward an adult vocation, avocation, ethical stance, and/or world view – in a biographical interview essay.

The interview process will help you gather specific information about your interviewee's experience as well as his/her reflections concerning how that experience impacted his/her later life:

the aunt who survived the 1990 Plainfield tornado to become a meteorologist;

the priest who migrated from Durango, Mexico to Chicago as a toddler;

the high school soccer coach who survived cancer;

the third-generation ironworker who is considering a career change.

The success of *The Glass Castle*, now in its 183rd week on the *New York Times* bestseller list, is certainly in part due to the rich details Walls reveals about experiences that have shaped her adult personal and public identities. If we were able to interview Jeannette Walls, we might ask her how her educational experiences—early desert homeschooling, mentoring by Welch High School's Miss Jeannette Bivens, choosing Barnard rather than Bluefield State—impacted her eventual career as a journalist/memoirist. We might also gain valuable information using interviews to learn about how Walls's experiences informed her views concerning such topics as homelessness, child welfare, health care, substance abuse, sibling relationships, and social safety nets, among many others. (You might take a look at one of the many interviews with Walls available online, including 2007 conversations with CBS and The Colbert Report.)

Your interview will be conducted in two stages:

- In the first stage, you will send (via USPS or e-mail) your interviewee a set of ten or so open-ended questions for him/her to answer. His/her written answers to your ten questions will make up your initial interview transcript.
- The second stage of the interview process allows you to add follow-up questions to your initial set of ten to be used when you conduct the face-to-face (or phone if face-to-face is impossible) interview.

Your questions and your interviewee's responses to both sets of questions will constitute your interview transcript.

Finally, you will mine the material gathered in both interviews to write a biographical essay—using summaries, paraphrases, and direct quotations from your interview—about your interviewee, focusing on how his/her identity has been shaped by earlier experiences. As you consider your interviewee and his/her responses to your questions, you will inevitably draw conclusions about the applicability of his/her story to your own life and those of your readers. Be sure to include those insights as you draft your essay.

The interview essay—due Week 9—will be 4-5 pages, double-spaced in Times New Roman 12-point font, will be posted to your private webboard conference and turned in on paper, and will represent 15% of your course grade. The successful interview essay will be thoughtfully and generously developed, coherently organized, and will gracefully represent and integrate the voice and words of your interviewee. The effective interview/biographical essay will draw meaningful conclusions about how the interviewee's experiences shaped his/her identity, and will show how they relate to your own experiences. Essays that do not integrate the thoughts and words of the interviewee, that fail to explore the implications of the interviewee's experiences for his/her adulthood, that are poorly developed, or that have haphazard organization, will receive lower grades, as will essays with surface errors so numerous that they interfere significantly with communication.