

# *Writing Spaces* Assignments & Activities Archive

## Literacy Autobiography

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## Overview

Writing a personal narrative assignment is commonplace in first-year composition classrooms and the proposed assignment presents it as a *literacy autobiography* (LA) which can, according to Canagarajah, focus on individual learning journeys and underline “in-between identities and discourses” (p. 13). The transnational identities of our diverse student body can communicate niche and personalized learning – experience, association, communities, interactions, and understanding of education. As well, moving between diverse personal experience and learning objectives connects with translanguaging that addresses invisible hierarchies related to race and language. Complex questions, as listed below, are important discussions for first-year students and approaching them from the standpoint of how we learn and approach academic or dominant learning expectations can develop their critical thinking abilities.

- What is language ownership?
- What is linguistic justice?
- What do we do when we see and hear differences in language articulation?

First-year composition students are active participants who communicate, collaborate and engage (themselves and/or others) with ideas in academic and social platforms. Therefore, this assignment will foreground this dynamic nature of language use and ask them to re-contextualize their written draft into an audio/visual format.

## Time Commitment

2-3 weeks: 3-4 in-class sessions or 3 asynchronous sessions

## Materials

Suggested readings (see Works Cited) include Stewart; Canagarajah & Sauder; and Aysal. The use of Kaltura, Camtasia, or other audio/visual screen capture, recording, and editing platforms is also necessary (the use of personal recording devices and uploading to YouTube may also be an option).

## Assignment Process

Students will evaluate their literacy practices. They will trace their learning journey as skills or strategies that they have learnt (in English or other language; in any geographical, social or cultural space and context), practiced and continue to improve on. These past experiences should have relevance in current time, that is, they should consider the kairotic element or timeliness of the learning strategies for one's stakeholders.

- Students will read the Stewart piece to discuss and understand – (i) the ways in which personal experience can be effectively used in the context of academic writing; (ii) think about their personal learning background, experiences in their social or disciplinary communities, and interest groups; and (iii) identify their communication practices – how do they communicate as part of specific groups, what identities do they associate with, what language(s)/ dialects do they use and how do they move between linguistic or cultural differences?
- Based on their understanding of learning, students should plan an outline of skills or strategies they use to effectively communicate as part of diverse social, cultural and or linguistic communities.
- Next, read Sauder & Canagarajah's chapter as a sample narrative that presents a translingual experience. Discussion on Sauder's experience can be combined with instances of students' own experience with languages, accents, and understanding of differences in culture and social access.
- Following this discussion, students should prepare and submit their draft, peer review and prepare for final

draft.

- Based on the final draft, student should prepare a 2-3-minute audio/visual capture of their narrative. Capturing the same set of ideas in a different genre can enhance the understanding of purpose/context of writing, awareness of audience, and recognize how the language choice (focus on vocabulary, written versus oral) differs. Aysal's narrative on Hul'q'umi'num' heroes can be used to discuss and exemplify the task expectation.

## Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this assignment will:

- Show evidence of critical thinking
- Demonstrate the ability to construct logically argued, evidence-based, and persuasively organized paragraphs and essays
- Perform a university-level analysis of English-language texts by identifying and evaluating controlling ideas, supporting ideas, dominant rhetorical patterns, tone, context, and features of style
- Analyze genre, purpose and audience of written draft and re-contextualize in audio/visual format.

## Learning Accommodations

Learners may be given the option to partner with a peer for the audio/visual capture of the narrative. If working with a partner the length of the audio/visual text may be increased to 3-4 minutes.

Clear instructions around the audio/visual capture should be shared. The following is a suggested list of instructions:

You can:

- Be a storyteller (semi-formal is okay).
- Use material from your final narrative assignment.

- Narrate sequentially, i.e. follow the order of arguments, discussion, evidence etc. or re-organize the material.
- Focus on certain aspects, key points, most important content/ arguments/ skills discussed in the narrative. Given the length of the recording, you will need to edit original material in your assignment.
- Record yourself as an object of the video or focus on images, photographs, PowerPoint slides, animation, to name a few. Caution: Copyright! Who is the author of that image or photograph? Do you need their permission for use? If yes, find a different picture that is a copyright free image/ available in the public domain or take a photograph/ record a video yourself.
- Work individually or pair up with someone in your class. No more than 2 people. No more than 3 minutes. If working individually, keep your recording to 2 minutes.

You cannot:

- Record others without permission. Check with your professor if you must record another person.
- Include music and images that are not in the public domain and therefore, copyrighted.
- Go beyond the scope of the narrative assignment. Stick to the material/ events you have shared. New or additional information is not required. Your narrative voice, style of presentation, and even choice of vocabulary may be different.
- Share audio-visual material posted by peers in any other forum.
- Negatively caricature or represent individuals, institutions, societies, geographical regions etc. Remember that the purpose is to share successful strategies and engage your readers.

## Works Cited

Aysal, Lara. *Hul'q'umi'num' heroes: Reclaiming language through*

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Canagarajah, Suresh. *Transnational Literacy Autobiographies as Translingual Writing*. Routledge, 2020.

Canagarajah, Suresh and Ruth Parrish Sauder. "Writing Toward Beauty." *Transnational Literacy Autobiographies as Translingual Writing*. Routledge, 2020, pp. 159-174.

Stewart, Marjorie. "Weaving Personal Experience into Academic Writings." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writings*, Volume 3, edited by Dana Driscoll, Mary Stewart and Matthew Vetter, Parlor Press, 2020, pp. 162-174.

### Further Reading

Canagarajah, Suresh. "Translingual writing and teacher development in composition." *College English*, vol. 78, no. 3, 2016, pp. 265-273.

Guerrettaz, Anne M., and Bill Johnston. "Materials in the Classroom Ecology." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 97, no. 3, 2013, pp. 779-796.

St.Amant, Kirk. "Writing in Global Contexts: Composing Usable Texts for Audiences from Different Cultures." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writings*, vol. 3, edited by Dana Driscoll, Mary Stewart and Matthew Vetter, Parlor Press, 2020, pp. 147-161.