**Creative Writing**

**Writing the Personal Essay**

Everyone has at least one dramatic tale to tell, either of his or her own experiences or that of someone else. It might be a moment of high adventure, danger, jeopardy, or even comedy. It might be a tale of courage or accomplishment in the face of great odds, or merely a quiet turning point of real significance. We will be writing personal essays about just such an example from our own lives.

When you write your essay recounting your experience, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Choose a subject covering a short time span; this will increase its impact and singleness of effect. The experience you write about should be unusual as well as dramatic, but please avoid ailments and operations even though they seem to qualify by definition. Readers often become impatient with such topics, believing their own medical encounters far more interesting than those of others.

- Write in the first person point of view. After all, you are the one telling the story, and it did happen to you (or someone you know and you were an observing party!).

- Begin with a “narrative hook” that will grab and hold the reader’s immediate curiosity and interest. A brief anecdote, startling statement, or question is a good way to begin this essay.

- In the middle portion of your essay, use specific details to build momentum and tension. Dialogue is a valuable tool, helping the story move forward and injecting on-the-scene quality to the incident. However, dialogue is not necessary. In certain circumstances, a story can be more powerful without it. Come see me if you have questions.

- The ending should be satisfying and surprising, yet believable. Do not call up the reserves or depend on a bolt of lightning to resolve the incident in an unbelievable fashion. Instead, work for an ending that is plausible without being predictable all along. In the same vein, do not abruptly end your story. The reader wants to know what happened so do not leave them hanging just because you think the story has gone on long enough.

- Plenty of relevant details are needed throughout the piece to vividly develop the characters and setting. You are recreating the scene for someone who did not experience it with you. Paint them a picture.

- Give the essay a provocative, engaging title. If the piece does not look interesting at first glance, chances are some people would pass it over for one with a catchier title!

- Your story should be at least 300 words long. Do not be afraid to go over this number, but please do not write a novel.

- See the Rubric for specifics on how this essay will be graded.