A Grading Rubric for Autobiographical Writing
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An “A” essay has the qualities of a “B” essay, plus some of these:

- It is particularly creative or interesting in approach.
- It describes events, people, reactions with particular skill and clarity.
- It takes risks, emotionally or artistically.
- It demonstrates some wisdom and insight in looking back at an earlier period.
- It goes beyond the basic requirements of the assignment.
- It makes the reader (me) really care about what happened.

A “B” essay has these qualities:

- It approaches its subject seriously, even if it’s funny.
- It wants to explore and understand, rather than simply recount what happened.
- It covers its subject well, with clear organization, so an outsider can follow the story.
- It is clear about the significance of the experience it narrates.
- Its writing problems are relatively minor and don’t interfere with the reading experience.
- It is organized and balanced—less time on less important stuff; more on important stuff.
- At important moments, it “shows” rather than “tells” (see p. 2).
- It shows good judgment in selecting relevant detail—physical, psychological, emotional.

A “C” essay has some of these qualities:

- It is somewhat superficial, lacking in detail and depth.
- It gives insufficient information for a reader to comprehend the event.
- It has serious, persistent writing problems.
- It takes no risks and thus says nothing very important.
- It may not make the incidents or their implications fully clear.
- It may rely on clichés to analyze experience or to describe emotion:
  - (e.g., “I was sadder but wiser”; “I felt like my heart was breaking.”)
- It is seriously imbalanced: an important aspect of the event gets inadequate coverage, or a less important aspect is treated in unnecessary detail.
- The writing is general rather than specific and concrete:
  - (e.g., “I learned a great deal from this experience” vs. “I learned a new kind of humility, plus a respect for people I’d formerly looked down on.”)
- In general, the essay “tells” rather than “shows.”

A “D” essay is rare, unless it’s really badly written, or conspicuously misses the point of the assignment.

(continued)
**Telling:**

My sister and I had a big fight. I really hated her at the time. She was always criticizing me.

**Showing:ICTURE**

- My sister began it. “You are so irresponsible!” she yelled from upstairs.
- I even hated her voice, high and whiny. “Look who’s talking, the airhead who lost my bike!”
- From the kitchen, my dad’s voice boomed. “I want you both to shut up immediately!”
- Momentary silence. But I knew Megan would be waiting when I got upstairs.