

# Finding an Event/Idea to Write About

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- You have your topics: map story, timeline, ideas – what do you know?
- These are events when you overcame an obstacle, when things did not turn out as expected, that are charged with emotion, and that you keep coming back to--again and again.
- Make your best choice now; if it doesn't work out, you can come back to the other two.

# Finding a Subject Cont'd

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- Moments of Transformation? How would change something?
- Your Source of Power or Confidence (or lack of?) or Strength?
- Moments of Magic or the Unexplainable?

# The Place

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- Make a list of the key places where the event/experience occurred, skipping lines after each entry.
- For now, list all the places, without worrying about whether they should be in the essay.
- After each place, record some key sensory details. What colors? Sounds? Smells? Objects?

# The People

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- List the key people.
- After each person, describe a few distinctive physical features, the person's manner or way of speaking or gesturing.
- Recreate any special conversations, any unusual choice of words, any telling remarks. You won't remember exactly what was said, but try to recreate so you can take your audience there.

# Sketching the Story

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- Write for 5 minutes. Telling (tallying) what happened.
- Work some of this into a scene (the context and conclusion could come later).
- Make your scene your beginning?

# Testing Your Choice

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- You now need to think about whether or not you have enough to go on.
- In **groups** of twos or threes, try your story out with someone else.

***Storytellers:*** try to make your story dramatic (by piquing their curiosity and building suspense).

***Listeners:*** Tell the storyteller what you found most interesting or compelling. Could you imagine the place? Were you eager to find out what happened? Can you understand why the event is significant to the storyteller?

# Promising Topics?

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- Beach weak [sic]?
- Car crash.
- Not necessarily what but how.

# Exploring Memorabilia / Talking with Your Momma

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# Reflecting on the Event's Significance

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- Remembered thoughts and feelings: *Write for a few minutes on what it felt like then.* What were your expectations before the event? Reactions after? How did you show feelings? What did you say? What did you think of yourself? What did others think? What were the immediate consequences?

# Event's Significance Cont'd

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- Exploring your present perspective: *Looking back, how do you feel about it now that you have some distance from it?* If your feelings are different, what is that difference? What do our actions/reactions then say about the person you were? Do you see now that there was a conflict underlying the event? Or between your own desires? Were you pressured by others, society in general? Was the event about power or responsibility?

# So What?

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- Review what you've written for the event's significance. *Add another two or three sentences extending your insights into the significance of the event.*
- What's it about?
- What were the conflicts? Between whom? How overcome?
- Metaphor? How is the experience a metaphor? What thing that stands out will represent something else?

# Sharable Concern/Complexity

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- Maybe you tiptoe back to that initial story, indicate what it means, reflect on it. No trumpet, “it’s high time that we . . . .” Maybe just ask questions? Not polemical . . . no call to arms . . .
- Honor complexity—not overly hopeful or pessimistic?
- Arc of discovery—I used to think. Now I think. It might also be true that (complicate).

# Goals for Drafting

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- **Your Purpose and Audience:** if my readers have had a similar experience, how can I convince them that mine was unique? If they haven't experienced it, how can I help them to understand it? Fresh?
- **The Story:** What should the climax of the story be? What actions or dialogue would intensify it? Strict chronology or flashback (or flash forward)?

# Goals Cont'd

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- **The Ending:** If I conclude with some reflections on the meaning, how can I avoid tagging on a moral or being too sentimental?
- Should I show that the event was never fully resolved?
- Should I frame the essay by echoing something from the beginning?
- **Voice/Style:** How to tell it in my own voice? Unique way? Be honest and truthful? Take a risk?

# Beginnings

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- How can I grab their attention? A piece of dialogue? Begin in the middle? A surprising announcement? What *context* do they need for understanding what they are about to read?
- “Just after Easter Roy gave me the Winchester .22 rifle I’d learned to shoot with.”

Try Your Own

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Try Another

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# Titles

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- A memorable phrase or bit of dialogue?
- Play on words?
- “Shaping Up Absurd” (was a subtitle)