DOCUMENT RESUME

ABSTRACT
        Many students view writing as limited to utilitarian
ends: writing to please a teacher or to pass a composition course.
They often perceive little inherent value in their writing. However,
experience teaching high school and college students reveals that
many students recognize some inherent value in writing when it is
used as a means of understanding themselves or others, as in the
writing of autobiography (portrayal of the writer in the past),
memoir (portrayal of a person whom the writer knew in the past), and
portrait (portrayal of a person whom the writer knows in the
present). This booklet shows how such writing contributes to the
understanding of self and to the development of writing skills, and
it outlines classroom activities for guiding students in four areas:
observing and portraying behaviors characteristic of self; choosing
specific topics that best portray self; researching topics through
free writing, observing, interviewing, and reminiscing; and writing
preliminary and final drafts. (GW)

Writing about Ourselves and Others

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Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system developed by the US Office of Education and now sponsored by the National Institute of Education (NIE). It provides ready access to descriptions of exemplary programs, research and development efforts, and related information useful in developing more effective educational programs.

Through its network of specialized centers, or clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for a particular educational area, ERIC acquires, evaluates, abstracts, and indexes current significant information and lists that information in its reference publications.

The ERIC system has already made available—through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service—much informative data, including all federally funded research reports since 1956. However, if the findings of specific educational research are to be intelligible to teachers and applicable to teaching, considerable bodies of data must be reevaluated, focused, translated, and molded into an essentially different context. Rather than resting at the point of making research reports readily accessible, NIE has directed the separate ERIC clearinghouses to commission from recognized authorities information analysis papers in specific areas.

In addition, as with all federal educational information efforts, ERIC has as one of its primary goals bridging the gap between educational theory and actual classroom practices. One method of achieving that goal is the development by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) of a series of sharply focused booklets based on concrete educational needs. Each booklet provides teachers with the best educational theory and/or research on a limited topic. It also presents descriptions of classroom activities which are related to the described theory and assists the teacher in putting this theory into practice.

This idea is not unique. Several educational journals and many commercial textbooks provide teachers with similar aids. The ERIC/RCS booklets are unusual in their sharp focus on an educational need and their blend of sound academic theory with tested classroom practices.

And they have been developed because of the increasing requests from teachers to provide this kind of service.

Topics for these booklets are recommended by the ERIC/RCS National Advisory Committee. Suggestions for topics to be considered by the committee should be directed to the clearinghouse.

Bernard O'Donnell
Director, ERIC/RCS

Theory

Based on their school experiences, many students view writing as limited to utilitarian ends: writing to please a teacher or to pass a composition course. They often perceive little inherent value in their writing. From experience in teaching autobiography, memoir, and verbal portrait to college and high school students, I have discovered that many students recognize some inherent value in writing used as a means of understanding themselves or others.

There are three theoretical planes that intersect to illuminate the process of understanding self through writing. Theory of autobiography, memoir, and portrait writing (referred to hereafter as AMP writing) delineates writers' methods of using details of experience to portray self; social-science theory suggests different characteristics of self; and theory of the composing process provides a framework for understanding the various stages writers go through in writing about self.

For the purposes of this booklet, I am stipulating the following definitions: *autobiography* recounts experiences which portray the writer in the past; *memoir* recounts experiences which portray another person whom the writer knew in the past; and *portrait* portrays a person whom the writer knows in the present. As defined, the emphasis on portraying oneself or another person through concrete detail poses a problem of length: Students cannot be expected to portray, in a full-length autobiography, memoir, or portrait, all of their own, or another's, previous experience. Portraying experiences in concrete detail in a relatively short paper—showing oneself, or another person, behaving, thinking, and feeling rather than simply giving the reader a catalog of facts—requires some focus on a particular time period or set of experiences. In writing the "phase" autobiography, as suggested by James Moffett,[1] students choose a particular phase, or period of time, which was important in the students' own development or self-definition: for example, a visit to another neighborhood, town, city, or country, during which their previous values, ideas, or self-concepts are challenged by a strange world. By limiting focus, students go beyond superficial résumés of events and instead portray those be-

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haviors that suggest the characteristics unique to the individual.

In all three of these forms—autobiography, memoir, and portrait—students attempt to capture the nature or essence of self. Those few critics who have developed a theory of autobiography or memoir base much of their discussion on this difficult concept, "self." The concept transcends the merely statistical or circumstantial (age, weight, sex, height, occupation, school) and encompasses characteristics of personality, needs, values, self-concept, social role, a vast array of intangibles that are manifested in behavior. Although a writer may explicitly describe these intangibles, it is the concrete details that best "signify" selfhood (to use Henry James's term). Writing AMP therefore involves portraying characteristics of self through details of dialogue, appearance, nonverbal behavior, and expressed thoughts and feelings. Just as one comes to know a stranger by observing that person's behavior, so the reader comes to know the subject of AMP by "hearing," observing, empathizing with that subject. For example, when a portrait writer in the *New York Times Magazine* characterizes Detroit baseball pitcher Mark Fidych as "flaky," "existential," "romantic," the reader still wants the writer to flesh out these descriptors by showing Fidych's unusual behaviors on the mound, his blunt language, his comments about the world at large. [2]

• This does not necessarily mean that students must begin with ideas about self and then "show, don't tell" these ideas through concrete detail. The process may work in reverse. Because students often tend to think about themselves or others only in terms of actual experiences, they may begin by recording a lot of experiences, observations, or recollections and, only after writing all of this down, may discover some ideas about the self.

In addition to portraying self through concrete experience, students writing AMP are engaged also in the act of reflecting on their past selves, or on other persons. In order to understand the nature of the self, they must stand back and consider the meaning of experience in terms of self. The reader becomes a witness to the writer's act of reflecting on experience in terms of the writer's own values, needs, aspirations, ideals. As Porter and Wolf note in their textbook, "autobiography at its best ought to reveal what it feels like to be the person who is writing." [3]

Many students often have little opportunity to stand back and reflect on experience in a formal manner. They are daily bombarded with entertainment and information, by media which require little reflective thinking beyond immediate, superficial experience. Moreover, as found in one study of different modes of students' language use in high school classrooms, students engaged in little reflective thinking; most of their classroom-language use was devoted to information giving. [4] Saturated with data, and inundated by entertainment, students may find it difficult to put all of this stimulation into the perspective of per-

sonal meaning. In contrast, such nineteenth-century writers as Thoreau leisurely philosophized about even the most insignificant aspects of daily life.

Most students do not view their own or others' experience in symbolic, philosophical terms. They tend to reflect on themselves or others only when facing a crisis: challenge, success, failure, illness, or death. Because the self seems to come into sharper focus during these experiences, they often serve as the basis for writing AMP. The death of a grandfather sets off reflection about his unique qualities; a mother's success stimulates reflection about her aspirations and drive; the recollection of moving and adjusting to a totally different place recalls a past self coping with change. Choosing and focusing on these specific experiences is an important stage of writing AMP.

Social-science theory and portraying characteristics of self

Social-science theory provides a number of interesting insights into the nature of self. It attempts to explain not only how humans are unique but also how they are similar. It therefore provides some understanding of writers' attempts to portray self both as unique and as shaped by group norms.

Psychologists who study the ego indicate that the consistency of a person's behavioral style suggests certain characteristics of self. By repeating certain types of behavior, the writer suggests that this behavioral style is characteristic of the subject. In researching material for a phase autobiography, students may detect certain behaviors that recur in different episodes: for example, a tendency to launch impatiently into a project, without thinking it through. This suggests two important foci for portraying self: the style or manner of behavior and the degree of consistency of that style.

The writer does more than simply choose certain behaviors that portray self. The writer shows the person speaking, acting, thinking, and daydreaming in a certain consistent manner. The fact that a person performs particular duties on a job may suggest less about that person's self than does the unique manner in which she or he performs those duties.

People also change their behavior in response to different circumstances, roles, social expectations, and group norms. In some circumstances they become quite angry, while in other circumstances they are calm; in some situations they are nervous and withdrawn, while in others they are confident and outgoing. Though trying to understand such variation can be exasperating, it is essential to portraying uniqueness.

Social psychology and sociology have mapped out elaborate networks of social contexts that are partially responsible for the variation and complexity of a person's behavior. Writers of AMP use different social

relationships, events, or settings to show how a person's style of
behavior varies or remains constant across these different contexts. In
writing AMP, students therefore attempt to develop the self as a mirror
of people and places, revealed through relationships.

There are also imaginative and subconscious aspects of self. Psycho-
analytic theorists have described fantasy and dream as means of coping
with reality and expressing subconscious needs and desires. Writers
often use a person's daydreams—idealized versions of self that are set
against its more realistic versions—to portray that person's needs or
desires.

The self is also constantly evolving, developing through various
stages. Some psychologists assert that we all proceed chronologically
through the various stages of development in cognition, socialization,
personality, moral reasoning, and language and that each stage is
prerequisite to the next.

Writing about past behavior from the perspective of the present may
create a conflict between the earlier developmental level and the level of
development reflected in the writer's present perspective. This conflict
is most apparent when adults write about childhood experiences. For
example, a student writes about a moral dilemma—whether or not to
defend an unpopular cause—encountered at age twelve and again at
age thirty. The differences between the reasons given for failing to
defend the cause at age twelve (fear of being ridiculed by friends) and
for defending the cause at age thirty (belief that the cause was just)
dramatizes the differences between developmental stages, revealing the
self as evolving in a particular direction.

The self also develops in accordance, and in conflict, with cultural
values. The adolescent self has been partially shaped by conflict with
traditional values. Women's autobiographies often describe an initial
period of socialization according to traditional, male-oriented cultural
values, followed by a rejection of these values and an emerging
redefinition of self.

Differences between autobiography, memoir, and portrait

While autobiography, memoir, and portrait each involve the portrayal
of self, they differ in purpose, focus, and difficulty. The most obvious
difference is that autobiography focuses on the writer, and memoir and
portrait focus on others. Some students may be far more objective in
writing about someone else than in writing about themselves and may
prefer the memoir and portrait forms. Older students may be more
likely than younger ones are to recognize differences between their own
past and present behavior; they may even perceive themselves as a
series of distinct versions. As James Olney suggests in his theory of
autobiography, the fact that memory brings "back some things,
neglecting other things . . . seems to argue that selfhood is not

continuous; for it brings up one self here and another self there, and they are not the same as one another."[5]

Memoir (writing about someone in the past) differs from portrait (writing about someone in the present) in that students usually have more direct access to the subject of a portrait: they can interview the subject of a portrait, while they must depend more on their memories in writing about someone in the past. As with phase autobiography, memoir writing is most successful when it focuses on specific events or incidents representing characteristic behaviors. Students may recall some of their own previous experiences with their subject, or they may attempt to reconstruct those experiences from interviews with the person and with others who knew that person. In some cases, students write memoirs about the "past self" of a person they still know in the present.

Because students can draw on a lot more observational data for writing portraits than for writing memoirs, portraits tend to be focused less often on specific events than are autobiography or memoir and more often on the person's behavior in various circumstances. For example, a student writing a portrait of a social worker could follow the subject around, on and off the job, and could interview him or her at length. The student thus would gather observations of that person's behavior in various situations—behavior which suggests the social worker's unique personality.

Theory of the composing process

In writing a phase autobiography, memoir, or portrait, students use a number of writing skills. These skills are best understood in the context of current theory of the composing process as defined by such educators as Moffett, Macrorie, Elbow, Emig, and Murray.[6] These theorists reject the traditional textbook models for good writing, which focus students' attention on the product rather than on the complex process of composing. Based on analysis of students' actual writing behavior, they have outlined various stages of the writing process. These include *prewriting*: free writing, jotting, discussion, researching, transcribing, dictating, reflecting; *writing drafts*: formulating, organizing, shaping, articulating ideas or experiences; and *preparing final copy*: detailed focus on such details as wording, sentence structure, spelling, and appearance. In the prewriting and initial drafting stages, students may be less concerned with audience and more concerned with shaping content, while, in the final stages, they may be concerned with audience and with minor aspects of form.

The activities suggested in the practice section of this book encourage students to stretch the writing of AMP into different stages, with different activities at each stage. Instead of first thinking of everything they want to portray about self and then sitting down and

writing a draft, students are encouraged to develop their thinking—recollections, observations, and inferences—in free writing, journal writing, or jottings and, in the process, discover their meaning. They then have extensive written material, some of which they may develop into a first draft.

Justifying AMP as part of a writing instruction program

The question is often asked, "What does this highly personal writing contribute to a writing class, when most students have difficulty clearly expressing their ideas?" Two assumptions underlie this question. The first is that writing instruction ought to stick to expository writing. The second is that writing AMP does not involve the articulation of ideas.

Clearly, subject matter need not dictate the mode of expression: AMP can involve any of the kinds of writing in which students should be competent (expository, persuasive, expressive, narrative). Moreover, while the content may be personal, the process is the same, regardless of mode.

The processes which serve as bases for the activities suggested in the practice section are basic to most writing tasks. Free writing, journal writing, and other prewriting activities develop ideas. Specific experiences or examples are used to illustrate ideas. Research, observation, and interviews are conducted in order to develop material. Behavior must be reasonably explained. Experiences must be organized. Revising strategies are used to change, reformulate, or edit the writing.

Students also engage in processes that could be defined as unique to the narrative or expressive modes. (While the activities in this booklet concern writing about actual persons, many of them may also be used in creating fictional characters.) The writer of AMP essentially is retelling past and present events that constitute a "slice" of a person's life. Successful retelling, that engages or entertains the reader, requires the careful selecting and ordering of information to create a suspenseful, dramatic narrative. Paralleling the processes of characterization in fiction, AMP writing depends on dialogue, description, and behavior to portray self. These and other processes based on literary conventions both reflect and carry over to the development of literary competence.

Practice

The activities which follow build on a sequence of skills leading to the final writing of a phase autobiography, a memoir, or a portrait. The first section, "Discussion: Introduction to AMP," focuses on methods for portraying self: techniques of observing and portraying behaviors characteristic of self, as well as changes in those behaviors from past to present. The next section, "Choosing a Topic," suggests ways in which students can limit their focus to specific events or experiences that best portray self. "Researching" follows, suggesting methods of free writing, observing, interviewing, and reminiscing. The final section, "Writing Drafts," outlines methods for organizing material, evaluating preliminary work, and coping with problems students often confront in writing drafts.

While these activities are designed primarily for high school and college students, the teacher can vary the level of sophistication of the activity or delete activities according to students' age, maturity, and writing ability.

DISCUSSION: INTRODUCTION TO AMP

What is the self?

The purpose of these initial discussions on the nature of the self is to help students appreciate tne fact that human beings are complex creatures who are difficult to understand and even more difficult to portray in writing. Many students, taking their cues from current how-to books on achieving self-awareness, self-actualization, or self-understanding, assume that one can "discover" a "real self" simply by following the directions of a master or guru. By appreciating the complexity of the individual, students are more likely to be skeptical of superficial attempts to portray self, and they may be more willing to probe beneath stereotyped self-concepts or conceptions of others.

If these initial discussions are conducted in an open-ended, non-directed manner, they may also serve to establish close relationships between students, relationships that are important for later discussions and for peer evaluation of writing.

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The discussions begin with students introducing themselves by stating such information as age, place of birth, height, weight, address, and courses taken in school and then discussing how much this information conveys about the self. I ask them about the usefulness of this "vita-sheet" data in understanding the nature of the individual. Many students say that it is insufficient, because it conveys nothing of the unique personality, behavioral style, or values that suggest self. We then try to list kinds of information that do suggest unique character- istics of a self. For example, one group listed:

- adjectives that best describe self; adjectives that do not describe self
- behaviors, hobbies, reading or media interests, possessions
- ten things about oneself of which one is proud, or ten things that are most important; ten things of which one is not proud, or ten things that are not important [7]
- an obituary noting those things for which one wants to be remem- bered
- a drawing or photo, including a descriptive caption, of oneself en- gaged in a favorite activity
- several sayings, ideas, or opinions that best represent one's per- sonal philosophy

Students then discuss how successfully this information could be used to suggest various aspects of self. They may recognize that their assertions about themselves are often quite different from their behavior. Some information may suggest negative aspects of self which they would prefer not to disclose. Photographs and drawings present qualitatively different information. Further, students may realize that this information conveys only a static portrait, rather than a sense of self as existing with others over a period of time.

Students often assume that self is defined in a vacuum—that by breaking away from the world in order to "be oneself," one discovers the real self. This idea has some validity, but it is naive about the nature of the self as a social being. By discussing self-concept as influenced by other people's conceptions, students may understand that self is also defined or shaped by a network of social relationships.

From these discussions, students may derive a notion of the self as complex, as complicated by disparities between self-concept and behavior, outer and inner selves, and variations and inconsistencies across social relationships.

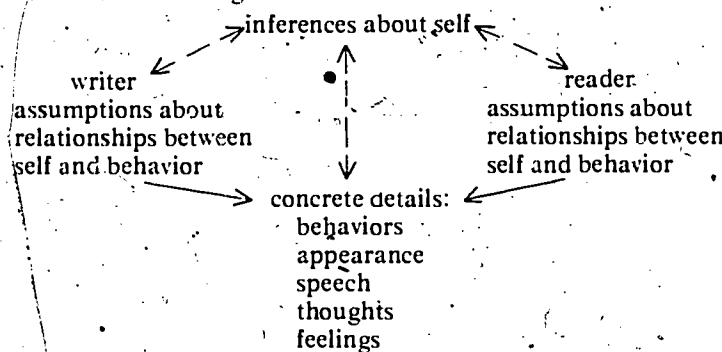**Portraying self through behavior**

It is also important that students appreciate the need to describe behavior in order to portray self. They must remember that they are communicating their ideas to a reader, and the reader uses the details of behavior to make inferences about the individual. Concrete details

are often more easily understood than abstractions.

Students need to think about their readers. In one activity designed to help students understand the reader's reliance on concrete detail to comprehend self, one student tries to-communicate ideas about someone to another student. The other student reacts as to which information—abstraction or concrete detail—is most helpful in understanding the ideas. In most cases, it is the details.

I also ask students to decide which of different types of cues is most helpful in-understanding a person. For example, a student says, "In the- past, Joe was a hard-working, dedicated, achievement-oriented student." In discussing the meaning of such general descriptors from the point of view of a reader interested in understanding, it is often apparent that such phrases do not adequately portray self. Several students may conceive of themselves as hard working, but they may differ in the degree to which they are, in fact, hard working. I then ask, for reasons for the differing understandings of this concept. Students may note that they disagree about the meaning of *hard working* because each has a different set of previous experiences with, and assumptions about, hard work. We discuss the fact that, in order that the reader understand the writer's meaning, the writer needs to use those concrete details of experience that convey the meaning the writer intends for the concept of *hard working*. For example, a writer may begin an autobiographical sketch with: "I would usually get up early in the morning, full of plans and schedules for every minute of the day. No time for wasted energy. As I looked in the mirror, I asked myself, do I look busy?" We discuss how a reader makes inferences about the individual in this description. A student who infers that the writer was obsessed with work is asked how the details in the sketch communicate that obsession. The inference depends upon the assumption that the behavior described is characteristic of obsession. Asking for reasons for such inferences can lead to a discussion of the assumptions involved.

The following chart can be used to illustrate the reader's use of concrete detail in making inferences about the self.

inferences about self

writer   reader
assumptions about   assumptions about
relationships between   relationships between
self and behavior   self and behavior

concrete details:
behaviors
appearance
speech
thoughts
feelings

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Students may be given some written descriptions of characters or of actual persons and asked to note those details they use in making inferences about the characters or persons. Some bits of information—speech, for example—may be more revealing than appearance. First impressions—appearance, dress, speech—may prove to be unreliable, as other information is revealed. The manner or style of behavior may suggest more about the self than does the behavior itself.

Improvisation can be used to focus the discussion on the use of specific cues. Students decide on certain situations: a meeting in the dean's office; a sales representative trying to impress someone; a visit to a retirement home. After acting out these situations, students make inferences about the nature of the relationships portrayed—intimate, subservient, formal, tense—and the roles or personalities assumed. They then describe the specific cues they used to make these inferences, the reasons for their inferences, and the underlying assumptions about behavior and self. Disagreement about the meaning of certain cues further illustrates the complexity of the process of understanding self.

The final discussion topic focuses on the idea that specific incidents communicate a sense of self. Students attempt to describe people unknown to the group, in terms of incidents that illustrate characteristic behaviors. Often, a series of these incidents reiterates certain consistent qualities. For example, the fact that a person is consistently late, regardless of the occasion, reveals more about the individual than would only one incidence of tardiness. Students then discuss how particular incidents suggest one side of a person while other incidents suggest a different side.

Bringing in guest speakers and having them talk about those experiences in their lives that influenced their careers, values, or philosophies can dramatize the role of key incidents in determining self.

These discussions of the ways in which specific behaviors and incidents reveal character are helpful when students must develop , criteria for selecting information that best portrays self.

Problems of recollection

In researching background for writing autobiography or memoir, students often have difficulty trying to recall specific details from previous experience. When they cannot recall all of the details, they must be willing to summarize or substitute approximate recollections in their writing. However, some degree of accuracy in recall is important. We therefore discuss the selective bias of memory—that as current mood attitude, experience, or state-of-mind shifts, so certain memories are evoked or blotted out.

Two studies of the memory process suggest some techniques fo improving recall. One study found that when subjects were asked t

recognize pictures of former classmates, they were far more accurate in recalling names than they were when asked to recall names without benefit of pictures.[8] This suggests that old photos, yearbooks, letters, newspapers, and such can stimulate certain memories. Another study indicated that when subjects are in the same emotional state of mind as that of the original experience, recall is improved.[9] For example, being excited or tense can evoke memories of excitement or tension in the past.

Memories often occur spontaneously, rather than as a result of a conscious effort to remember. Thinking of a recent experience involving a certain emotional state or of an object associated with it may trigger recall of earlier experiences. Students could discuss how specific stimuli or emotional states evoke past experiences. The short film *Frank Film* (available from Pyramid Films) contains many images—cars, furniture, drinks—associated with different periods of the film maker's life. After viewing a film such as this one, or perhaps after reading through old magazines, students could cite images that evoked memories associated with certain emotional states—an old basketball with the excitement of winning   , for instance.

Techniques of observation

Before they begin the research stage, students need to become familiar with techniques for observing behavior. While it requires extensive training and experience to learn the observation techniques employed by psychiatrists and social psychologists, students may sharpen their perceptions of behavior by engaging in some basic observation activities.

Work on observation techniques begins with open-ended observations of people's behavior in a public place, such as a park, restaurant, or lobby. Each student writes down only behaviors that are observable, without drawing inferences or making judgments. Stress should be placed on the use of free writing or detailed note taking as means of recording observations. Students then compare their observations, noting similarities and differences. After this initial, description stage, they can make inferences about their subjects, discussing reasons for these judgments and their validity.

Another activity applicable to autobiography is self-observation: describing one's appearance or behavior in a given situation. A photo, mirror, or videotape is a helpful aid for noting details of behavior. Students can compare their self-descriptions with other students' descriptions of the same image or behavior, discussing reasons for differences in perception.

Recalling their background discussions about changes in behavior due to changes in context and about the unreliability of first impressions, students try to observe themselves and others in different

circumstances and at different times. For example, students sit in a
student-lounge and make careful observations of students they do not
know, prompting certain inferences. Then, after further observations
in different contexts or at a later time, they modify or amplify their
initial inferences.

'It is also helpful for students to share their inferences as much as
possible. Not only should they realize the relative perspective of their
own observations, but they also may learn to appreciate the value of
others' perceptions. They may then become more willing to seek out
others' perceptions to supplement their own.

After students demonstrate their ability to observe behavior, they
may focus their attention more selectively on particular behavioral
attributes and processes: speech, nonverbal behavior and appearance,
thoughts and feelings, change and development, and perspective.

Speech. One of the most salient characteristics of self is speech.
Listeners make judgments about people within seconds, using speech
cues; readers depend heavily on dialogue in making inferences about
characters. In writing AMP, students need to know how to use dialogue
or descriptions of speech behavior to portray self.

Students may examine the relationship between speech and
personality by discussing how they identify friends by their speech
patterns: aspects of style, register, dialect, enunciation. They also can
improvise different conversational situations and observe the speakers'
degrees of consistency. By reading some fictional dialogue or a tran-
script of their own conversation and discussing the use of dialogue cues
in making inferences about the speakers, students may become aware
that underlying these inferences are certain assumptions about
speaker/speech relationships, assumptions often reflecting stereotypes
of speech behavior; for example, that someone who speaks slowly is not
very bright.

Based on these discussions, students write different sets of dialogue
that portray friends or fictional characters. A tape recorder or note-
taking can be used for transcribing or quoting others, an important
skill for memoir or portrait writing. In cases which require recollection
of past conversations, students can probably approximate dialogue
based on the nature of the relationships they want to portray.

In transcribing, or translating speech into written dialogue, students
need to work on the use of pauses, rhythm, tone of voice, emotional
state, irony, interruptions, and listener reaction. It is often helpful to
discuss the use of these elements of dialogue to portray characters in
fiction.

Appearance and nonverbal behavior. In writing about oneself or
others, details of appearance or of nonverbal behavior are highly
suggestive of certain personality characteristics. Students observe their

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own or others' nonverbal behavior for an extended period of time, noting those recurring behaviors which are characteristic of the individual's attitudes, feelings, background, maturity, and personality. Again, it is helpful to discuss stereotypical assumptions about per-, sonality, appearance, and behavior.

In writing of themselves or others, students often use too much material, describing the person from head to toe rather than selecting particular features, such as a nervous twitch, unusual dress, hair style, or a brisk walk. By sorting out descriptive material, they may discover that some features are uniquely characteristic of the individual and that a lot of details are not necessary. Old photos can suggest distinctive features characteristic of self in the past.

Thoughts and feelings. Determining a person's thoughts and feelings is difficult, if not impossible, to do through observation. In writing AMP, students need to imply another's internal perspective by overt reactions to specific events, circumstances, people, or places.

One means of illustrating the relationship between thoughts and feelings and external events is to role play an experience familiar to students. At different points, everyone stops to reveal their immediate thoughts and feelings. Then the role play is repeated without interruption. By observing each other, students try to infer each other's reactions. They then discuss how they would select certain behaviors to suggest these thoughts and feelings in their writing.

Students also could work on their ability to empathize, in one-to-one and small-group discussion, by trying to accurately restate each other's expressed thoughts and feelings. For example, one student discusses his or her response to a movie, and another student tries to restate or summarize that student's thoughts and emotions.

Change and development in persons. Understanding changes in personality, values, attitudes, reasoning, maturity, and interests as manifested through changes in speech, appearance, or nonverbal behavior helps students to research their own or others' past selves. One activity which helps to develop awareness of the fact of change is to have students compare their past and present perceptions of an event, place, or person that they experienced in the past: an annual sports event, a family holiday, an old school building, an old friend. By using the event, place, or person as a constant, they can note changes in their own responses—that, while a high school football game once seemed exciting and significant, now it seems routine and dull, or that a relationship with a member of the opposite sex which was once strained and distant is now complex and comfortable. Once students are aware of changes in their responses, they can discuss reasons for these changes. From these past/present comparisons, they may detect those characteristics that can be used to indicate change.

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The most obvious developmental difference in students is that of physical appearance and skill. By observing younger brothers and sisters or children in an elementary school, students may recognize such behaviors as energetic movement, frequent physical contact, short attention spans, laughing, and shouting: behaviors that probably differ from their own. They may also detect differences in speech behavior— in vocabulary, sentence length, degree of abstraction, or knowledge of conversational conventions.

Changes in needs, values, and attitudes are often reflected in choice of conversational topics, in media interests, and in concerns with family, peer group, social life, education, and social and political problems. Older students can discuss the added dimension of change in cultural and social values of previous decades.

Changes in perspective from past to present. In writing autobiography or memoir, students may adopt the perspective of the past, describing experience through the eyes of a past self. Younger students may experience difficulty in creating a different perspective, because they are usually too egocentric to distinguish between present and past perspectives. Writing from the perspective of a past self demonstrates how that past self perceived the world. By occasionally interjecting or alluding to the present perspective, a writer may dramatize development from past to present self. For example, a writer describes the world through the eyes of a ten year old whose naive, inquisitive, perspective is limited to a particular neighborhood. Or a writer describes the experience of adjusting to a large urban university through the eyes of a freshman from a small rural community. The reader should realize that the writer's commentary represents a very different, more mature perspective than that of the naive ten year old or the inexperienced freshman.

Students may not understand the uniqueness of their own perspectives nor that their perspectives change. An activity for helping students define the unique and changing nature of their perspectives begins with students writing responses to objects or pictures. They compare their responses and discuss the differences, noting inferences, associations, focus and degree of interest, and reasons for these differences. In viewing a picture of a crowd watching a football game, some students focus on members of the opposite sex, while others focus on members of the same sex; some believe that the crowd is happy, while others believe that it is unhappy. Students then choose different points in time—perhaps three years past, or five, or ten—and write about the same object or picture from their perspective at that time. By comparing their responses from five years or ten years past with their present responses, they can infer reasons for the differences: changes in attitudes, values, interests, language ability, reasoning, self-concept, and other developmental characteristics previously discussed.

Experiencing from different perspectives

In thinking, researching, or writing, students often fail to consider an experience from a variety of perspectives. Breaking out of their usual ways of thinking generates fresh insights about themselves and others. An important recent development in composition instruction has been the attempt to teach students question-asking strategies based on heuristic category systems, so that they learn to consider a topic or idea from various perspectives.

One set of categories, developed by Lee Odell, includes concepts that most high school students can work with easily: reference to physical context, reference to causal sequence and to time sequence, and reference to change, to contrast, and to classification.[10] For example, students thinking about a person's behavior may ignore the relationship between that behavior and the physical setting. Posing questions about the context focuses on the use of physical setting and period of time to highlight the moods, reactions, attitudes, and interests manifested by a person's behavior. Considering the causal relationships between events encourages students to explore possible reasons for a person's behavior. Why did event A occur? Why did event A occur before event B? Did event A cause event B to happen, or not? For example, did meeting a girl who was interested in radio announcing encourage the student to go into radio announcing as a career, or were the two events merely coincidental? Was the student's decline in grades caused by spending too much time playing basketball, or were the grade decline and the basketball-playing unrelated? Students also might consider contrasts between details. For example, in gathering material about her past self, a student reviews various relationships with close friends, attempting to determine the influence of those relationships on self-concept. For each relationship, the student considers not only the similarities between herself and others, but also the differences. Students can sharpen their perception of contrast by reading passages of character description and noting those details that could be classified as similar and those details that could be classified as different.

Another set of concepts, Kenneth Burke's "pentad," can be used to help students consider different perspectives in explaining a person's actions. The pentad consists of five concepts: *agent*, the person, group, or organization who performed the act; *act*, the thing done; *scene*, the situation in which the act was performed; *agency*, that which was used by the agent to perform the act; and *purpose*, the reason for performing the act.[11] The pentad can be used to study how different people may perceive the same event differently. A student writing a description of his brother's fighting in Vietnam conceives of his brother as an agent who performed acts of "patriotic bravery" in a worldwide scene of "encroaching communism," using his "superior power" and intel-

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ligence—for the purpose of "rescuing the Vietnamese." Discussing his writing, he learns that his brother perceived the event in quite different terms: he was being used (as an agency) by the government (the agent) to perform acts of "unwarranted aggression" in a scene of "local civil war," for the purpose of "propping up the Thieu regime."

While younger students may have difficulty in shifting their perspectives, older students could try several explanations, using the pentad as a guide. However, in some cases, certain elements of the pentad are omitted. A student writes about a past self, selling magazines after school, trying to earn enough money to go to college, and omits any discussion of the scene ("everybody went to college in my high school") or of the idea of being used as an agency by the magazine distributor. Often, students fail to consider purposes for the self's action: in writing a portrait of a friend, a student may carefully research various acts, considering the relationships between the acts, the scenes, and the agencies, but may fail to explore any purpose behind these acts.

Students can also broaden the scope of their perspectives by conceiving of experience from a philosophical point of view, considering its meaning or significance. While they may not be accustomed to posing such questions (defining experience in terms of such larger philosophical issues as the meaning of life and death, the ultimate value of life, the justification of moral or religious principles, or the nature of fate) students often confront such issues in writing about, for example, the death of grandparents or the ethical implications of their own or others' behavior. The danger here is that students may end up writing didactic treatises similar to the "spiritual" autobiographies and biographies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Reading AMP

In reading full-length examples of AMP, students witness the self's extensive development through different phases. Some of the more popular examples include *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya Angelou; *North towards Home*, Willie Morris; *A Walker in the City*, Alfred Kazin; *Bound for Glory*, Woody Guthrie; *Black Elk Speaks*, John G. Neihardt; *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood*, Mary McCarthy; *Blackberry Winter*, Margaret Mead; *One Day, When I Went*, James Baldwin; *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Claude Brown; *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov; *An Unfinished Woman*, Lillian Hellman; *The Strawberry Statement*, James Kunen; *Autobiography of Malcolm X*; *The Way It Spozed to Be*, James Herndon; *Making It*, Norman Podhoretz; *Don't Fall off the Mountain*, Shirley MacLaine.

In reading these and other selections, students may compare some of their own experiences with those of the writers, noting the extent to

which the writers developed particular experiences or episodes in their lives.

There are also anthologies of short autobiographical essays or memoirs, for example, *Growing Up in America* by Robert Rosenbaum, that could be used to study the form of the phase autobiography or memoir. If examples of phase autobiographies are not readily available, short stories may serve as useful substitutes, particularly those that portray a single character. Because students often assume from their previous writing experience that autobiography writing consists of exposition about oneself, the short story can be used to illustrate techniques of dialogue, character, setting description, or narrator commentary.

While students usually have read many examples of portraits in popular magazines, they may not have been cognizant of some of the characteristics of portrait writing. The quality of portrait writing varies considerably, depending on the magazine, the length of the portrait, and the intention of the writer. Portraits in *The New York Times Magazine* (generally one in each issue), *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, and *Ms.* are usually well written. Portraits in news magazines, although well written, tend to be limited in focus and depth, highlighting behavior relevant to current events. Portraits in celebrity, gossip, movie, romance, and many teenage magazines tend to exploit the person's name or image for purposes of promoting a movie, record, or book or to focus on sensational or bizarre aspects of the person's life.

Students can study techniques used by the professional writer of AMP: interviewing both the subject and people who know the subject; shadowing the person in school or on the job; researching biographical information; portraying behavior, speech, values, and ideas through the person's relationships with others; and giving personal commentary or responses to the person.

Students could also watch some short documentary films that focus on one person—*I.F. Stone's Weekly*, *Portrait of a Television Newsman*, *Antonia*—noting the use of interviewing, the use of the person's voiceover commentary about their own or others' behavior, and the degree of objectivity in the filming.

In reading AMP, students should try to discover what James Moffett calls the controlling idea, defined as the writer's idea about the self, communicated through experience—that the self is powerful, naive, or insightful; or that the self learns from experience; or that one's actions may conflict with one's ideals. This controlling idea serves as the basis for the writer's selection and emphasis of information. Difficulty in discovering the controlling idea signals lack of information or faulty organization of material by the writer.

Students also can discuss the writer's attitude toward the self,

another important determinant for selecting and emphasizing informa-
tion. Even portrait writers, who may be supposed to take a neutral
stance toward their subjects, are influenced by attitude. Students
should note which cues suggest attitude—the use of judgmental
language, derogatory information, or other stylistic choices. Examples
of the relationship between style and attitude can be found in Walker
Gibson's *Persona*.[12]

In many "celebrity" autobiographies or portraits, the writer assumes
a one-sided attitude, treating the information uncritically. Because
students generally take a positive attitude toward their past selves and
toward subjects of memoirs and portraits, they need to recognize the
difference between a totally positive attitude, blind to any shortcom-
ings, and a more honest, probing, critical attitude.

CHOOSING A TOPIC

Choosing a subject for a portrait

In selecting a subject for a portrait, students should choose someone
they know well or someone who will be willing to cooperate fully. A
formal agreement should be made that derogatory material will not be
included and that only designated people will read the portrait. This
does not necessarily mean that the student must portray the person only
in glowing terms, but, unless an understanding is reached, the subject
may be unwilling to cooperate.

The advantage of writing about someone whom the student knows
well is that there is ample material from previous experience to draw
upon; the disadvantage is that the student may have difficulty standing
back from the relationship and writing from a detached perspective. In
deciding on someone whom they do not know well, students should not
necessarily assume from their reading of published portraits that they
need to choose someone of importance. The essential consideration is
the person's willingness to cooperate; often, important people are too
busy or too preoccupied to spend much time talking with a student.

Choosing a focus for autobiography or memoir

Students should be aware of the need to limit the focus of an auto-
biography or memoir to a particular phase, time period, or recurring
behavior, in order to fully develop their material. It may be useful to
make a list of important events that have occurred over a lifetime or to
draw a "life line," noting high points and low points, and then to
further consider those experiences.

It is helpful also to narrow the choice to a particular time period—a
vacation trip, a school year, a summer job, an eventful weekend—or to
a particular place—a neighborhood, a school, a house. These dimen-
sions should be chosen for a specific reason: to portray an important
relationship, a challenge to self, a change in behavior, a birth, a death,

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a personal problem.

One variation is the "series" autobiography or memoir. Students write about a set of related experiences occurring at different points in time—a recurring problem, an annual ceremony, a set of relationships. Another option is for a group of students to collaborate on a composite memoir of one person they all knew well.

RESEARCHING·AMP

Having chosen a topic, students can begin to research. Much of this consists of various prewriting activities—free writing, discussing, interviewing, reminiscing, observing—in order to gather as much information as possible.

Free writing as a method of research

One of the most effective research methods is the use of free writing—spontaneous, free-association writing. One of several variations of free writing is simply to write as rapidly as possible for short time periods, without concern for sentence completion, punctuation, or spelling. Students need to learn how to select words, sentences, or ideas from their free writing to use in a later draft. A number of specific techniques for developing ideas through free writing are suggested by Peter Elbow in his book *Writing without Teachers*.[13]

Free writing is useful for recalling past experiences. Certain stimuli can be used to evoke memories—a simple chronology of events, old photos, objects, images, or people may evoke past experiences. For example, students could visit a school, a neighborhood, or a park and, as previously discussed, write down associations evoked by a "sense of place." Various other stimuli help to focus on the individual—the person's possessions, a list of adjectives that best describe the person, or a specific behavioral characteristic.

A variation of free writing is to have the student recall orally, freely associating past experiences for another student to transcribe or tape record.

This process of free association is similar to what James Moffett calls "memory writing." He suggests beginning with a free-writing experience, using a chain of memory or memory links: start with an object in the present and jot down past experiences associated with that object. This should be followed by defining a feeling or an idea which is central to the recollections—a reason for the student's choice of those particular experiences.[14]

The same process can be used in researching a portrait or memoir. Because students generally write about someone they know well, much of their research involves thinking through their own experiences with that person and their observations, impressions, and feelings about them. Getting these recollections down on paper first means that

students will have a large amount of material before them when they begin, later, to select salient information and to organize the first draft.

Students may need help in learning to use free association as a research device. Learning to associate spontaneously begins with listing objects, images, or experiences of the present. Students then try to direct their associations backward in time: initials carved in a desk (present)—initials on a note—note passing during a lecture—Jill smiling at the note—Jill correcting the spelling on the note—Jill criticizing the way I dress—feeling irritation at Jill (past). The direction of the memory chain suggests a theme, an idea about the student's relationship with Jill: the romantic associations shift quickly to feelings of irritation over being criticized.

Students often list very general impressions: "my uncle: friendly, jovial, crafty, conservative, popular." Each of these impressions may be used to suggest specific behaviors or experiences that could be used in a portrait or memoir. "Crafty: planning a surprise birthday party for my mother without her knowing about it; buying abandoned real estate and selling it for a large profit." These examples would then be fleshed out in further detail, using free writing.

Another associative writing activity could be referred to as comparison or metaphor writing. By thinking of emotions, objects, or experiences which are similar to those described in their free writing, students may clarify their feelings. On a sheet of paper, they list past experiences in one column and their comparisons in a parallel column. For example:

listening to my father .... listening to a news broadcast
basketball games in the park .... mechanical toy soldiers
going out in the car for the
  first time after I got my license .... voyage to an unknown place
visiting my old school .... visiting a cemetery

These comparisons can also be used in the final writing as metaphors to sharpen the reader's understanding of the experiences depicted.

Other types of writing

There are a number of other activities—some variations of free writing, some more structured writing—that help students develop material and ideas.

Dream writing. Recording dreams in a journal, immediately after waking, does not necessarily provide a lot of material which can be used intact, but careful interpretation of dreams does suggest certain fears, wishes, preoccupations, identity themes, or relationships applicable to the controlling idea of the AMP. For example, a student's journal may describe dreams of failing tests and being reprimanded by parents, images that suggest fear of failure and a need to prove oneself to one's parents.

Recording dreams also can encourage students' interest in writing. As James Miller notes. "The dreams are interesting simply because of our own deep emotional involvement in them. Discovering some sense of their oblique meaning has all the excitement of breaking the code of a secret message." [15]

Letter writing. Students are often most comfortable and self-assured when writing letters. They have a firm grasp of the rhetorical situation: they know their audience, the appropriate style, and the purpose. By writing letters to a past self or to the subject of a memoir or portrait, the student often is able to clarify attitudes or feelings. Hypothetical responses written from the perspective of the past self or the other person help students think about the differences between their own, current perspective and that of the past or of the other person.

Journal writing. Journal writing is helpful in developing certain perceptions of oneself and others. By writing about specific daily experiences, students often discover general characteristics of self. Estelle Jelinek. in teaching autobiographical writing, has used some of the following topics as starters for journal writing: [16]

Describe a situation in which you felt rejected.
Talk about someone you love or someone you hate.
Describe a skill you tried to acquire as a youngster. Did you have a sense of accomplishment or failure?
Discuss aspects of your personality that you dislike. worry about. or regard as a handicap.
Describe feelings that you have trouble expressing or controlling.
What kinds of things make you happy, angry, or depressed?

Observing oneself and others

Careful observation in conjunction with free writing is important to the research phase. George Hillocks's *Observing and Writing*, an ERIC/RCS TRIP booklet, suggests many specific activities and exercises that could be used to help students learn observation techniques. [17]

In researching for phase autobiography, students need to distinguish between their present and past perspectives, in order to be able to write about the past as they experienced it. Many of the details, feelings, objects, and behaviors that were important in the past are no longer important, and vice versa. Students could keep journal records of their thoughts and feelings about present experiences and then compare them with their free writing about past experiences, noting differences in the ways they experienced present and past events. For example, a student writing about a third-grade teacher needs to separate present feelings about teachers from past feelings. By thinking and writing about present teachers, the student may realize that conversations with them are easy and open. The fact that the student was once afraid to approach the third-grade teacher may suggest the development of a

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stronger self-concept.

Another method of research is to reread books and magazines, listen to records, or watch movies that were popular during the period portrayed in the autobiography or memoir. This material, reflecting the values or fads of previous years, provides a wealth of detail about dress, music, art, media, architecture, leisure activities, political and social ideas, and idols of a particular period. *Teaching the Decades: A Humanities Approach to American Civilization*, a curriculum guide by Brooke Workman, contains many suggestions for exploring American values of the twenties, the thirties, and the period from 1945 to 1960, through cultural phenomena.[18] For example, students who want to write about their parents' or grandparents' lives during the Great Depression could read Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* or watch a movie made during the thirties. This material could then be used as a memory aid in talking with parents or grandparents or as background detail in writing.

Observation of another person's behavior should focus not only on specific, observable behaviors but also on the attitudes, values, needs, and self-concept suggested by these behaviors. (Rather than trying to spy on subjects, it is better for students to ask permission to observe them in an unobtrusive manner: shadowing them as they go through their daily routines, watching their behavior in personal interviews, asking them to talk about their experiences.) By taking careful notes, students should be able to detect behavioral consistencies that suggest unique aspects of self—tendencies to speak, act, and think in a certain manner. For example, a student may note that a friend seems to prefer being with others to being alone, tends to be upset by minor incidents, often suggests activities for groups of friends, and does not care much about personal appearance. The validity of these observations depends upon the consistency of the behaviors. Students need to be careful in making inferences simply on the basis of their own observations, however; they can always check with the subject as to the validity of the inference.

In addition to observing behavior, students should make notes on specific incidents which could be used later to support their inferences. The student writing about a friend kept detailed notes of the friend's successful attempt to convince a group to go fishing. Though reluctant at first, the group was convinced by descriptions of the various types and sizes of fish they might catch. By noting some specific dialogue and nonverbal reactions to dialogue, the student can recount the conversation in detail.

Interviewing and discussing

Another important research tool involves formal interviews or informal discussions with others who know the subject. If using a tape

recorder or taking notes inhibits the person being interviewed, the
student should try to reconstruct the conversation as soon as possible
after the interview. Some of this discussion might be quoted directly in
the final writing: In his autobiography, *When All the Laughter Died in
Sorrow*, professional football player Lance Rentzel quoted verbatim
taped interviews with his parents and friends.

With friends, an open-ended discussion in which the student
interjects personal comments or recollections is less artificial than a
formal interview; the latter is more appropriate for a less-well-known
person. However, students should prepare themselves, even for open-
ended discussions. If reminiscence about the past is to touch on topics
of interest to the writer, some homework is necessary in order to be able
to cite specific objects, events, places, or people that will stimulate the
other person's memory. Students may also pose questions about the
individual's self-concepts, needs, values, interests, and style of be-
havior. They may ask for biographical information or for accounts of
experiences that bear some relationship to the present (a person who
enjoys his or her job might discuss the way he or she developed an
interest in that job). Such background information often can provide
clues to the reasons for an individual's behavior.

WRITING DRAFTS

In my experience, it is difficult to outline specific guidelines for writing
drafts. It also is difficult to clearly distinguish the free-writing stage
from the rough-draft stage. However, some general advice can be
applied to certain problems which students frequently encounter.

Organizing research material

After they have completed their research, students are often over-
whelmed by the quantity of material they have gathered. At this point,
they should go back through their material and extract key ideas or
summary statements. The process may be facilitated by asking
questions: What am I trying to say? What do I intend to show about
this person? What is the important information here? Students must be
willing to throw out any free writing which does not suggest key ideas.
The ideas often need to be developed further, using totally different
material—more free writing—or using specifics from the original free-
writing.

Once a key idea has been defined, the student uses it to organize a
rough draft. For example, a student who wrote about junior year in
high school did some free writing about a job in a fast-food restaurant:

> After band practice I went in and started. One after another/too fast
> they came. Cheeseburger and fries, cheeseburger and fries. It
> started at four and didn't stop till seven. They just kept pouring

through the doors. The manager told us to ask them if they wanted
more and to smile at all of them. The other people just ran around and
shouted at each other, more fries, more cheeseburgers. And they just
kept pouring through the door. My head started buzzing. They didn't
give a hoot about me.

In reading back over this free writing, the student can extract a key
idea: that the pace of the job never allowed relaxation. This and other
vignettes of junior year suggest a controlling idea for a phase auto-
biography: that the student's life was totally controlled by regimented,
routine obligations.

Students also can attempt to clarify their attitudes toward self. In
some cases, it is not until students read through their writing that they
are able to recognize the attitudes reflected in their choice of details or.
information. They sometimes discover that their free writing reflects an
attitude quite different from the one they planned to convey. The
student who wrote about junior year had intended to convey a negative
attitude: disapproval of the failure to break out of the regimented roles
imposed by others. However, this piece of writing reveals an ambiguous
attitude. On the one hand, the student displays a willingness to give in
easily to others' demands; on the other hand, the selection of informa-
tion suggests a condescending attitude toward school and job.

Sketching out the overall organization is generally not a problem
when students are writing about one incident with a clear-cut chrono-
logical development. In writing about a series of incidents or relation-
ships, students must decide on the direction of the sequence, the rela-
tionship underlying the different experiences, and the extent to which
each incident will be developed. For example, in writing about a
youthful fascination with sideshows at state and county fairs, a student
recalled sideshows attended er a five-year period. The controlling
idea turned out to be that, as years passed, the student lost interest,
perceiving that the sideshow freaks were human beings who were
simply trying to earn a living. The student decided to emphasize
differences between the first year's visit and the last, with some
additional information about the intervening years. to portray a
gradual change not only in his perception of sideshows, but in his
attitudes toward other people.

Organizing a portrait or memoir around bits and pieces of
information, apparently unrelated, is a more difficult task. One
organizational schema that helps in sorting out this material is a set of
categories representing different segments or aspects of the person's
life. For example, a student's observations and interview data about a
friend are divided into four classifications: classrooms, social relation-
ships at school, job, and social relationships not related to school or
job. The student also should try to vary the material, so that

abstractions and inferences are tied to incidents, direct quotes, or description.

Selecting details

Deciding on specific details to include requires further classification of the controlling ideas. Some students are uneasy about throwing out any of their research material; they try to put it all into their first drafts. Asking students what they are trying to show about themselves or about other people can encourage them to' define reasons for including or excluding certain data. That question can also serve as a basis for discussion in one-to-one or small-group feedback sessions in which the responses of the teacher or the group can show the student how clearly the controlling idea has been communicated.

Summarizing versus expanding

Students are often unsure about whether to summarize or to expand material. To some degree this decision is a function of the proposed length; although students should not prematurely set a quota on number of pages. As Moffett points out, once the student has defined some controlling idea, he or she can chose to portray in detail those experiences which best represent the idea and to summarize others that do not.[19] These summaries often involve characterizing time periods in which nothing significant happens, but which are necessary to the development of background. For example: "During the first week of my vacation, it rained every day, so all I could do was sit and read old magazines. Then the weather cleared. . . ." Although summary, the passage includes some indication of a specific attitude which leads up to later experiences and to a change in that attitude.

In writing portraits, students may begin by summarizing their ideas about the subject—"The owner of the local diner was best known for his concern for other people"—and then fleshing out that idea with specific examples. Or they may present specific material which builds up to a concluding summary statement.

Students may have problems in summarizing conversation or quoted commentary. Instead of giving direct quotes or even summaries of each person's statements, which can be quite extensive, they could simply describe the person or the relationship: "My mother and my aunt just did not get along" or "Many people said that his cooking was the best in town."

Commenting

Just as a novelist must decide whether, and how much, to intrude as commentator on the events in the novel, so must students decide on the appropriateness of commenting on past experiences or on another person's behavior. The advantage of refraining from comment is that

the reader is allowed to follow the events, as they unfold, through the perceptions of the subject. For example, a college student wrote of a weekend trip with a new friend. Beginning with descriptions of romantic, idealistic expectations, the student, later in the weekend, is disappointed: This friend has brought along a business-administration text and is more interested in reading it than in talking. As the trip ends, the foolishness of those idealistic expectations has been clearly illustrated. If the student had commented in the beginning that, from the perspective of the present, those expectations were foolish, the drama of the realization would have been weakened. Premature commentary ("Had I but known") can lessen the impact of the idea being portrayed, by "giving away the ending." While commentary from the perspective of the past is often helpful in describing past events, students should be careful to distinguish such description from commentary made from the present perspective.

In writing portraits, quoting the subject directly can provide more information about the subject's personality than can the writer's summary. The subject's reactions should be presented with enough concrete detail to enable readers to empathize with the subject and to determine the differences between their own response to the experience and that of the subject.

Peer evaluation during writing of drafts

Because writing the rough draft is often time-consuming, class-time is best spent simply writing. Once students have completed sections of the draft, they should seek evaluation from their peers or teacher. Evaluation is most helpful during draft writing because it is much easier for students to revise a tentative version than one they perceive to be finished.

In order to provide helpful feedback, both teacher and students must recognize that it is the writer who must ultimately make any needed revisions. It is therefore the writer who must determine what changes need to be made to fulfill his or her intention. Evaluation that leads students to recognize and articulate these necessary changes is often more helpful than telling them what changes should be made.

Responses that describe the reader's reactions to a specific section give the student some sense of whether the reader understands that section. For example, a student recalls childhood in a small town, intending to show the dead-end monotony of the town symbolically with the image of cars endlessly circling the town's streets on Friday night. In listening to the reader's reactions, the writer may discover that the reader did not understand the symbolism of the cars moving around the streets. The onus is then on the writer to judge how clearly the description of the cars' movement conveyed the intended impression of monotony. The writer and the reader could discuss options for

improvement, or the writer could come back later with a rewritten version for further evaluation.

Judgmental feedback gives the student a definite idea of the reader's attitude; this, in some cases, may provide incentive for further revision. But harsh, indiscriminate, or totally negative judgments may give the impression that there is little hope for improvement.

In helping students to give useful feedback to each other, the teacher should stress the difference between evaluating the writing and evaluating the writer; students can easily view critical evaluation of their writing as a personal attack, particularly when they write about themselves.

After reworking the content and organization of their drafts, students can turn their attention to matters of editing—wording, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, transitions—the final stage of the composing process.

Illustrating AMP

Students may want to supplement their writing with photos of themselves or others, magazine pictures or newspaper headlines of the period, samples of previous writing or artwork, drawings of settings or people, or even a videotape or a super-8 film of the subject. In reading published AMP, it is often enjoyable to see pictures of the people described in the writing, playing the visual descriptions against the verbal ones.

Discussing what students have learned

After students have completed their AMPs, they could discuss with someone else, perhaps with their subjects, some of the things they learned about themselves or about others. One interesting line of questioning revolves around the self in the future. Students who wrote phase autobiographies may predict future behavior by considering their development from past to present self. Charting that development suggests certain consistent behavioral patterns that may or may not continue in the future. Students may also speculate about the future development of a portrait subject, noting which characteristics are valid predictors.

Notes

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4. Dennis J. Searle, "A Study of the Classroom Language Activity of a Selected Group of High School Students" (MA thesis, The University of Calgary, 1973).

5. James Olney, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 25, 26.

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