

## **Descriptive / Informative Writing: A Personal Symbol or Ritual**

Read the examples of descriptive/informative writing provided. You will notice that each piece focuses on a process or idea that has some symbolic significance either to the writer or to the people the writer describes.

You are going to be creating your own piece about a personal ritual. Follow the steps below to complete this assignment:

1. Identify something in your life, an action or event, that has symbolic significance to you. Do not pick something that requires research or that you would need more than 800 words to explain. Choose something that is unique to your experience and has symbolic significance in your life. It might be something that is serious or something that is a little bit funny. It also should be something that you do more or less the same way each time so it has a feeling of being a ritual that you repeat. Examples of appropriate topics are:
  - Preparing for my swim meet
  - Decorating the Christmas tree with my family on Christmas Eve
  - Saturday night movies with my younger brother
  - Making chocolate chip cookies with my best friend
  - Doing jigsaw puzzles with my dad
  - Going to my favorite restaurant with my friends
  - Making strawberry jam with my family
  - Opening up our house when we return after a summer of traveling
2. Once you have selected your process or topic, brainstorm. Think about what you do when you complete this “ritual”. What steps do you follow? If you complete it with a group, who is responsible for what? (For example, when decorating our Christmas tree, my dad was always responsible for putting the lights on the tree. I always had to lay the ornaments out on the sofa so that they could be seen. My mom made cocoa...) What are the “rules”? (For example, when completing a jigsaw, my dad and I always had to turn all the pieces over and then made piles of pieces based on their colors.) Think about why you have these “rules”. Think also about the way things always happen. (For example, it wouldn’t be the same tree decorating experience if my dad didn’t get mad at the lights at least once.) What is unique about your ritual? What is funny? What is charming? What is special?
3. Next, organize your information. How can you describe your ritual in a way that will make sense to others – not only in terms of what your ritual is but also in terms of what it means to you.
4. Now you are ready to begin drafting. Think about the two examples that you read. How can you use them as a guide to sharing your own ritual? You must remember that your ultimate goal is to inform your reader, so don’t let your piece become a story. Also, make sure you include commentary about your ritual and its significance so that it is more than just a description.
5. Write, read, revise, reread, revise and finish. When you feel that you have finished your piece, give it to someone else to read. If your reader can interpret the importance of your ritual properly, your piece is probably clear. Listen to any advice that your reader gives you and revise again.

## Student Example

Music is not easily defined. It's a collection of rhythms and tonal nuances that are both experimental and traditional in nature. Many consider it is a form of expression, a way of releasing emotions or simply a way of sending a message. For me it was my way of connecting with my family.

I was brought up around music; both of my parents played piano and from an early age I had already learned to avoid the mainstream drivel that seemed to have taken over the music industry. Music quickly became something I learned to appreciate but it wasn't until later that I invested my time in choosing this path of expression for myself.

With a penchant for low basslines and catchy grooves, I pursued bass guitar as a hobby. Having no prior experience with a musical instrument I found mastering the precise movements was like learning to walk again. The complexity of the instrument, the skill required to play it, overwhelmed me. Many times I found it too difficult but became confident in seeing my father play the piano with remarkable soul. It was an inspiration that showed me how beneficial it was to sacrifice my time to an instrument, to learn the importance of finding one's artistic outlet. I knew it was in my nature, so I learned to love that mahogany body, the pearl inlaid frets and the smooth satisfying sound of a pentatonic bassline.

I practiced day after day repeating monotonous exercises to achieve some fluidity in my playing. I started simple, trying not to cloud my creativity, which can often happen with too much focus on solely music theory. I learned a rock classic, "Smoke on the Water" by Deep Purple. The main riff was composed of only 4 notes yet the feeling of satisfaction at pulling off even such a simple melody stuck with me forever. It's important to remember such seemingly insignificant moments because they remind the player why they picked up the instrument in the first place. Having a source of motivation is essential. However, I think if my father hadn't been there to inspire me, I may not even have sought improvement. Yet listening to what he had achieved in his 35 years of playing made me feel I could do the same. He could race up and down the piano, make black keys and white keys howl to an A# jazz melody. Not to mention, he improvised. Whereas I was memorizing songs and patterns, he played straight from the heart.

He was meticulous and not only that, but *his* playing had emotion. It is that one indefinable quality which separates the good musicians from the bad; that kind of playing demands commitment. It demands years of slaving and unfaltering devotion to a hunk of wood you can call an instrument. Seeing my father do that was my true inspiration.

I ran through simple patterns, went through scales, and practiced speed. I even explored various techniques such as “slap bass”, a method where the ball of the thumb is used to create a staccato effect while the fingers pluck the string in a pizzicato style. I even attempted tapping, a method where both hands are situated on the fretboard and 3 or more fingers tap on the frets consecutively to create a legato effect. Yet all of these were simple textbook solutions to mediocrity and none truly embraced spirit of music. However, music is something which bears so much passion that it transcends any other form of art. It quickly became a way of life for me. The sound of metal to wood became an all too familiar sensation and eventually I realized that true skill comes from the soul. No textbook can define what music means to each individual; it can only provide raw techniques. It is how the player uses what he learns and grows through his experiences that he can say he has progressed as a musician.

The most vivid memory I have of this time is of me standing with my bass and my father jamming alongside me. It was the one moment when I felt my playing had passion. He was hammering the keys while I was sliding up the fret board. We were in harmony and the rhythm persisted, like clockwork. I can understand why some people regard music as an introspective journey. I understand why some see it as art or experimentation. But for me, it was the way I learned to connect with a family of musicians and find my place in that community. The ability to manipulate sounds, to create harmonious melodies is a remarkable gift, and it becomes all the more worthwhile when you've done it for a reason as important as I have.