

Profile Essay

A profile essay in the context of a composition course may refer to a description of a person, place, activity, or other item. In a journalism course, the term refers more specifically to writing about a person only.

Writing Profile Essays for Composition Courses

Choosing a subject

Broad subjects may be more difficult to write about thoroughly than those which are more specific.

Broad: *A profile of the University of Michigan Football program.*

Specific: *A profile of Michigan's head football coach.*

If possible, choose a specific subject. If allowed, consider a subject of which you have firsthand knowledge. If not, choose one about which quality information is available.

Choosing a focus and thesis.

It may be difficult to include all the information about your subject in a profile, even if your subject is specific. Try, then, to develop a limited focus on your subject that can define the content of your essay.

A limited focus stated as a complete sentence can be your thesis.

E.g. *My sister Beverly is caring, insightful, and ambitious.*

E.g. *The Writing Center is social, helpful, and invigorating.*

These examples are three-pronged thesis statements that ascribe abstract traits to your subject. Notice the traits describe abstract qualities. This allows you more to write about than concrete qualities would (e.g. *My sister Beverly is tall, skinny, and pale.*).

Writing the body of your essay

There are other approaches, but if you use a pronged thesis, consider the body of your essay in parts. Each part should pertain to a specific prong. Here are tips for writing effective body parts (or paragraphs), so to speak:

Use personal experience. Favor anecdotes (mini stories) of particular incidents over general descriptions. If you are explaining how the Writing Center is chaotic, don't simply write *There is a lot going on there and many people at the tables talking all at once.* Go further and add the story of one specific incident that occurred during a visit that depicts chaos. (E.g. Last Friday, a student confronted a tutor. The student threw a book at the tutor and began a tirade before security was called....)

Use cited material. If you're not allowed to use first person (write using "I"), or if you're profiling someone whom you don't know (e.g. the head coach of Michigan football), the best way to be specific is cite examples to support your points from other work. Follow the quotation and paraphrase formats described in The Writing Center book for English 111.

Choosing a topic—revisited

At times it's tempting to write about the first subject that comes to mind—for a profile or any other type of essay.

Remember, though, that if you write about the first subject that comes to mind, chances are your instructor has read an essay very much like yours many times.

Consider, then, choosing a subject other than the first one that comes to mind. Your essay may then have a quality of novelty or creativity it wouldn't otherwise.

(For more information on writing profiles, including examples, see *Axelrod & Cooper's Concise Guide to Writing* by Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper.)

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