

## SMARTHINKING's E-structor Response Form

(Your marked-up essay is below this form.)

**HOW THIS WORKS:** Your e-structor has written overview comments about your essay in the form below. Your e-structor has also embedded comments [in bold and in brackets] throughout your essay. Thank you for choosing SMARTHINKING's OWL; best wishes with revising your paper!

Welcome to Smarthinking, Christina! I'm Kristin W., and I'll be helping you with your essay this afternoon. I enjoyed reading about the last fifteen years of your life, and I have some suggestions that will help you to organize and develop your narrative. I hope you find them helpful!

### \*Strengths of the essay:

Choosing a negative experience (like dropping out of school or working a "dead end" job or getting laid off from said job that was still paying the bills) that positively impacted your life (it made you see the importance of getting an education) was an inspired decision, Christina. This really gave your essay something extra special! Plus, it's a great narrative twist! Most readers won't be expecting such a wonderful outcome, giving you the chance to spring a surprise ending on them! ☺

### Main Idea/Thesis:

Sometimes it helps to start by revisiting the assignment, so let's take a look at what Ms. McCalla wants you to do in this paper. She has asked you to answer the following question in a 3-5 page personal narrative: "How has this experience affected the way I think/feel about school or education?" There is an important clue in this prompt, Christina, that's going to help you revise your essay so that it better fits your assignment. The words "this experience" tell us that your essay needs to focus on a *single event*. Your current draft mentions several possible events: working at MC Assembly, dropping out of college, and getting laid off from MC Assembly. Which of these events do you think most affected your views on education? How? To develop a clear main idea for your essay, you need to first answer these questions. Then, you can come up with a plan for narrating that event for your readers.

### Organization:

So let's talk about how to narrate an event that's had a big impact on you. Because you want your readers to see, hear, and feel everything you experienced during this event, you'll want to describe it as it happened using lots of description, action, and dialogue to make it come alive. Most narrative writers find that chronological organization works best for stories like this because it takes the readers through the event step-by-step. So once you choose an event, you might find it helpful to make a brief list of its major moments. Think of these as the highlights you want to be sure that you include so that your readers fully understand the impact of this event. For example, if I were writing an essay for this assignment, I might choose to describe the first time I taught a college-level English course. It's a single, specific event that took place in a limited time frame (a limited time frame is critical because you have to supply your readers with lots of details), and it absolutely affected my feeling about school. To develop a frame for my essay, I might jot down the following moments:

- Walking into the classroom for the first time
- Introducing myself to the class
- Giving the introductory lecture
- Holding a brief question and answer session
- Letting the class go

As you can see, my moments are organized chronologically, taking my reader from the beginning to the end of my class. This gives my essay a strong of structure and makes it easy for my readers to follow along. In addition, by choosing moments that really made me experience strong feelings about

school, I am creating a structure that will help me fulfill my ultimate goal: to show my readers how this event affected my feelings about school.

How can you use this model to create a frame for your own essay? What moments within your chosen event caused you to experience some strong feelings about your education? In what order did these moments happen? Remember to limit yourself to a doable time period. A few minutes, an hour, or a day are really best for short narratives like this one.

### **Content Development:**

As I mentioned above, narrative writers use description, action, and dialogue to make their stories come alive for their readers. That's why it's so important to limit your "event" to very narrow window of time. The longer the event the more details you will need to include to fully narrate it! So let's consider your current draft for minute. Much of it seems like a summary of the events that transpired during the last 15 years rather than a lively story that describes what happened during a particular event. Here's a brief example from your essay:

"After being at Keiser University for less than a semester, I dropped out. I started working more and more and then I got laid off. I was home for a whole semester doing absolutely nothing. I wasn't working nor was I in school. I couldn't take it any longer and this is where I formed my educational goals of what I would like to achieve and why."

Although this passage mentions two promising events—dropping out of school and getting laid off—it doesn't walk your readers through either of them. As a result, your reader doesn't really know what *happened*. Let's focus on one of these events for a minute: dropping out of school. When exactly did this happen? What year was it? How old were you? What semester was it: fall, spring, summer? Were you excited about school when you started? When did that feeling change? How far along were you in that semester when you dropped out? How many classes were you taking? How did you feel about your classes? What was the workload like? How were you doing in your classes? What finally made you decide to drop out? How did you feel about that decision at that time? How did you feel about it later? How did this decision affect your views on school? These are the kinds of questions your readers are going to have about this event. Your job as the writer is to anticipate and answer these questions as you tell your story. To give your readers a full "picture" of this event, then, you're going to have to set the scene, describe what happened in vivid sensory details, show them the actions you took, and give them a peek into your thoughts using internal dialogue (i.e., "How did I get here," I thought to myself.) Including all of these details will help your readers understand how this event impacted you, how it affected your feelings about your education.

### **\*Christina 2694346 has requested that you respond to the Grammar & Mechanics:**

I know that you're concerned about your verb tenses, Christina, let's put that on hold for right now. It's more important for you to address the issues I've noted above than to fix your grammar. Also, you may find that as you revise, your verb tense issues decrease. When you tell narrate an event that took place in the past in chronological order, you basically use past tense throughout. If at the end you choose to explain how you feel *now* about your education, you will want to use present tense and include a transition that lets your readers know that you're talking about right now. For example, if I wanted to shift to the present at the end of my story, I might say: "Although it's been 8 years since I taught my first college-level course, I still feel the same nervous excited in the pit of my stomach." This lets my readers know that I'm going to talk about how I feel now. I hope this brief suggestion helps! Remember to submit another draft after you've revised and ask for help with your verb tenses if you're still worried. We'd love to help! ☺

**Summary of Next Steps:** To briefly recap,

- Focus on a single event that has effected your feelings about school or education
- Break that event down into a list of key moments arranged chronologically to give yourself a frame for your essay

- Develop that frame using description, action, and dialogue; make that event really come alive for your readers!
- Use past tense since your event took place in the past

Thanks for sharing your essay with me, Christina! You've certainly experienced a lot in your life that has affected your views on education; that's gives you a ton of possibilities for your essay☺ I hope my comments help you to chose one and write a great story about it! Please send us another draft; we'd love to see how it turns out!

Kristin

**Find additional resources in SMARTHINKING's online library:**

You can find more information about writing, grammar, and usage in SMARTHINKING's student handbooks. You can visit the [SMARTHINKING Writer's Handbook](#) or the [SMARTHINKING ESOL \(English for speakers of other languages\) Writer's Handbook](#).

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**Please look for more comments in your essay below. Thank you for visiting SMARTHINKING. We encourage you to submit future essays.**

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Christina ---

17 February 2010

### MC Assembly Improved Me

Being in school for the past fifteen years has earned me a quite a bit of experience, not only in school but also in life. For me school was just a place to hang out and a place for friends. That was what I thought until I started college. Well Brevard Community College, for the most part. **[The introduction is a great place to set the scene for your narrative. Where and when does the event take place? What's happening in your first "moment"? What are you thinking? What are you feeling? Drawing your readers into the event is key to keeping their interest, and providing these details will help you accomplish that goal. ]**

Throughout grammar school, middle school and some of high school, I was always involved in sports and that was my life. I played softball and ran track; I was MVP on the varsity

softball team, when I was a freshman and that was the last time I played on a team. I went to school because I wanted to be on the team, if not I would have skipped every day. But when I started moving from town to town, I gave up on getting involved. This meant I gave up going to school and trying to make new friends.

After I graduated from high school, I attended Keiser University. At the age of seventeen, I wanted to become more independent, and less dependent on my parents. Even though my parents were not forcing me to get a job, I wanted to be able to make my own way. I started working at an assembly line called MC Assembly. I worked the weekend shift which was Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. The first couple of weeks juggling work and college, it was quite difficult adapting to the vigorous schedules. But I kept up with it and at the same time it was new and exciting. There were many things at MC Assembly that were difficult to do; however, there is always something to do. Working on an assembly line, there were many new things that you can learn and then later on apply to life. But after sometime of working there it became boring and pointless. It got to the point where I did not even want to go to work but I still did for the money.

The hours were horrible. I worked twelve hours a day, three days a week. I was in school on the weekdays and worked on the weekends. I didn't have any time for friends or family, which really caused a problem. I started realizing that this job was taking away my social life and was demanding too much for me. I still wanted to be able to have a normal life, but I needed the money. I did not see this as a career; it was merely a job. I could not see myself working there 10 years down the road because it would possibly lead nowhere. There were individuals working in there for five or six years, twenty years even, doing the same thing that they started off with including the same hours and same pay. Being in any company for more than five years they deserve some kind of recognition but there was none. Working at MC Assembly was a true

dead end, not only for the fact that I didn't see myself doing that for the rest of my life, but for the fact that I wanted to have an opportunity for advancement in a career like setting.

After being at Keiser University for less than a semester, I dropped out. I started working more and more and then I got laid off. I was home for a whole semester doing absolutely nothing. I wasn't working nor was I in school. I couldn't take it any longer and this is where I formed my educational goals of what I would like to achieve and why. **[Which of these events (dropping out of school or getting laid off) impacted your views the most? Remember, your essay needs to focus on a single "experience.]"** This was not only a life changing experience, it was an educational boost. The experience at MC Assembly has affected the way I think and feel about my education and my future career choices. It has done so by giving me a little taste of how it could be at any other regular job and not a career. Also, it gave me a drive to get a better education and to take advantage of all the opportunities that I am offered. **[This sentence gives your readers some insight into the impact the event had on you, Christina. Good job!]** All it takes is a little push to accomplish something and that's one of my main goals. My parents always told me that my education is for me and not them and that my education can never be taken away from me. Having a first job that can teach you the value of an education gave a head start on a bright and successful future. My whole outlook on life and the goals in my life changed dramatically due to working at MC Assembly because if it wasn't for me working there, I would have probably been stuck there right now rather than writing this paper. Working there had helped me set a goal in which I can accomplish to better myself. It also helped me see where I could possibly be in life, if I did not make something of myself and the opportunities of an education.

So I decided to go back to school. I started attending Brevard Community College. Attending school and working again, I realize how much I needed education. I realize how much school has been a part of my life and not going to school made me feel like a part of me was missing. **[Congratulations on your decision to return to school, Christina! I certainly wish you all the best! ☺]**