

Autobiographical Letter – Instructions to Students

The Autobiographical Letter is an opportunity for you to reflect on yourself as a learner, to evaluate your readiness to graduate, and to express your post-high school plans. After reviewing your school career, you will examine the implications of key learning experiences, draw conclusions, and explain plans for your future.

Criteria for success on the Autobiographical Letter require that it be **reflective**, **thorough**, **well-organized**, and **engaging** (interesting to read).

Requirements for Preparation

- Follows acceptable business letter format.
- Word-processed, single spaced, appropriate font, 1” margins.

Content Requirements

- Traces your development as a learner, crediting people, places, events and/or ideas that have influenced you in significant ways.
- Narrates at least one pivotal learning experience, examining its meaning for you.
- Explains how your skills, strengths, interests, and values define you as a learner.
- Describes workable, immediate, and long-range employment and/or education plans based on your skills, strengths, interests, and values.

Organization, Style, & Conventions Requirements

- Meets acceptable writing standards for **Organization, Voice, Conventions, Word Choice, and Sentence Fluency**

Paragraph*	Contents
One: Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduces you to the reader and gives a purpose for the letter.
Two: Your Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traces your development as a learner, crediting people, places, events and/or ideas that have significantly influenced you.
Three: Pivotal Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe an important learning event that has had a large impact on you, and make its value clear to the reader.
Four: Best Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain how the skills, strengths, interests, and values which define you as a learner are evident in your best works as an Auburn HS student.
Five: Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clearly identify your chosen Pathway and describe your workable, immediate and long-range employment and/or education plans based on your skills, strengths, interests, and values.
Six: Concluding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conclude the letter so it doesn't just end, summing up the main points and leaving the reader with a positive impression of you.

*This is an outline for the MINIMUM numbers of paragraphs. Higher quality letters will probably exceed these minimal requirements, for example by adding additional paragraphs for each of the best works you decide to present in your finished portfolio.

Instructional rubric for “Being Reflective”

<u>Level 1</u>	Little or no attempt to analyze the experiences being described, or to draw conclusions about implications for future plans.
<u>Level 2</u>	An attempt to analyze life experiences has been made, but analysis is mostly superficial; the letter is more narrative than reflective; and conclusions tend to be poorly supported.
<u>Level 3</u>	Some self-analysis leading to clearer understandings is evident; shows some thinking about the meaning of these for future plans; and the analysis or the thinking about implications could be stronger.
<u>Level 4</u>	Thoughtful self-analysis resulting in some new or enhanced understanding is clear, and some thoughts about your future plan based on those understandings are included.
<u>Level 5</u>	Serious self-examination resulting in new or enhanced understanding and valid speculation about the implications of those understandings for the student’s future plans are very clear.

Instructional rubric for “Being Thorough”

Level 1	Incomplete. Required elements are missing, or so brief as to be unrecognizable. Or there is too little detail to fulfill the purposes of the autobiographical letter.
Level 2	Somewhat incomplete; One or more elements is missing or too brief to be informative, and/or there is too little supporting detail to inform readers or support conclusions drawn.
Level 3	Thorough and detailed; it has all required elements and many supporting details; elements of the letter could be more clearly identified, or more fully supported with information, and connections to conclusions could be stronger.
Level 4	Complete, in that all of the required elements are included and sufficiently elaborated to inform readers and to support the conclusions drawn.
Level 5	Comprehensive: all of the required elements are included and clearly identified; each element is well-elaborated and supported with ample detail to inform readers and to justify conclusions about the self-as-a-learner and about future plans.

Instructional rubric for “Being Well-Organized”

Level 1	The letter is organized somewhat chaotically and is unclear; the elements of the letter are poorly developed with limited/no transitions or connections among them; readers are left confused.
Level 2	The letter has some attention to organization—both in the sequence of topics and in the connections among elements of the letter; but significant inconsistencies and/or omissions defeat the organization.
Level 3	The letter is mostly well organized; it states the purpose, provides a sensible order of topics and makes smooth transitions; minor improvements could be made in sequence, connections among topics, or in the conclusion.
Level 4	The letter is well organized, with an expression of purpose, a logical sequence of topics, transitions between topics, and an effective conclusion that brings the different topics together.
Level 5	The letter unfolds smoothly, with a clear expression of purpose, a meaningful sequence of topics, clear transitions, explicit connections among elements and a powerful conclusion to facilitate the reader’s understanding.

Instructional Rubric for “Being Engaging”

Level 1	The letter limits reader interest by an unexceptional opening, and almost formulaic approach, the use of ordinary personal stories, limited reflection, and an overall negative tone about the assignment.
Level 2	The letter shows some elements of quality, possibly an attention-getting beginning, choice of interesting and revealing personal stories, interesting reflections; but there are too few of these elements to sustain reader’s interest.
Level 3	The letter is mostly enjoyable to read, with appropriate tone, showing some imagination, serious reflection and style; minor inconsistencies or lapses cause some distraction to the reader, but it is still interesting to read.
Level 4	The letter has an interesting opening, combined with well-chosen personal stories, an inviting tone, honest reflection, and clear style make the letter enjoyable to read.
Level 5	The letter has an intriguing opening, fascinating personal stories, a compelling tone, sincere reflection, and a genuine attempt both to learn from experience and to present the self to readers, this makes the letter high engaging.

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Dear Panelist:

After 13 years of public education, I believe I've done what I needed to do to prove myself worthy of leaving and pursuing my own interests in learning. Over the years, I've picked up learning abilities and techniques that will help me further my education well past the high school level. I have also developed strengths in the areas of math and reading which will undoubtedly help me later on in life.

As a learner, I think the most important thing to have is passion and interest in learning. I want to study something due to my natural sense of curiosity. With this, I can extend my learning further, taking it into my own hands. I do research on my own time and find ways to learn without the teacher. Once I took upon myself what the teacher did for me my first 12 years of education, I couldn't really go much further than being the teacher myself. Once you do this the need for having a teacher is nonexistent.

As a student, I would describe myself today as an independent and practical individual. For math and the area of doing equations, repetition works well for me. It also helps me to read an article or piece over a couple of times, to comprehend the content fully. There are exceptions, though, and oftentimes I catch on to a concept or idea the first time through. If I am forced to really think about something, repetition helps me understand it more quickly. A perfect example of this would be reading Walker Percy's "The Loss of the Creature." Percy's writing almost requires you to employ repetition to comprehend it; since Percy's abstract thoughts are way more advanced than most readers are used to. After reading through Percy's essay numerous times, along with some outside help from teacher and student alike, I slowly began to understand his elusive theories. This event, like many others, has influenced my ways of thinking and has solidified my route of learning through repetition and mimicry more.

The American education system is probably the biggest factor that shaped and built my learning experience, obviously. However, the way I learned was on my own. As with everyone else, I learned from social interactions at first, when I was young. I followed how my sisters and my parents interacted with everyone else, and I formed my behavior from this. So from the start my learning experience was unique and different from everyone else's. At each event where I learned something, there was a plan, however small, to go about learning what had to be learned. Formulating these plans was also part of my learning experience, and I remembered the plans that worked best for me on numerous occasions. So the way I went about learning how to tie my shoes (watching intently and attempting to mimic the 'teacher') was applied to learning other things, such as making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

One of the most pivotal experiences for my learning has been going to summer school. It was necessary for me to do this because I had failed numerous classes my junior year and had to make up a full credit of English 11. Originally, I didn't see much point to being there. I felt that I shouldn't be wasting my summer with the bunch of losers in my class. But it was something I had to do, and I kept with it. I eventually realized that because of my disinterest in my schoolwork that I had become a loser, too, which was how I came to be involved in summer school in the first place. Upon this realization, I started taking much more time out of my day to do the work, since I had no intention of being an underachiever anymore. Time passed, and I did the little work we received and for once turned it in on time, and put in lots of effort, ironically. When it came time to give the only presentation to the class we were required to do during our time there, I was disappointed when I received a B. After I received

the grade, I reflected on where I was going. I found it odd that I was disappointed in getting a B, a grade largely superior to the marks I had received my junior year. I found I was very pleased at my standards being so high now, that a B was to be frowned upon. This B, coincidentally not a bad grade in itself, I used to extend my efforts even further, and after that point, I didn't get anything lower than an A in this class. As a final challenge to myself to prove that this summer school class was not a waste of my time, I set the goal of getting a percentage higher than the 100% overall in the class. With the very last assignment I did, which was an extra credit assignment, my grade went up from a 99% to a 101.3%, a grade that I was completely satisfied in getting and very proud of, as it was the final goal I set for myself, and to many people it would seem unachievable. This was also the highest for a class that I had ever gotten in my life (by far). For the start of my senior year, I have made much more effort to turn in my assignments and do the work as I get it, and although I realize that some still do it more timely and with better quality than I, it has been a major improvement for me from last year. Summer school has put me into the mindset that I have now, the notion that a B, though decent, is not decent enough and that I can do better.

All of the academic skills that I had found use of in the past will help me in the future, and I plan on retaining all of them in addition to finding new ways of stretching my learning and figuring out new ways to go about the art of learning. Reading has always interested me, as it is a way to escape to another world with my imagination. I have also found myself to be equally proficient in math. This stableness in both reading and math has been shown numerous times with the scores on assessment tests I've taken. For example, on the SAT, I achieved nearly the same score for both areas both times I've taken the test. Based on my interests as far as a career, both of these areas will be beneficial to me. I am particularly interested in careers related to the Engineering, Science and Technology Pathway. Supporting the mathematics half, I'm looking into computer programming and science, which requires math to be a strength if you are going to succeed. As for reading, I know I will be going into a career that emphasizes strong reading skills. Nearly every job out there requires at least some reading skills, and I am uninterested in the ones that do not. Web design and management are just a couple of areas that I am interested in that require decent reading proficiency. Repetition has in the past worked extremely well for my comprehension of any one thing, and I foresee that it will help me greatly in the future, as well. Another aspect of learning that has greatly affected my understanding of many things has been curiosity. Without curiosity, my interest in learning would be close to nonexistent, and without this one entity, I would have no drive to keep learning well beyond the standard levels. I will hopefully be able to apply these concepts to life at the University of Washington, which is where I plan to go after high school. It represents a greater challenge than any others I have yet undertaken, just to be accepted, and I will be going out of my way to try to get in, as the grades from my junior year will hinder my labors greatly. But with a lot of effort (and a bit of luck), I just might be given the opportunity to attend the University. There, my skills as a learner can be developed further. The learning skills I've had for most of my life (through the acts of tying my shoes, and putting together sandwiches and so forth) will help me, but those that I've picked up through summer school will assist me the most, since now more than ever am I required to put forth more time and effort towards my schoolwork than I have before.

Sincerely,

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