

P.E.N. (*Personal Essay Notebook*) 2010

I. The Personal Essay

Your FIRST personal essay is due Wednesday, **February 17**.

Former Mrs. Smith students, start a new folder, and I will give you your topic soon.

FOR NEW STUDENTS, here is your topic:

“All of us have moments when we have feelings of delight. Take any one of your own delights and, using Priestley’s pattern of organization, write an essay describing it.”

It should be typed and put in a separate notebook, which you will hand in each Wednesday.

As we have discussed (see J. B. Priestley essay), your personal essay should have the following characteristics:

1. Starts with an idea that interests the writer (For this first assignment, choose something that delights you.)
2. Is an attempt at self-understanding, an attempt to “know thyself”
3. Writer seldom pursues the idea in a straight line
4. Is in conversational style (a higher level than in impromptu speech)
5. Frankness (should not be totally ironic; makes a point frankly)
6. Is limited in topics only by writer’s reactions to his own inner and outer worlds
7. Has tendency to “walk around the subject” (circumambulation) and “view it from several vantages”
8. Does not attempt to be definitive or all-inclusive
9. Has a “beginning, a middle, and an end” (Aristotle); the end connects in some way to the beginning
10. Makes a point; reveals something about the writer (This MIGHT reveal a universal quality, one we all have.)

II.P.E.N. Requirements

Your P.E.N. is due every Wednesday.

Heading: **Mrs. Smith**
 Name of Class, Period ____

Your Name
February 17, 2010

#1: My Delight

Each essay should meet the following requirements:

1. in a loose-leaf folder (not a spiral notebook); have your name and the class period on front of folder (so I don't have to open it to see that it is yours)
2. Number (and date) each essay (Put #1 on the first essay, #2 on the second, etc.)
3. Correct and complete heading and title
4. double spaced and typed
5. one side of paper only
6. neat, with your name on each essay
7. one-inch margins; do not justify right margin
8. For Lit/Comp classes, at least 1 typed page (not more than 4) per assignment. [For AP classes, at least 2 typed pages (not more than 4) per assignment.]
9. If your essay ends early, start another one, a new topic. (You may quit in mid-sentence on the second one☺.) This minimum length (See 8) really counts, for your grade!
10. Have a title for each essay. (**Do not underline it; do not put it in quotation marks.**)
11. Hand essay and folder in at the beginning of the period. **Put each new essay after the previous one.** (You're making a book, so the last one is last each week.)
12. Avoid "you"; try "I" and "we" instead.
13. If you miss handing in an essay, hand it in (with the next, new one) the next week (for a late grade).

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III. P.E.N. Notebook Grade--Your grade will be based on the following criteria:

1. Meet the requirements of a personal essay. (**See I; also see V, below.**)
2. Meet the P.E.N. requirements. (**See II.**)
3. Turn in ALL your personal essays each time—I will often be grading the corrections you make on the previous essays. *Put new essay last. In other words, keep them in the order you write them, like a book. Number each essay.*
4. IF I have made specific comments on your essay, EDIT the essay. Make changes and corrections based on my comments and on your own ideas for improvement. You may make the corrections on the "blank lines" in your essay OR you may completely rewrite (retype) the essay (on a computer). Leave the first essay in front of the revision. If there is something incorrect in terms of grammar, spelling, or usage, I will sometimes (1) put a check or comment in the margin or (2) underline the error. "Fix" everything that is marked. Ask me if you don't know what the error is. (Do this! It's called "talking to your teacher"!) If you omit correcting something I have marked, I may mark it again; and you should fix it by the next assignment. And your grade will go down.
5. Avoid making the same errors on subsequent essays.

YOUR FINAL P.E.N. GRADE:

- If you do 1-5, your P.E.N. grade will be A.
- If you are late handing in one essay, your total P.E.N. grade drops one-third of a letter (A becomes A-, etc.).
- If your essay is too brief, your grade will go down.
- If you do not hand in an essay, your P.E.N. grade drops a letter (A becomes B, etc.).
- Put a star (*) in front of any sentence fragment, to show you recognize it as ungrammatical but are using it for effect.
- I will record each essay's (weekly) grade by putting the number of typed pages.
- Don't lose your essays. ☺

IV. Topics for P.E.N.

- Sometimes I will give you a topic (like "Delight"). I recommend you pick a small topic, not "My Trip around the World."
- *Sometimes we will use the Notebook for another kind of essay (such as an Analytical Essay on our reading)*
- Sometimes I will suggest a topic.
- Usually you will choose a topic of your own.
- Here are a few Personal Essay topic suggestions (to use as a starting point), in case you are ever stuck:

1. Describe an event that changed you in some way.
2. Write an essay on how something good can come out of something bad.
3. Write about your favorite place (room, spot, etc.).
4. If you could invite any two people in history (dead, alive, historical, literary, musical, fictional, etc.), to a party you are having, who would you invite? Explain your choices.
5. Discuss a choice you have made "that has made all the difference."
6. Write about "my best day ever."
7. Write about "having my senior pictures taken," or "receiving my prom pictures."
8. "Never take anything for granted."
9. "Nothing is more important than ____."

V. Writing a 25-minute Essay

The above essay topics are similar to college application essays. If you would prefer (sometimes) to practice college prep/Benchmark/S.A.T. essays, you may choose from the suggestions on the next page. See me about other, similar topics.

College prep/Benchmark/S.A.T. Essay Topics

1. *The greater the effort, the greater the glory.* – Pierre Corneille

Assignment: The statement above argues that the difficulty of a task determines its importance. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

2. *Treating your adversary with respect is giving him an advantage to which he is not entitled.* – Samuel Johnson

Assignment: The statement above indicates that respecting one's opponents is not strategic. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

3. *In crisis is cleverness born.* – Chinese Proverb

Assignment: The statement above implies crisis can benefit us by fostering creativity. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

4. *Those who doubt themselves most generally err least.* – Samuel Richardson

Assignment: The statement above argues that self-confidence causes carelessness and error. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

5. *If you rest, you rust.* – Helen Hayes

Assignment: The statement above argues that those who fail to strive regress. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

6. *Learning starts with failure; the first failure is the beginning of education.* – John Hersey

Assignment: The statement above implies that failure is educational. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

7. *Progress is not an illusion, it happens, but slow and invariably disappointing.* – George Orwell

Assignment: The statement above argues that rapid progress is not possible. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

8. *We can succeed only by concert. It is not "Can any of us imagine better?" but "Can we all do better?"* – Abraham Lincoln

Assignment: The statement above argues that we can achieve success only through collective effort, rather than as individuals. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

9. *Patience and tenacity of purpose are worth more than twice their weight of cleverness.* – Thomas Henry Huxley

Assignment: The statement above implies that consistent effort is of greater importance than creativity in achieving success. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

10. *How can one learn to know oneself? Never by introspection, rather by action. Try to do your duty, and you will know right away what you are like.* – Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

Assignment: The statement above implies that we cannot know who we are and what we are capable of without testing ourselves. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

11. *Progress may feel more like loss than gain.* – Mason Cooley

Assignment: The statement above implies that our comfort with what we know makes it difficult to accept change, even when it is a change for the better. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

12. *No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.* – William Blake

Assignment: The statement above implies that we risk failure when we attempt to surpass the limits of our own abilities. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

13. *A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.* – Max Planck

Assignment: The statement above implies that most people cannot accept new and unfamiliar ideas. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.

14. *The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap we esteem too lightly.* – Thomas Paine

Assignment: The statement above argues that we most value that which is difficult to attain. Write an essay supporting, disputing, or qualifying the statement. You may use examples from history, literature, popular culture, current events, or personal experience to support your position.