

Writing Guidelines: Telling Your Story Through Personal Evangelism

Assignment: Write your own story of how you became a Christian.

Length: No less than three (3), no more than five (5) pages, double-spaced.

1. Structure

Your personal story must have a beginning (Introduction), a middle (Body), and an end (Conclusion).

Structuring your paper with an Introduction, a Body, and a Conclusion will help other people understand your story. So, **start at the beginning, follow the logical chain of events to your salvation, and conclude with your hopes for the future.** Do NOT label your paper "Introduction, Body, Conclusion." Rather, just keep in mind that these three parts are required for an acceptable paper. Below are some hints:

- a. **Introduction** (1 page): Tell what happened first. Here are some questions you may want to think about as you begin your story. Remember, these questions are just to get you started. Don't repeat them in your paper, or feel you have to answer all of them: just think about how they may apply to your own salvation story.
 - i. What was your life like before you found the Lord?
 - ii. How did you feel about God?
 - iii. How did the people around you feel about God? Were the people you loved the most Christians? If not, where did you first hear about the Lord?
 - iv. What were the events leading up to your salvation?

- b. **Body** (1-3 pages): Tell what happened next. Here are some questions you may want to think about as you talk about your decision for Christ:
 - i. How did you make your decision for Christ? How old were you?
 - ii. Where were you when you made your decision for Christ?
 - iii. How did you ask Jesus into your heart? What did you say/think?
 - iv. How did you feel during and after your salvation?
 - v. What did you do immediately afterward? How did you feel?
 - vi. Did you talk to anyone about your salvation? How did it go?
 - vii. What was the next decision you made after you made your decision for Christ?

- c. **Conclusion** (1 page): Briefly describe what life has been like since your salvation, and what you foresee in your future life.
 - i. What changes have you noticed in yourself? In others?
 - ii. Why is Christ so important to you?
 - iii. Has the way you look at your life changed? If so, how?
 - iv. Have your future plans changed? If so, how?

2. Writing Your Rough Draft

Write your first draft from the heart. Be honest!

The best way to go about writing this paper is to look at the questions on the previous page and take some time to think about the events leading up to, during and after your salvation. Then, write down those events. Don't worry about how it sounds, about grammar or misspelled words—you can fix those later. Just write it all down, using the first words that come to mind.

You want your salvation story to sound like you, to have your own personal flair.

For example, the evangelist Greg Laurie describes his life as a wild, non-Christian teenager in the 1960s. It's a little surprising to read his references to surfing and the drug culture of that time, but his description of the way things were at that time in his life adds color and interest to his story—and makes his conversion to Christ all the more amazing.

Does that mean you have to have led "la vida loca" before your salvation in order for your story to be good? Not at all. The great Christian writer C.S. Lewis led a quiet life, but the way in which he came to his intellectual understanding of God makes for fascinating reading. Remember, **no matter what your personal salvation story is, there is someone out there who has gone through or is going through a similar situation.**

3. Use Proper Grammar and Style to Make Your Story Better

Write in complete sentences.

We often don't use complete sentences when we're talking with other people. Usually we give "non-verbal" cues--gestures or facial expressions--that allow the person to whom we are speaking to guess what we mean without our completing our thoughts out loud.

For example, take the following exchange between Kris and Karla.

KRIS:	Since making my decision for Christ, I feel so ...	<i>(incomplete sentence)</i>
KARLA:	You look ...	<i>(incomplete sentence)</i>
KRIS:	Happy?	<i>(incomplete sentence)</i>
KARLA:	Yeah.	<i>(incomplete sentence)</i>

People talk this way all the time, and sometimes, in the excitement of writing our stories down, we may be tempted to write this way, too. But your written story needs to be recorded in complete sentences, because you want to make sure nothing is misunderstood or misinterpreted. Remember, you want whoever is reading your story to understand what you're saying. **The person whom you've just met, or who comes across your written story, will not get any benefit if they don't understand you. Go slowly and take the time to complete your thoughts.**

What is a complete sentence?

To put it simply, a complete sentence must have a subject (a noun or a pronoun) and a predicate (verb). The subject is what you are talking about; the predicate is what is happening to what you are talking about. A sentence doesn't have to be long: it just needs both these ingredients to be complete.

Incomplete:	Jesus.	<i>(noun)</i>
Complete:	Jesus wept.	<i>(noun + predicate)</i>

A complete sentence should also answer any questions the reader may have. Remember, **a sentence should not leave the reader asking a question or unsure of what's going on.**

EXAMPLE:

Sounds Incomplete: I feel. *(Question: You feel what?)*

Sounds Better: I feel happy. *(Question answered.)*

EXAMPLE:

Sounds Incomplete: I don't have to. *(Question: You don't have to what?)*

Sounds Better: I don't have to feel afraid. *(Question answered.)*

An easy way to determine whether a sentence is complete or not is to read it out loud, slowly, to yourself. When you read it out loud, does it make sense? Would another person who doesn't know you or your story understand what you are talking about? **If the sentence doesn't make sense to you or sounds incomplete, rewrite it so it does make sense and sound complete.**

Group your sentences into paragraphs.

What is a paragraph?

A paragraph is a group of sentences, all relating to the same idea, that are strung together in a neat bundle so the reader knows all the sentences in the paragraph are talking about the same subject. A paragraph should contain at least two sentences, preferably three or four sentences. When you go on to a new thought, start a new paragraph by indenting (hitting the "tab" key on your computer). Starting a new paragraph with each new thought will make your story easier to read.

EXAMPLE:

I grew up in a small town of only 2,000 people. Everyone, it seemed, knew my name and what I was up to. If I got in trouble, I didn't stand a chance of keeping it a secret. So when Mr. Jenkins caught me stealing gum from his general store one fine autumn day, I knew it was only a matter of time before the whole town would be whispering about me.

"You're in for it now, boy!" Mr. Jenkins yelled as he dragged me by the scruff of my neck into the tiny back room where he kept the accounts. He shoved me into a hard wooden chair as he grabbed the receiver of an old rotary phone. "I'm fixin' to call your father!"

As Mr. Jenkins dialed the numbers, several thoughts raced through my adolescent mind. I thought about jumping up and running away while Mr. Jenkins talked, but I knew it would do no good. My father, along with everyone else in town, would know before I even made it home. I thought about trying to talk my way out of the situation, but Mr. Jenkins had caught me and I knew no lie would change the fact. As I looked around the makeshift office and tried to think of another solution, my glance rested on the Bible Old Mr. Jenkins kept at the topmost corner of his desk.

(Notice how all the sentences in the first paragraph relate to the writer's experience growing up in a small town. Note how the next paragraph starts a new group of thoughts: what happened between the writer and Mr. Jenkins. And notice how the third paragraph goes on to yet another thought-group: what the writer was thinking about as Mr. Jenkins dialed the phone. Also, notice how all three paragraphs are of different lengths.)

Which leads us to:

Mix up the lengths of your sentences and paragraphs.

Some sentences should be short and to the point; others can be long and descriptive. Likewise, some paragraphs can be ten sentences long, while others may be only two or three. But your story will be more interesting if you have a good mix of both kinds of sentences and paragraphs in your story.

EXAMPLE:

Weak: I felt encouraged. Work went better. My heart felt light. I knew God loved me. I felt Christ's love in my life. (*all short sentences*)

Better: I felt encouraged. Work went better, and my heart felt light, because I knew God loved me. I finally felt Christ's love in my life. (*short sentence, followed by a long sentence, followed by a medium-length sentence*)

Try to limit the use of the word "was" in your story.

The word "was" is a "passive" verb; it makes your writing sound weak. It's OK to use the word "was" once in a while, but, in general, try to use an action word that better describes your feelings and actions wherever possible.

EXAMPLE:

Weak: "When I **was** ten years old, I did not know Christ. I **was** angry and confused all the time. I **wasn't** sure whom to turn to. My family **was** not open to talking about God.

Better: When I **was** ten years old, I did not know Christ. I **felt** angry and confused all the time. I **wanted** to turn to someone, but didn't know whom. My family never **let** me talk about God."

Be careful about verb tenses: past, present and future.

The introduction and body of your story will be told in past tense, so make sure your verbs (action words) are in past tense, too.

EXAMPLE:

Incorrect: "When I was ten years old, I **do** not know Christ." (*verb in present tense*)

Correct: "When I was ten years old, I **did** not know Christ." (*verb in past tense*)

But, when you get to your conclusion, you may want to talk about how your life is now (present tense).

EXAMPLE:

Incorrect: My life is better now. I **knew** Christ. (*verb in past tense*)

Correct: My life is better now. I **know** Christ. (*verb in present tense*)

And you may want to talk about how you think your future life will be (future tense.)

EXAMPLE:

Incorrect: I plan to **becoming** a missionary. (*verb in present tense*)

Correct: I plan to **become** a missionary.. (*verb in future tense*)

Again, go slowly and make sure your verbs make sense, whether you're referring to past, present or future.

Pronouns: Make sure your audience knows whom you're talking about.

Again, often in spoken conversation we'll use pronouns—words like "he," "she," "they," "them"—and the person we're speaking to will know who we're talking about. But that's not always the case in writing. So when you use a pronoun, make sure a complete stranger who doesn't know your story would understand to whom you are referring.

EXAMPLE:

Unclear: My mother and my grandma were great spiritual influences in my life.

Sometimes **she** would read the Bible in the evening.

(*Question: who is reading, mother or grandma?*)

Clear: My mother and my grandma were great spiritual influences in my life. Sometimes **grandma** would read the Bible in the evening.

(*Question answered: grandma is reading.*)

Try not to start every sentence with "I."

It's hard not to begin every sentence with, "I did this, I did that ..." but, again, the more variety you have in your sentences and paragraphs, the better. Try to start each sentence with a different word.

EXAMPLE:

Weak: I grew up in a small town of only 2,000 people. **I** was always getting into trouble. **I** knew everyone in town whispered about me. (*heavy use of the word "I."*)

Better: I grew up in a small town of only 2,000 people. **It** seemed that I got in some kind of trouble every day. **And** everyone in town whispered about me: that, I knew for sure. (*Each sentence starts with a different word, bringing variety to the writing.*)

4. Read your salvation story out loud to yourself.

Often you can spot problems in your writing just by reading out loud. If you wrote your paper quickly, reading out loud will help you slow down enough to spot any areas that need improvement. Remember, if some part of story doesn't make sense when you read it out loud to yourself, it won't make sense to anyone else reading it, either.

5. Edit and Rewrite

When you're finished thoroughly reading your salvation story out loud, ask yourself what you think needs to be changed. Does this story make sense? Are any important facts missing? **Read or tell your story to the classroom facilitator or other students. Listen to their questions and write them down.** Then, consider what they have said and make the changes you think are necessary.

6. Edit and Rewrite Again

After getting feedback on your first draft, go back, make the changes you think are necessary, and read your story out loud to yourself again. Try reading your story to someone you feel comfortable with. If your audience says something doesn't sound right, ask them why. Then consider making final changes. Remember, this is YOUR salvation story; your story is very important and valuable. **Don't be afraid to ask questions and get the writing help you need to make your salvation story an effective tool that will help others believe.**

Recommended Reading:

The Elements of Style by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, Published by Allyn & Bacon; ISBN: 020530902X; 4th edition (January 15, 2000).

This student's friend; contains lots of simple rules that will make your writing better.

Life: Any Questions? by Greg Laurie, Published by Word Publishing; ASIN: 0849939917; (May 1999).

The beginning of this book is a good example of personal evangelism: Greg Laurie tells his own salvation story.

WEEKLY JOURNAL QUESTIONS

All students are required to keep a Personal Evangelism Journal for the duration of the course. For this purpose, you should obtain for use in this course an 8 1/2 X 11, spiral-bound notebook to be used only for Personal Evangelism journal entries. Each week, you will have a few questions to answer regarding your faith and personal evangelism.

Journal entries will not be graded on content; feel free to write what is in your heart. But all assigned questions must be written in your journal and answered with at least one paragraph. Again, **journal entries will be graded on completeness. You must answer the required questions for each week, writing the question in your journal and answering with at least one paragraph (no one-word or one-sentence answers).**

Percentage of final class grade: 10 percent

Journal Questions: Week One:

Describe what was your life like before you found the Lord.
How did you feel about God before you became a Christian?

Journal Questions: Week Two:

How did the people around you feel about God?
Were the people you loved the most Christians? If not, where did you first hear about the Lord?

Journal Questions: Week Three:

Describe how you felt when listening to and reading the testimonies in class this week.
Which testimony did you like the best? Why?

Journal Questions: Week Four:

Describe the events leading up to your salvation. How did you make your decision for Christ? How old were you? Where were you when you were saved?

Journal Question: Week Five:

Why do you think it's important to share your personal testimony?

Journal Questions: Week Six:

What changes have you noticed in yourself since you made your decision for Christ? In others?

Do you feel you've had to give anything up as a result of your decision for Christ? If so, what? If not, please explain why you didn't have to give anything up.

Journal Questions: Week Seven:

Why is having Christ in your life so important to you?

Journal Questions: Week Eight:

Describe how you feel when you talk to others about Christ. Are you comfortable? Uncomfortable? Is bringing Christ into conversation difficult for you?

Journal Questions: Week Nine:

Think about your favorite activities. Do you regard the things you do any differently since you made your decision for Christ? Explain.

Journal Questions: Week Ten:

Why do you want others to follow the Lord? What is the best thing about being a Christian?

Journal Questions: Week Eleven:

Is there a particular person you have in mind that you would like to tell your salvation story to? Who is that person? Why do you want to tell them about your experience with Christ?

What do you plan to do with the knowledge of personal evangelism you've gained in this class?

**SEMESTER PROJECT STRUCTURE EXERCISE: SALVATION STORY
ROUGH DRAFT OUTLINE**

Instructions: The purpose of this form is to help you organize your thoughts for your salvation story semester project. Write one sentence for each of the following questions in the blanks provided. Use your Journal Entries to help you. Later, you can come back and expand your thoughts and details of your story based on your work here.

Introduction:

- A. What was your life like before you made your decision for Christ? (One sentence)**
- B. What event led you to think about becoming a Christian? (One sentence)**
- C. Why did you decide to become a Christian? (One sentence)**

Body:

- A. Where were you when you made your decision for Christ? What do you remember about that place? (One sentence)**
- B. What did you say to the Lord? (One sentence)**
- C. What did you do immediately after you made your decision for Christ? (One sentence)**

Conclusion:

- A. How has your life changed since you made your decision for Christ?**
- B. Is the way you relate to the people in your life any different? If so, how?**
- C. Have you made any change in your future plans because of your decision for Christ? If so, what are they?**

Salvation Story Criteria Sheet

Instructions: Use this sheet as a checklist to see if your Salvation Story makes the grade. This worksheet contains the same criteria your facilitator will use to determine your final grade.

Structure:

Salvation Story has an Introduction (Beginning) _____

Salvation Story has a Body (Middle) _____

Salvation Story has a Conclusion (Ending) _____

Readability:

Salvation Story answers the questions detailed in the journal questions and the writing guidelines _____

Salvation Story is easy to read and understand _____

Salvation Story is compelling (interesting to read) _____

Words are clear; reader understands what the story is saying _____

Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation, Style:

Salvation Story is written in complete sentences and paragraphs _____

Salvation Story consists of varying sentence lengths _____

Salvation Story is free from spelling and grammatical errors _____

Salvation Story uses punctuation properly _____