

# Using Personal Photographs to Spark Narrative Writing

Steven Kenneth Ahola  
steboahola[at]hotmail.com  
Kansai Gaidai University (Japan)

## Introduction

Students tend to enjoy the writing process when they are able to write about topics relating directly to their lives. Thus, teachers often begin a new writing course with some type of narrative writing. The students, for example, may write about their family and friends or about an important event in their lives.

Photographs usually capture important moments in our lives. Further, photographs can help us remember little details about people, places, and events. In short, they can be powerful narratives. This lesson plan allows students to use their personal photographs in order to write a narrative paper.

## Lesson Plan

Levels: Intermediate and advanced

Materials: One or two personal photographs, a sample photograph narrative paper

## Preparation

Before the actual introduction of the photograph writing activity, the students should be instructed to bring in a couple of photographs that have some special meaning to them. Typically, students come to class with photographs of themselves at important events (graduations, weddings, or some sporting competitions). On the day of the photograph writing lesson, the students will then be prepared by having the photographs in front of them.

### Step 1

It might be helpful to begin the lesson by allowing the students to write a journal entry for 10 minutes about their photographs. While they are writing, you can ask several questions: Who is in the photographs? When were the photographs taken? What was happening in the photographs?

### Step 2

After the journal writing is completed, ask several volunteers to briefly describe their photographs. Then, introduce the photograph writing activity. The students should write a one to two page paper (including a short introduction and conclusion) about one of their photographs. In the paper, they are to describe the photograph fully and to explain the photograph's importance on their lives so that other readers will understand what prompted the reflective response.

### Step 3

Provide the students with some sample photograph papers written by former students and read them aloud in class. Scott (1996) presents her view of using student samples: "Since students vary a great deal in their writing ability, it can be helpful for teachers to collect examples of good student writing. Showing students what constitutes 'good' writing at each level of

language study can be very useful" (120). However, since it will be the first time for you to do the activity, you should write a sample based on your own personal photograph.

#### **Step 4**

Do a prewriting activity. This activity involves making a timeline for the student's photographs. On a piece of paper, the students make a list of all the events for the day when the photographs was taken. Allow the students to prewrite for 10-15 minutes.

#### **Step 5**

Give the students time to draft their papers. Before the students begin drafting, it might be important to highlight the paper's requirements and expectations once more. Further, it is a perfect time to circulate around the room and provide assistance to the students. Finally, give students a week to draft and complete their papers before turning them in for evaluation.

### **Conclusion**

This activity can be a good start to any new class. It allows the students to reflect on some personal event in their lives. They also learn about narrative and descriptive writing. Finally, since the students have so much background information about their photograph, they usually are able to write without any problems. Recently, one of my students wrote to me about this paper: "The photograph paper was the easiest for me, because it came from a personal experience and so my writing came from my heart."

### **Reference**

- Scott, V.M. (1996). Rethinking foreign language writing. Boston, M.A.: Heinle & Heinle.