



WRITING A FAMILY OF ORIGIN PAPER

Writing a Family of Origin (FOO) paper can seem challenging and somewhat daunting. It was the first paper I ever had to write that combined research and personal anecdotes. This can be a confusing balance to strike because it requires switching between informal first person and a more formal, third person research voice. In addition, many people find that the open-ended directions for writing a FOO paper can be somewhat unspecific or vague. Here I'll share some tips I learned while writing my FOO paper that may help you to write and organize your own.

When thinking about your family of origin, it can be difficult to decide which stories to describe from your childhood. My advice is to choose a few specific theories covered in class or in the textbook and to pick significant stories that align with those theories. Consequently, you can also do the reverse of this process and pick stories that you think are the most important and then find theories that align with them. I found that it was easier to work from the theories and then pick relevant stories but you can do whichever feels right for you; the main point is that you need a good balance of anecdotes that align with research from class and from the text.

Once you've decided on your matching stories and theories, start by writing about a specific event in first person. You are allowed to and should use first person to describe events from your own life in the FOO paper. Next, back up why this story about your childhood fits with a theory you've chosen with the use of cited paraphrase or quotes. This is where you can switch to a more formal voice for describing/citing research. Really support your paragraph with definitions by the theorists/authors and refer back to specific points in your story that specifically align with



the theory. This paper is about YOU though, so be as creative and descriptive as you'd like in the initial firsthand accounts of your life.

Lastly, it is not uncommon for your professor to ask you to do a 'rewrite' of your original paper. Since this is the first big paper many of you will write for graduate study, don't be discouraged if your professor asks you to add, fix, or change things. Many professors ask students to do a rewrite of this initial paper and will gladly discuss the changes they wish you to make. Sometimes only a few changes need to be made so don't freak out if you're asked to do a rewrite. I myself was asked to do a rewrite and felt very discouraged at first. However, once I discussed the paper with my professor, I felt a lot more confident about the changes I needed to make in the final draft and received top marks upon its resubmission.

In short, some things to keep in mind when writing your FOO paper:

- ◆ Don't go overboard with either your personal anecdotes or the theories. Pick a just a few important stories and theories that explain your background.
- ◆ Start by writing in first person about your childhood experience and then support why your chosen theories explain your history with evidence from the text and class. You may wish to switch to a more formal writing voice when explaining others' work to support your writing.
- ◆ Don't be discouraged if you're asked to do a rewrite. It's more common than you think and not an indicator that you did poorly. Talk with your professor about the changes they wish you to make and they'll help you get your paper to the desired final draft.

*By Julie Fortney
Peer Writing Consultant
Antioch Virtual Writing Center*