

GENERATING IDEAS FOR THE PROFILE ESSAY



BOB DYLAN AND JOAN BAEZ



SAMUEL BECKETT



VIRGINIA WOOLF



FRANZ KAFKA

1. Brainstorming

At the bottom of your assignment sheet and on p. 249 of *The Call to Write*, you can find many suggestions for possible topics for writing profile essays. Use as many of these suggestions as you can to brainstorm a list of subjects that might appeal to you. Write everything that occurs to you—don't censor anything. When you feel like you've completed your list, mark the two topics that seem most promising, and if you find yourself waiting for the rest of the class to catch up, free write about either one of them until the time is up.

2. Clarifying your direction

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the five questions under “Developing a Statement of Purpose”:

1. Why are you interested in this subject? What led you to choose it? What kind of attitude do you have towards it? What's your feeling about it?
2. Broadly, what do you feel confident that you already know about this subject? How did you come by this knowledge?
3. What do other people think of the subject you're writing about? Is your view different than theirs? Do you have a unique perspective?
4. Have you observed your subject directly? Will you rely on memory or on informal kinds of research? (This is not a research paper; however, if you do conduct any type of research, *be sure not to plagiarize*.) Do you think it would be a good idea to include interview material? What information would you like readers to have about your subject?
5. What's your “purpose” for writing this profile? What should readers come away with?

3. What to describe?

What are 3-5 things you will want to describe vividly in your profile? Make a list, then brainstorm some descriptive words for each item on your list. bout it?

4. Deciding on the Dominant Impression

Your profile should be informative, but it shouldn't be completely neutral. Readers will learn about your subject but they will also learn what your impression of your subject has been. Your profile should ultimately convey, as Trimbur explains, “a point of view—a way of seeing and understanding the significance of the person being profiled.” He suggests using the several questions (p. 252) to help you figure out your “dominant impression.” Here are a few:

1. What is the most interesting, unusual, or important thing you have discovered about your subject?
2. What are your own feelings about your subject?
3. Can you think of two or more dominant impressions you could create to give readers a way of understanding your subject?