

The 5-Step Personal Essay Writing Guide: "Role Models"

There's no question that some people play a significant role in your life. Essays about how others have shaped who you are in positive ways can tell a lot about how you learn and how you relate to others. It's important to remember that even though you are writing about an influential person; your essay must still be about you. Connect the lessons and influences from your role model back to your own life. The essay is always about you.

STEP 1: Identify Your Role Model's Impact on You

To jump-start your essay, answer at least three of the following questions to figure out how you can write about your role model's influence on your own life.

1. Who has been an influential person or role model in your life? _____

2. What do you admire the most about this person? Why? _____

3. What specific things have you learned from this person? _____

4. How have you used teachings from your role model in your own life? _____

5. Which of your role model's traits (e.g., special talents, skills, way of treating others) do you hope to one day have yourself? _____

6. Can you think of specific examples of what this person did or said that made a lasting impact? _____

7. How is your life different since meeting your role model? _____

Which of the above questions was the easiest to answer? _____

Which question gets you started on the best stories you can tell? _____

Choose one to two main points to use in STEP 2 of this worksheet. Also, weave in some of your other great answers and stories into your essay in STEP 3.

STEP 2: Focus Your Essay

You want your essay to have a clear and focused main point. The reader should know exactly what you're trying to say. Here are three examples of how to start:

"My grandfather is my role model. The things that I admire the most and have tried to apply to my own life are a strong work ethic, unwavering honesty and a love of family."

"My English teacher has inspired me to pursue a career in education. She has also taught me how important it is to be patient with students and to always encourage them to live up to their potential."

"My judo sensei is the most influential person in my life because he has shown me how making small gains each day will eventually lead to huge progress and that I need to believe in myself even when I don't feel like it."

What will be one or two main points of YOUR essay?

STEP 3: Find Some Examples

To illustrate your main point and to make your essay memorable you need to provide examples. Just remember that your essay needs to be about you so find examples from your role model and then try to connect them back to you.

Focus of essay:

My uncle is my role model. He has taught me a lot about life, especially how to take responsibility for my actions and to always think about my family and community.

Details:

For the past 20 years my uncle has held the same job – waking up each morning to go to work at 5 a.m. without complaint. I try to do the same thing with my part-time job at Zippys. Even though I don't always feel like going to work I try to remember that it's part of my responsibility and commitment to my boss.

Every third Sunday, my uncle invites the whole family to his house for dinner. I try to do the same with my friends. Even when I am busy with work and school, I always try to make time to get together. For the past two years during Labor Day weekend I have hosted a potluck barbeque at the beach for both my friends and family.

My uncle is always willing to help out a neighbor. I also believe it's important to contribute to my community and have been involved with a lot of public service projects including an effort to help the homeless.

STEP 4: End with a Bang!

There's a reason Hollywood movies end with a big finale—it makes them memorable. Do the same thing by leaving your reader with one last thought in your essay. Here are three examples:

When my grandfather passed away, I was devastated, but I also realized his influence was something that I would carry with me for the rest of my life. He has taught me so much about working hard and enjoying life. In this way I know that his spirit will always be a part of me even as I head to the mainland for college.

I know I will face many new challenges in college, but I also know that if I apply the lessons from my coach, I will be able to overcome any obstacle. Whenever things get really tough, I'll just repeat his words, "It's not about failing but about rising back up every time we fall."

There is one last lesson that I have learned from my mother: time makes everything better. Even when I have what seems like the worst experience and things are falling apart, I know if I take it one day at a time, things always get better.

STEP 5: Hear It Out

Try to put down your draft for a day so you can look at it with a fresh eye. Read your essay **out loud** and ask yourself and helpers (teachers, friends, relatives, essay coaches) the following questions:

- Does it start with a bang? Does the first sentence make you want to read more? Do you know from the beginning what the essay is going to be about?
- Does the essay say enough about you? Does it show how your role model has influenced you?
- Were you able to follow the story? Did you get lost anywhere along the way? Did it follow a logical order, or skip back and forth in a confusing way?
- Were there questions that came up that didn't get answered?
- Were there any words that you heard too many times? (Try to avoid using the same word twice in the same sentence.)
- Was it interesting? Were there parts that could be livened up?
- Was it too long? Which parts should you cut out?
- Is it too short? What parts should have more information?
- Does it end on a high note?

Go back and try to rewrite some parts to make your essay better. If you get stuck, go back to STEP 1 on this worksheet and re-do some parts. Good luck!

