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### Rubric for Life Story Analysis

Your grade for this assignment will be based on three things: the over-all quality of your writing, the biography—that is, how you report and organize the events in your informant’s life—and your analysis of what you heard.

**Writing:** I will evaluate your writing on the combined basis of mechanical errors, organization, style and ideas.

**C level:** Papers written at this level tend to have many mechanical errors. Most errors of this sort can be detected by any spell-checker—it is a good idea to use one. Among other things, such papers:

- have many misspelled words and typos
- frequently use words incorrectly
- have many sentence fragments
- do not cite sources, or else do so incorrectly
- are unreasonably short. Although it is possible to write a good, short paper, it is unlikely. A very short paper (6 pages or less) would have to be exceptionally well-written to make up for its brevity.

**B level:** Papers written at this level tend to have few mechanical mistakes. Instead, the major issues concern organization. Good “B level” papers tend to have the following:

- **Topic sentences:** There is one sentence (usually but not always the first) that tells a reader what the paragraph is about. The rest of the sentences in the paragraph elaborate the main idea.
- **Organization of paragraphs:** Each paragraph leads naturally into the next. The paragraphs are grouped into sections; each section discusses a single main idea.
- **Evidence:** The paper uses appropriate quotes and examples to illustrate the main points.
- **Citations:** The paper provides appropriate citations to demonstrate the relationship between your analysis of the interview and your reading

**A level:** Papers written at this level are very well-organized and free of mechanical mistakes. In addition, they are written with at least a moderate degree of style. This means:

- They use clear, simple language: you should sound like you are explaining something to your grandmother. Fancy vocabulary and technical jargon do not make your paper more impressive; they just make it harder to understand.
- They illustrate abstract ideas with concrete, easily understood examples.
- They express complex ideas. (A paper that concludes, “I think my mother was a hero—I am so glad I have her as a role model,” is not really saying much. A paper that discusses your mother’s virtues and weaknesses, and explains these by putting them in the context of larger socioeconomic and historical forces, and discusses how this perspective is, or is not, consistent with some theory of life span development, deserves an A.

## Biography

**Level C:** Papers written at this level are hard to follow. They may be missing a lot of information and show minimal organization.

- A good deal of information seems to be missing. For example, a reader may not be able to tell who the key players were in the informant's life, or what the informant was doing for a living. The account may focus on a few events to the exclusion of nearly everything else: we hear all about the informant's first love affair, but little about the next 30 years of her life.
- There is little attempt to organize things into meaningful sections. The paper describes a series of events, but not a sequence of distinct "chapters" to the life story.
- If paper is organized into "chapters," these seem arbitrary—we can't really tell how one is different from another.

**B level:** Papers written at this level are reasonably complete and coherent. However, they stay at a fairly superficial level of description.

- The account is reasonably comprehensive. We have a pretty good idea of the significant relationships, and what the informant was doing in the way of work, at every chapter of the life.
- The life story is organized into meaningful chapters. We understand how one period ended and another began. We can see how one period differed from another.
- However, these are mostly described from an external perspective. We understand what happened to the informant and what s/he did, but we do not understand what it all meant to your informant. For example:

"During this period my Mom was out of college and living on her own in New York City. She had a number of jobs—as a waitress, a bar tender, a cashier--none of which paid very well. Most of her energy went into taking art classes."

**A level:** Papers written at this level go beyond superficial description.

- There are meaningful periods, which are described from an internal perspective: We see not only what your informant did, but how s/he felt about it all.
- We also see not only a sequence of events, but a course of development. That is, we see how your informant's life changed—both in terms of what she did and how she felt--and how it stayed the same. For example:

"During this period my Mom supported herself with a bunch of poorly paid jobs, and put most of her energy into her art classes. In some ways her life was not all that different from how it had been in college: She was still supporting herself with odd jobs, and spending as much time as she could in the studio. But I think she now felt much more independent. Although she wasn't earning much money, she took a lot of pride in being able to support herself. She had not done this in college, and she had not been really sure that she would be able to do so. She also felt that her career as an artist was taking shape. Before, she had simply been painting in the styles recommended by her teachers; now for the first time she was starting to develop her own artistic vision. This helped her feel that she really might have a future in this career—and that it might be personally satisfying in ways that it had not been before."

**Analysis:** There are two ways of analyzing the interview; you should try to use both.

- One way is to regard the interview as a factual report—and discuss how the events your informant describes fit, or do not fit, theories of life span development.
- The other way is to regard the interview as a story—and discuss how, and for what purposes, your informant tells the tale.

**C level:** Papers at this level do not have much analysis; instead, they simply report the events of the life.

**B level:** Papers at this level attempt to address theories of life span development or narrative, but they do so only briefly, and without exploring at any length the details that make your informant unique.

Analyzing the interview as a factual report, from the perspective of developmental theory.

Papers at this level refer briefly to theories of adult development, but without much detail.

- o “My father’s life changed after he had children. He became much more serious about providing for his family. This is what researchers say usually happens.”

Analyzing the interview as a story. Papers written at this level use some of the ideas that other investigators have developed, but without going into much detail.

- o “My mother always found a way to look at events positively. Her account is full of redemption stories.”
- o “My father’s stories always describe how he overcame some adversity.”

**A level:** Papers at this level are far more detailed; they help us see your informant as a unique individual.

Analyzing the interview as a factual report, from the perspective of developmental theory.

Papers written at this level explain how your informant’s life matched some of the patterns that researchers have discovered—how it differed from others—and why. For example:

“My mother never had a real career, in the sense of something she did to earn a living. Instead, her “career”—if you can call it that—consisted of caring for her mentally disturbed brother. She did this for many years. This role of family care-taker is, of course, usually performed by women, especially in lower-middle class families. It is interesting to think about how her life might have been different, had her family been more affluent—or had she been born thirty years later, when the entire culture had become far more individualistic in its values.”

Analyzing the interview as a story. Papers written at this level point out the things that make your informant unique—not just the way their stories line up with more general coding schemes, like “adversity” *versus* “injustice.” For example:

“The stories that my father told were redemptive, in the sense that they all have upbeat endings, and they describe him overcoming adversity, rather than suffering some injustice. More specifically, his stories are all about succeeding with the help of someone who came to his aid, just when things look darkest. Although he is too modest to say this in so many words, his stories also suggest that these benefactors came to his aid because my father had already demonstrated some unusual level of competence and moral virtue. Many of his stories subtly exaggerate these virtues—and subtly disparage other people, who did not receive as much help from any benefactor.”