

**sample assignment: essay drawing on  
personal experience and a reading source**

Writing Assignment  
CPN 100, section 071

Essay on Personal Experience & Source

In the context of Nora Ephron's "Shaping Up Absurd," describe a time that you felt self-conscious.

As you vividly describe a key moment of your personal experience, help your readers understand how your own ideas and feelings relate to Ephron's. In doing this, you should develop a clear thesis regarding your sense of self-consciousness.

To document your source, include MLA-style parenthetical citations and a "Work Cited" page.

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Sandra Palmer  
CPN 100, section 071  
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Of Absurdities and Avocado Dip

In our society that saturates radio, television, and literature with definite ideas of how females should look, a woman could easily feel self-conscious about a body feature. Today, to be beautiful a woman must have large breasts, a slim waist, rounded hips, big round eyes, pouty lips, long shiny hair, and a small, slightly turned-up nose. Pressures to conform to this stereotype often cause persons such as Nora Ephron and myself to experience feelings of low self-worth. Unfortunately, we all are taught to judge a book by its cover and to make first impressions an individual's destiny. Because appearances have such importance, those of us who fail to appear exactly as expected suffer many consequences. In her essay, "Shaping Up Absurd," Nora Ephron explains her feelings of inadequacy because of her small bustline. My own complex stems from being overweight.

Avocado dip: That's where it all started for me. With a completely blank stare, I read the diet given to me by a rather portly nurse who should have read it herself. It said that I had to consume "no-salt" crackers and avocado dip twice a week for lunch. At that moment, I realized that pudginess wasn't acceptable. I knew that drastic measures would be necessary to alleviate my social "handicap." Discovering that avocado dip was green and paste-like made me understand the suffering that I would experience.

*essay heading: does not include instructor's name (according to portfolio guidelines)*

*essay title: uses key terms to clarify the focus of essay (see Troyka 53-54)*

*opening strategy: writer engages readers by identifying a situation (see Troyka 104-06)*

*acknowledging background information: writer states author's full name, title of source  
brief indication of writer's thesis*

*use of specific, vivid detail (see Troyka 79-81)*

*writer develops significance of key experience*

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*transition: writer starts paragraph with link to preceding paragraph (see Troyka 82-84)*

*references to source: writer uses paraphrase and quotation—with MLA-style parenthetical citation (see Troyka 522-32, 580-87)*

*writer relates personal experience to reading source*

*quotation from source—with MLA-style parenthetical citation (see Troyka 522-32, 580-87)*

*writer more fully relates personal experience to reading source*

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Just as I endured endless diets and advice on the "correct" way to lose weight, so did Nora Ephron experience several methods (gimmicks and old wives' tales mostly) that supposedly would enlarge her breasts. Ephron explains that she tried sleeping on her back, splashing cold water on her chest, and even bought a "Mark Eden Bust Developer." At one ¶13 point, Ephron resorted to wearing a padded bra (Ephron 12). Likewise, I suffered by wearing a girdle during my four years of high school. Though it didn't make me thinner, it did help improve my appearance. Yet the girdle caused a great deal of discomfort. Also, it embarrassed me in the girls' locker room because only I wore such a thing.

I was struck particularly by Ephron's comments on her friend Emily's rather curious remark: "'I would love to wear a dress like that ... but my bust is too big'" (15). This type of "competitive remark" reported by Ephron is also applicable to my situation. Too often I have heard: "Gosh, I am so fat." Amazingly, the person making such a remark is usually ¶14 underweight. Comments like these are a source of never-ending annoyance to me. People say something completely absurd about their figures, expecting someone to contradict them--so they in turn can have the false modesty of contradicting them when they do. If, on the other hand, I make a remark about being fat, I wouldn't be contradicted because of my figure. Ephron feels that such comments are a sort of fake self-pity. "I have thought about their remarks, tried to put myself in their place, and considered their point of view. I think they are full of shit" (16). Ephron's final words on the subject very effectively express

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my feelings about fake self-pity as well. In fact, her sarcastic tone throughout the essay conveys my own feelings about self-consciousness in general.

The sarcasm and humor in "Shaping Up Absurd" reflect the way that I contend with my weight daily. Though satirizing myself and other overweight people in a lighthearted manner makes other people feel uncomfortable, it relieves my tension. If one can't laugh at oneself, however, then laughing isn't justifiable. Today, I see my "social shortcoming" as a personal asset. Being full-  
95 figured has in countless ways given me character and an easy sense of humor. Nevertheless, I am occasionally confronted by the pressure to look like Cindy Crawford. After reading Ephron's essay and writing this paper, I realize that "breast worship" and "Cindy worship" are essentially the same thing. It also relieves me to know that someone else has had her own little run-in with something like avocado dip.

*conclusion: writer fully develops  
essay's thesis*

*concluding strategy: calling  
for awareness  
(see Troyka 107-09)*

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*MLA-style "Work Cited"*  
(see Troyka 588-607)

Work Cited

Ephron, Nora. "Shaping Up Absurd." In *Life Studies: A Thematic Reader*. Ed. David Cavitch. Boston: Bedford Books, 1992. 8-16.

