

# Written Collage

Exercise

Large index cards are best for this exercise, but you might not have those handy tools of the trade, so separate sheets of paper will work as well.

This exercise can be done alone,  
but works even better with  
writing partners or small groups.

You may want to set a timer—  
give yourself about 5 minutes  
for each step.

1) Assemble five oversized index cards  
(or 5 separate pieces of paper).

On the first card:

Describe a smell from your past.

Don't worry whether or not it is  
an significant or important smell;  
all that matters is that it remains  
in your "memory bank" ten or  
twenty years later.

Describe the smell, the quality of  
the odor.

Is it sour or sweet, smoky or  
clean, sharp or dull?

Does it remind you of anything?



Keep this to around  
four or five sentences.

2) On the second card:

Describe a part of someone you  
love, but just a part. .

Stick to one physical aspect—  
your mother's hair, your aunt  
Lula's elbows, your little  
brother's teeth, your best  
friend's smirky smile.

Be specific.

Instead of “Dad had rough hands,” describe the texture of the palms, the shape of the fingers, the bruises or cuts, the caked oil underneath the fingernails.

No more than six sentences.

3) On the third card:

Pick a quote from your past,  
something you heard all the time  
when you were younger.

It can be significant—  
a parent's correction or sharp  
criticism—  
or seemingly insignificant—a  
dumb joke your older brother  
made every time you sat down  
to eat dinner.

It can be anything at all.

The only requirement is that you heard it often and that it remains in your memory bank, for whatever reasons.



Do NOT illuminate, describe, or elucidate about the quote—just give us the quote: for example,  
“Drink your milk. You want to have strong bones, don’t you?”

One quote, one phrase.

On the fourth card:

Construct a disjointed list of thirty words, primarily nouns (or nouns with some slight modification).

Each of these words or phrases  
describes a remembered  
something in your past.

For instance, a list could look like this: “Ringo. Sled, Uncle Steve’s wooden leg, cooked cabbage, Mr. Smith, bugs, palm trees.”

In this instance, it is not important to give enough information for the reader to fully understand.

Just make your list.

No phrase more than FOUR  
words long.

A list of thirty (30) words or short  
phrases in total.

It is OK to write more than 30  
and then cross some out.

At the top of each card, write a  
number—1-4.



On one blank card write:

“Why I Am Who I Am.”

You now have constructed an experimental essay, in collage form.

Read it out aloud, including the title, and the numbers at the top of each card.

Do you notice the unexpected connections and odd logic?

The intention and objective is to create congruity in storytelling, not just tell a story in chronological order.

- QUESTIONS?