

6. Activist Biography

At this point, you have read extensively about your activist. Now it's time to start piecing together a 1-2 page biography. Use the following notes to inform your writing. A biography is supposed to be **fact-based** and as unbiased as possible. Obviously you are interested in your activist and share some of their beliefs and values. Try to write this biography in such a way that nobody would be able to disagree with what you are saying - that is, make it **FACTUAL**. You will also be citing your sources.

- BANNED: the words "I" and "you," except as part of a direct quote
- BANNED: opinions, except for those of the activist, presented in an unbiased way, preferably as a direct quote.
- DOUBLE-CHECK: don't start more than 25% of your sentences with the name of your activist or their pronoun (she, he, they, etc.)

STEP 1: Relevant Background

Question	Answer	How did this influence the activist's later life?
When were they born?		
Where were they born?		
Who were their parents?		
What was their education like?		
What was their first employment?		
Who were early influences?		
Other background info		

Step 2: Call to Arms (how the activist becomes active)

Not everyone becomes an activist. What happened in your activist's life that made them dedicate their energies to solving a big problem?

1. Something or someone new happens, or the activist witnesses an event. Describe it.
2. The activist reacts. What do they do and say?
3. The new thing responds to the activist. What happens?
4. What **problem** does the new thing present to the activist?
5. How can the activist solve the problem?
6. What does the activist decide to do?
7. What are the activist's major emotions?

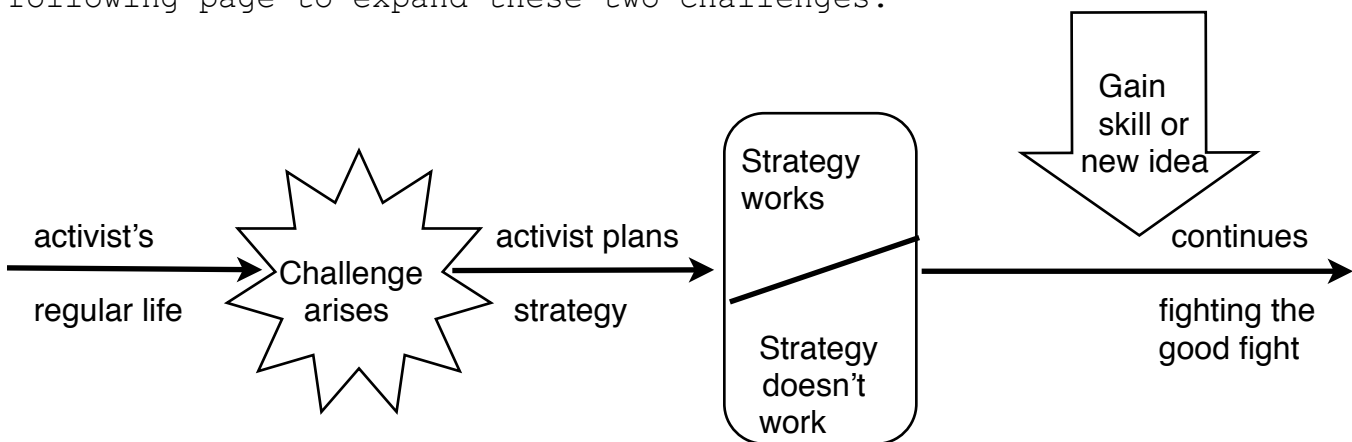
(Side note to sophomores who had me as freshmen: are you noticing something here? Something... heroic? Is it different?)

Step 3: Challenges faced. AT LEAST 2.

Your activist has run into a few challenges, some perhaps more interesting than others. Make a short list of challenges your activist has faced:

Challenge faced	Outcome

Challenges we face in life follow a general pattern. Choose two of your activist's challenges from above and highlight them. Then use the following page to expand these two challenges.



A1. What is the activist doing just prior to the challenge?

A2. How does the challenge arise? What is it?

A3. How does the activist plan their strategy?

A4. Did the strategy work? What happened?

A5. What lesson does the activist learn?

A6. How do they carry on after that?

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B2. How does the challenge arise? What is it?

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Step 4: Accomplishments

Finally, we need to look at the impact your activist has had on their field. People make an impact in many different ways. Accomplishments could include publishing an important book or paper, leading a protest, passing legislation, organizing a community response, creating provocative art, mediating between two groups, becoming a lawmaker, etc. Make a list.

Accomplishment	Impact on the cause

Congratulations! You have all the info!

Now to make the biography...

This is going to be about 5 paragraphs or so. Remember, facts only! You have all of the following info, which you can add to, of course.

Paragraph 1 = Intro and Relevant Background

Paragraph 2 = Call to Arms (how the activist became active)

Paragraph 3 = Challenge #1

Paragraph 4 = Challenge #2

Paragraph 5 = Accomplishments and Conclusion

What you need are strong transitions and academic language to tie it all together. Right! Onward!



Write a good intro!! Try:

-Start in the middle of a suspenseful story and cut it off. Bonus: you can finish the story in the conclusion.

Example: Her heart beating fast, Rosa Parks did the only thing she could do: she kept sitting.

-Start with a statistic.

Example: Everyone knows that women make 75 cents to a man's dollar, but Gloria Steinem refused to accept such injustice.

-Start with a quote.

Example: "Ask not what your country can do for you," John F. Kennedy famously said. "Ask what you can do for your country."

-Start by asking a question.

Example: What makes a leader truly great? Why did so many people want to follow the path of Martin Luther King, Jr.?

Then, give some background on who your activist is and why they're important:

Ida B. Wells may not be the most famous of the suffragettes, but it's important to note that black women fought for their right to vote and that the suffrage movement may well not have been successful without them.

Bill Nye, with his mix of internet-ready wit and deep scientific knowledge, is a leading voice against climate change and for science education.

Then, tell about their upbringing:

His 1980s childhood in the Baltimore ghetto deeply affected Ta-Nahesi Coates' views on race in America. He saw acts of terrible violence that no child should see, and realized that the white children he saw on TV didn't have to experience that. His grandmother constantly challenged him to write down what he saw; she had taught him to read when he was only four years old.

Then, bridge to the rest of the paper:

This background would serve him well as he grew into the great activist that would one day shake the world.

The setbacks of her childhood only made her more determined to find a solution to this great problem.

NOW WRITE A SUPER ENGAGING INTRO: LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. MY ACTIVIST. _____!

The body of the paper!

The next 3-4 paragraphs should focus on events in your activist's life. You can include another background paragraph if you'd like. Definitely tell us how your activist became active. Then tell a couple of stories about challenges your activist has faced. Feel free to use some of the following language to help you out:

Language of Sequencing

First, ... and second, ...

Meanwhile, the ___ appeared to be ...

While [subject 1] was ..., [subject 2] was simultaneously/concurrently...

Finally ___ proceeded to...

Consequently the _____ began to ...

Previously, _____ had decided to ...

Following this event, ...

Initially Some time later.....

After ... the next step is/was to...

What occurred/happened prior to... was that...

In the first stage/phase,

The transition between stages ___ and ___ can be described as....

Your conclusion!

Finally, tell us where your activist is now, their significance to their cause, and perhaps what work still needs to be done.

First, you need a bridge from the rest of your paper:

After decades of fighting the good fight, Jimmy Carter continues to advocate for the causes he cares about. Despite being 91 years old and suffering from cancer, he is determined to eradicate guinea worm in his lifetime.

Wyclef Jean is currently reorganizing his charitable foundation to better serve the people of Haiti. He continues to use his celebrity status to draw attention to their issues.

Then, discuss the problem a bit:

However, Amy Poehler would be the first to admit that we have a long way to go before female comics get the same recognition as male comics. Fortunately, the young women of comedy have her example to follow.

The Amazon Rainforest continues to suffer from deforestation and other environmental catastrophes. Activists push on, despite fears of ending up like Chico Mendes.

Look to your introduction to write your concluding sentence. What is the most important thing you learned while writing this?

Cesar Chavez made great strides towards creating equitable work conditions for Mexican immigrants in the U.S. Now we need to carry on his work so that recent racism from presidential candidates becomes completely unacceptable.
