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How to Open an Autobiography — Example Introduction

Persona: Sofia Reyes, 19, college freshman, Introduction to Writing course

[The following is a standalone example of an autobiography introduction. It demonstrates how to open with a specific scene rather than a general statement, establish voice in the first paragraph, and signal the themes the autobiography will develop — without summarising everything that follows.]

The summer I turned nine, my grandmother taught me to make tortillas. Not from a recipe — she did not use recipes — but by feel: the right amount of masa, the right pressure of the palm, the right heat of the comal. She guided my hands without explaining what she was doing, the way people who have always known something teach it, through repetition rather than instruction. I burned the first three. The fourth one was almost right. She put it in front of me anyway, as if it were perfect, and I understood later that this was not a small kindness. It was a deliberate act of belief.

I am Sofia Reyes, and I grew up in El Paso, Texas, at the edge of two countries and two languages, in a family where the past was always present in the kitchen. This autobiography is an account of how that upbringing shaped the person I am becoming — someone who moves between cultures without fully belonging to either, who learned early that identity is not a fixed point but a practice, and who is still, at nineteen, learning what it means to make something from scratch and call it your own.

[Note on this introduction: The opening scene (making tortillas with her grandmother) does three things at once — it establishes a specific, sensory memory; it introduces a theme (learning through doing, belief in someone before they have earned it); and it creates a voice that is personal without being vague. The second paragraph introduces the writer directly, names the autobiographical context, and signals what the autobiography will be about without summarising every event in it. A strong autobiography introduction does not begin at the beginning of a life — it begins at a moment that contains the meaning of the life that follows.]



College Essay