The best professional narratives strategically align your values and experiences with the opportunity at hand, and show how that opportunity will enable clearly articulated future goals. Before you begin, select a limited and specific set of values (or a single value) that will supply the grounding theme for the essay. Then, begin to gather compelling and diverse evidence for those foundational values. Seeking key evidence, some essays will focus on a single, multifaceted experience, but most essays take each paragraph as a container for a distinct experience—academic, professional, personal—that allows your reader see the essay’s grounding values in fresh and dynamic way. These experiences might be momentous, but they might also be mundane: it is our reflection on these experiences that gives them life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Excellent (no deduction)</th>
<th>OK (deduct 1 per bullet)</th>
<th>Redo (deduct 3 per bullet)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE BIG PICTURE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Opening Moves</td>
<td>• Opening situates the reader in the midst of an engaging thought or action that aptly frames the narrative, clearly suggesting the core value(s) that inform the essay throughout</td>
<td>• Opening moves are compelling, but it’s less clear how they frame the essay itself</td>
<td>• Opening offers no clear, sustained, or engaging strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Ground</td>
<td>• Middle paragraphs focus on representative experiences (academic, personal, professional) or key facets of a core experience</td>
<td>• Middle paragraphs are coherent, but they attempt to cover too much or too little ground</td>
<td>• Middle paragraphs lack a central identity and coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Gestures</td>
<td>• Conclusion strategically extends, echoes, or reflects upon the thoughts or actions introduced in the opening in light of the unfolding narrative</td>
<td>• Conclusion rounds out the narrative, but repeats what has already been conveyed without adding to it</td>
<td>• Conclusion is repetitious or relies on generalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBSTANCE AND STYLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative Arc &amp; Transitions</td>
<td>• Paragraphs form a cohesive story of growth and development</td>
<td>• Narrative contains a few notable gaps or shifts too abruptly, weakening the arc</td>
<td>• The narrative arc is absent or weak</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transitions between paragraphs effectively bridge core ideas rather than rely on mere sequence or chronology</td>
<td>• Transitions between paragraphs are clear but formulaic</td>
<td>• There is no clear transitional strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Stuff of Character</td>
<td>• Author clearly conveys a strategically chosen value (or limited set of values) that unifies the essay and that each paragraph freshly embodies</td>
<td>• Essay conveys a clear set of values and competencies, but relies on direct statement of those values</td>
<td>• Essay does not reveal a clear set of competencies and values.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Author offers evidence to support essay’s grounding values</td>
<td>• Essay lacks action and narrative specificity at times</td>
<td>• Essay tends towards abstraction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Essay gives the character something to do, aptly balancing action and reflection and avoiding abstraction</td>
<td>• Essay too often offers abstractions in place of action and reflection</td>
<td>• Essay consistently lacks action and detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Author’s character is likable—perhaps quirky, but not flawed</td>
<td>• Essay reveals flaws that might damage character</td>
<td>• Author’s character is not likable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style and Function</td>
<td>• Author varies sentence pacing (length) and structure (syntax)</td>
<td>• Essay occasionally reverts to static sentence structures and pacing</td>
<td>• Static sentence structures and pacing prevail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Essay contains no errors / typos</td>
<td>• Essay contains minor errors.</td>
<td>• Essay includes significant errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Author achieves concision by using active voice and vivid verbs (few “to be” verbs), and avoiding strings of prepositional phrases</td>
<td>• Writing is clear, but lacks concision at times</td>
<td>• Writing lacks clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Detailed Self</td>
<td>• Author uses vivid details to engage the reader on multiple sensory and intellectual levels, encouraging the reader to smell, hear, think, feel, taste, see, laugh, and so on</td>
<td>• Author offers details, but either misses opportunities for engaging the reader, or offers excessive and distracting details</td>
<td>• Essay remains too vague, lacking the kinds of details that bring an essay to life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Deductions | 0 | ___ Bullets x 1 = | ___ Bullets x 3 = |