***Catcher in the Rye* Voice Narrative Assignment**

When discussing his desire to prevent his novel from ever becoming a film, J. D. Salinger wrote in a 1957 letter, “*The Catcher in the Rye* is a very novelistic novel. There are readymade ‘scenes’—only a fool would deny that—but, for me, the weight of the book is in the narrator’s voice, the non-stop peculiarities of it, his personal, extremely discriminating attitude to his reader-listener. He can’t legitimately be separated from his own first-person technique.” In this excerpt Salinger—along with many literary critics—credits Holden’s distanced, cynical voice for the success of his novel.

In order to help me learn more about you as an individual and for you to learn about establishing voice in writing, you will write a 250-500 word first-person snapshot narrative about a significant event that occurred in your life (keep it relatively current). What I mean by snapshot is that you should choose an event that does not span over a long period of time. Your primary goal is to establish an intended voice in your narrative—like Salinger did through Holden—to achieve your purpose for writing. Below your narrative, you will answer the following prompts in four to six sentences each:

1. What is the purpose of this piece and what kind of voice did you establish to fit your purpose for writing?
2. What specific diction choices helped you achieve your intended voice? Cite them in your response.
3. What specific syntax choices helped you achieve your intended voice? Cite them in your response.
4. What specific punctuation and capitalization choices helped you achieve your intended voice? Cite them in your response.

Evaluated Components:

The Narrative…

* Uses an MLA-formatted header and a meaning-enhancing title
* Is 250-500 words
* Maintains first person point-of-view
* Follows Standard English rules for diction, syntax, punctuation, and capitalization unless the intended voice justifies a deviation

/ 20

The Writing Prompts…

* Adhere to Standard English grammatical rules
* Are each four to six sentences in length
* Answer the entire question
* Cite specific moments from the narrative (questions 2-4) to answer the prompt

/ 20

**Total Points / 40**

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11 Literature & Composition

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I’m Not Nervous

College roommates, close neighbors, and crotchety aunts fill St. Hugo’s Stone Chapel. I tell myself that I’m not nervous, that I’m not intimidated by formal ceremonies in front of large crowds, and that if I start to get emotional while watching my future wife walk down the isle, I can simply recall one of our comedy-filled moments from the last six years. The voice in my head begins to remind myself that I’m lying about the first two items on this list… but then, I remember I should use the bathroom before it’s time to hide in the sacristy.

As I enter the bathroom of the historic chapel, I learn that it is, well, to put it nicely, almost one hundred years old itself: the off-white walls of the single stall restroom touch both of my elbows simultaneously, a sign warns that only toilet paper should enter the corroding sewer pipes, and the lack of air conditioning makes my face begin to sweat. Worst of all, the door does not fully close or lock. With less than thirty minutes before the biggest moment of my life, I brave the conditions.

But halfway through my bathroom break, I hear heavy, rushed footsteps. As I reach to hold the bathroom door shut, my uncle Denny—sweaty and out of breath—attempts to push through the door. His face almost makes it through the opening door, so I quickly shove it back shut and nervously say, “occupied.” He desperately replies in a thick, country accent, “This can’t wait! Held ma bladder the whole way from Ohio!” He again pushes on the door, which is barely being held shut by my right knee, as I quickly fasten the layers of clips and buttons on my tuxedo. Being fully clothed again, I swiftly exit the bathroom as my uncle forces his way in and closes the hardly-functioning door.

In between quick zippers, sighs of relief, and a terribly-unreliable church bathroom door, my uncle says, “You forgot to wash your hands, Dave.” Stunned by my uncle’s former sense of urgency that faded into an attempt of being didactic, I wait for my turn to reenter the bathroom. I wash my hands, I note to myself that I didn’t choose my family, and I retell myself that I’m not nervous.

1. I intended to establish an analytical voice with shades of anxiety and humor in order to entertain my readers. I hoped to amuse my readers by showing them the roller coaster of emotions I felt on such a momentous day. Readers can hear glimpses of my standard analytical voice in the beginning of the narrative as I recount the variety of individuals filling up the church. This voice quickly gives way to a more anxious nuance as I attempt to convince myself that I am not nervous during a moment in my life when I was experiencing the most anxiety I can ever recall. The narrative moves to experience a more comedic tone thanks to my uncle Denny. Finally, the text ends with me coaching myself again through the stress of a formal ceremony, waiting to marry my best friend.
2. In order to develop an analytical voice that moves between anxiety and humor, I begin by simply using realistic diction that mimics how I would normally analyze a room. A prime example of this is with the opening line of “College roommates, close neighbors, and crotchety aunts fill St. Hugo’s Stone Chapel.” While all three items in this list use alliteration to create an appealing rhythm, I end by describing my aunts with the adjective “crotchety.” This slang term describes my true opinion of my older, grouchier aunts and mimics the informal tone of my inner voice. I have also chosen diction that fosters verbal irony such as the repetition of “I’m not nervous.” This phrase helps maintain an anxious, slightly-comedic voice since I am absolutely nervous yet fighting to convince my own self that I am not nervous.
3. Syntax decisions play a crucial role in developing the nuances of anxiety and comedy in my typically analytical voice. Most of my sentences are longer, grammatically-correct constructions that foster an analytical voice that is assessing the world it is taking in; however, I then begin sentences with conjunctions such as when I write “But halfway through my bathroom break, I hear heavy, rushed footsteps” at the beginning of paragraph three. This shift in syntax promotes anxiety and foreshadows something of havoc lies ahead. After experiencing the humor of my Uncle Denny’s escapade, my syntax follows a rhythmic, parallel construction as I attempt to slow down my thoughts and regain confidence in the final line of the narrative with “I wash my hands, I note to myself that I didn’t choose my family, and I retell myself that I’m not nervous.”
4. Fostering an analytical voice requires establishing some sense of levelheadedness. As a result, I primarily use Standard English capitalization. Additionally, I place periods at the end of sentences to sound objective. I juxtapose this analytical-sounding end punctuation with my uncle Denny yelling “This can’t wait! Held ma bladder the whole way from Ohio!” The use of an exclamation mark paired with the humorous content of his statement allows my analytical voice to also have a comedic shade. To add in further analysis of my environment, I also use dashes internally to include details such as when I write “…my uncle Denny—sweaty and out of breath—attempts to push through the door.”