

## Sample response 2: Writing about personal journeys

In this personal reflection, the writer explores both personal experiences and the nature of Italian Australian identity.

### Task

Create a written text that incorporates the following stimulus:

‘It’s like everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story.’

– Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*

## Response

## The difference between us is prosciutto

The spectrum of 'us-ness' fluctuates from Italian to Italian. You have the cannoli-eating, fresh-pasta-making, parmesan-by-the-kilo-loving Italian Aussies and then you have the others. The ones that buy custard in the carton, who are only Italian when asked about their dark hair and olive skin. All part of the one migrant collective, all hailing somewhere from that same long boot.

I was with my friend and he was talking about his dad. One of those rare Italian Aussie boys whose father was actually born in Italy. Not a grandfather that came on a boat like mine but a first-generation boy. And although we share the thick dark hair, bushy eyebrows and overbearing aunts, I realised we are on two different ends of the spectrum that is our heritage.

I only realised this when we were talking about the deli up the road from my house. It is a Foodworks but you'd only know that by the bright orange sign out the back in the carpark. Inside, it is an Italian nonna's paradise. Pickled eggplant, every delicious stinky cheese in bulk, and prosciutto you watch them slice into thin, melt-in-your-mouth strips right in front of you.

When my friend said the word prosciutto I could tell he was different to me. He said it with the sing-song accent, the pronunciation something like prue-shoot-tow. There's the difference between him and me. I say it like a white Aussie. It sounds uncomfortable in my mouth, foreign. He sounds like it is his.

And maybe that's what the spectrum of Aussie Italians all boils down to; how we say the word prosciutto. It is the difference between those that embrace their heritage and those that have been taught to only recognise themselves as Italian when asked 'what are you'. My family is in the second camp.

When my grandad came to Australia, he didn't speak English. He was small for his age even when he was six, had massive round glasses and the kind of stinky food in his lunch box that other kids made fun of. When he was in the first grade, his mum (my nonna) was called into the school and told to stop giving my grandad a hot water bottle filled with red wine for lunch. Of course, she didn't speak English so he kept on getting his hot red wine buzz every day at school. Nonna didn't understand the Aussies and they didn't understand her.

It was my grandad that decided to not be Italian anymore. But it was harder to escape the culture than he thought. He still had the recognisable Italian last name, but he learnt English and stopped speaking in his native tongue.

When he married my grandma, she transformed from an Irish woman to custard-carton Italian. She made cannelloni and fresh bruschetta. She played solitaire late into the night sipping on limoncello. She loved being Italian. She didn't speak the language except for some choice swear words that would be whipped out during heated card games.

Uses a series of compound adjectives to help create a distinctive voice as well as a humorous tone.

Uses non-standard English ('that' instead of 'who') to create a conversational style.

Uses a sentence fragment and colloquial phrasing to develop the voice; these expressions give the reader the sense that the writer is reflecting from an 'in-group' position.

Introduces a personal anecdote that connects the wider context of the piece (being Italian Australian) to personal experience.

Uses the first-person voice and past tense to sustain the reflective style.

Reflects on the difference between the writer's personal experience and that of their friend.

Connects the writer's personal experience to the larger theme of what it means to be Italian Australian.

Uses a humorous anecdote to further illustrate differences between white Australians and Italian Australians.

Relates family experiences to Italian Australian customs; makes a link to the opening paragraph ('custard-carton') to create coherence.





Every generation, something slips out. The love of bulk parmesan and swear words Aussies don't understand are the only Italian that has been retained properly. My friend is different. He speaks the language and has Tupperware filled with various tomato sauces. He doesn't shy away from the question 'what are you' but says he is Italian like it is obvious. And it is. You ask his name and you can tell right away.

Our families decided how Italian we would be. And I think it all boils down to how we say prosciutto.

Returns to the initial anecdote about the friend to bring the piece to a logical close.

## Reflective commentary

In this reflective piece I wanted to explore my cultural identity as well as relate my personal experience to the wider Italian Australian experience.

Developing my response from the stimulus quote, I reflected on the sociocultural story told about Italian Australians. I have connected my experience of being Italian Australian (my own 'story') to the identity constructed by the wider community – for example, by exploring the ways in which different people pronounce 'prosciutto'. I was also influenced by the mentor text 'The Red Plastic Chair is a Vietnamese Cultural Institution, and My Anchor' by Amy Duong. Duong reflects on her own cultural identity as a Vietnamese Australian and sees the red plastic chair as a 'cultural institution'. Duong uses the red plastic chair as an anchor within her piece to weave through family dynamics and stories of growing up within a white-washed Australian landscape. I decided to use a similar technique, but using prosciutto as an equivalent Italian 'cultural institution'.

I used personal anecdotes throughout my piece to ground the reader in my world and to construct a distinct narrative voice consistent with the identity being explored. Non-standard English and colloquial language help to foreground this narrative voice and enhance the conversational style of this piece of reflective writing. I decided to compare my experience to my friend's to show the complexity and nuances of a shared cultural identity. I also drew on my grandfather's experiences to add the perspective of another generation, showing the effects of generational change and creating a more layered narrative. Presenting myself as someone with 'in-group' status enabled me to reflect on the different ways there are to be an Italian Australian from an 'insider' perspective, hopefully engaging the interest of a wide audience.

The use of non-standard English is an important feature of this reflective piece. The narrative voice and my Italian Australian identity are highlighted in the ways I express myself, e.g. 'the ones that buy the custard in the carton' (rather than the more grammatically correct 'the ones who buy'). Informal expressions such as 'all boils down' and 'hot red wine buzz' contribute to a conversational style, generating a feeling of connection with the audience. These vocabulary and syntax choices reinforce the qualities of the narrative voice as well as the reflection on 'Otherness' in a white Australian context.

Discusses form and purpose; explains the central idea explored in the piece.

Explains how the stimulus material is incorporated.

Explains how a mentor text influenced the writing.

Reflects on word choices and language features.

Considers audience and purpose.

Gives a more detailed discussion of language choices, with examples.