

# The Narrative Essay

## **\*What is a Narrative Essay?**

- Narrative writing tells a story. In essays, the narrative writing could also be considered reflection or an exploration of the author's values told as a story. The author may remember his or her past, or a memorable person or event from that past, or even observe the present.
- The author may write about:
  - An experience or event from his or her past.
  - A recent or ongoing experience or event.
  - Something that happened to someone else, such as a parent or a grandparent.

## **\*Basic qualities of a narrative essay:**

- A narrative essay is a piece of writing that recreates an experience through time.
- Unlike other essays, you may write in the first person (I, me, we) because it is a story about YOU!
- In addition to telling a story, a narrative essay also communicates a main idea or a lesson learned.

## **\*First steps for writing a narrative essay:**

- Identify the experience that you want to write about.
- Think about why the experience is significant.
- Spend a good deal of time drafting your recollections about the details of the experience.
- Create an outline of the basic parts of your narrative.

## **\*Writing about the experience:**

- Using your outline, describe each part of your narrative.
- Rather than telling your readers what happened, use vivid details and descriptions to actually recreate the experience for your readers.
- Use descriptive language. This is made possible by using figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification), sensory words (words using your 5 senses), and vivid words (“the author ‘stood timidly,’ or “my grandmother looked at me with great concern as if I were the only person in the world that mattered.”)
- **Don’t tell. Show.** It’s not interesting to read about the garage sale. But it is fascinating to see, feel and experience one. Don’t be greedy on details.
- Think like your readers. Try to remember that the information you present is the only information your readers have about the experiences.
- Always keep in mind that all of the small and seemingly unimportant details known to you are not necessarily known to your readers.

### \*Communicating the significance of the experience:

- A narrative essay begins with an effective attention grabber. **Ex: Learning something new can sometimes be a scary experience.**
- Your thesis statement should make clear to the reader the event that the essay will describe. **Example: The day that my father convinced me to conquer my fear of heights by standing on the top of the Empire State Building was a day that I will never forget and that I will be forever grateful to him for.**
- The essay is essentially a story about something that happened. Just like any story that you read, your narrative essay must have a beginning, middle, and an end. The writer (you) should give detailed descriptions of the event by giving your reader a clear idea of the people, place, and events so the reader will get clear idea of how the writer (you) feels about them. **Example: The teacher smiled and waited patiently, for which I was grateful.** This type of language makes it clear to the reader the writer's fears and sense of security provided by the teacher who helped her get over her fear.
- The final paragraph, the conclusion, should reflect the writer's new understanding, or the importance of the event or experience described. For example, the author may conclude that learning to swim has helped him or her to feel more confident about his or herself in other new situations. Basically, explain how this event or experience has changed you.
- The essay should be well-organized as any other essay (see format).
- The writing should be lively and interesting by engaging the reader's interest by adding significant details and personal observations. Sharing personal thoughts and feelings will invite the reader into the writer's world and make them care about the writer's experiences.

### \*Revising your narrative essay:

- After spending time away from the draft of your narrative essay, read through the essay and think about whether the writing effectively recreates the experience for your readers.
- Ask other people to read through the essay and offer their impressions.
- Identify where more details and descriptions are needed.
- Identify and consider removing any information that seems to distract from the focus and main narrative of the essay.
- Think about whether you've presented information in the most effective order.

### \*Prompts for your narrative essay:

1. **A childhood event.** Think of an experience when you learned something for the first time, or when you realized how important someone was for you.
2. **Achieving a goal.** Think about a particularly meaningful achievement in your life. This could be something as seemingly minor as achieving a good grade on a difficult assignment, or this could be something with more long-lasting effects, like getting the job you desired or getting into the best school to which you applied.
3. **A failure.** Think about a time when you did not perform as well as you had wanted. Focusing on an experience like this can result in rewarding reflections about the positive emerging from the negative.
4. **A good or bad deed.** Think about a time when you did or did not stand up for yourself or someone else in the face of adversity or challenge.

5. **A change in your life.** Think about a time when something significant changed in your life. This could be anything from a move across town to a major change in a relationship to the birth or death of a loved one.
6. **A realization.** Think about a time when you experienced a realization. This could be anything from understanding a complicated math equation to gaining a deeper understanding of a philosophical issue or life situation.

## Basic Format of a Narrative Essay

### Paragraph #1-The Introduction

1. Begin with an attention grabber that captures your reader's interest.

**Ex: Sometimes it takes something terrible to realize what is important in life.**

2. Follow with 2-3 sentences that lead up to your thesis statement.

3. State your thesis statement-this should clearly state the experience or event that you will describe and its significance. Do not begin telling the details of your story yet.

**Example: Although my sister and I have sometimes not seen eye-to-eye at times, it took her being horribly sick to make me realize how much she truly means to me.**

### Paragraph #2-4 Body Paragraphs-Your story.

1. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence. Begin this sentence with a TRANSITION that show the order that the events occurred (First, Later, In the end, Second, Third, etc.) and the details of your story.

**Examples:**

**The day first began like any other day.**

**Later that day, my sister began to feel worse and my family and I began to worry.**

**After a day of much distress, my sister finally began to feel better.**

2. This is where you tell your story. Just like any story you read, you need to make sure to have a clear beginning, middle, and an end. Make sure to describe people and places involved with vivid details.

*General guidelines:*

- A rule familiar to a lot of [essay writers](#) is to give one idea per paragraph.
- A story has to follow some logical pattern. Chronological is the easiest one.
- With every new paragraph underline the significance of experience and the universal truth the story brings to the audience.
- Use descriptive language. This is made possible by using figurative language (similes, metaphors, personification), sensory words (use your 5 senses to place your reader where you are) and vivid words (smiled brightly, explained softly).

### Paragraph #5: The Conclusion

The Conclusion is just as important as the Introduction; It is the last impression your reader will get of your story.

1. Begin by re-stressing the importance of your thesis. Be careful not to use the same wording.

**Example: Although the day my sister fell ill was a horrible day for my family, it made us all realize how important we are to each other.**

2. Summarize the basic events of your story.

3. Reflect on the larger meaning or importance of the experience described. Basically, what was the point of your story? Explain the new understanding and why/how this experience or event has a permanent effect on you.

**Example: This day may have been horrible, but sometimes it is through the horrible events in life that people begin to value the best in life.**

## The 5-Paragraph Narrative Essay Outline

Attention Grabber:

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Thesis Statement

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Topic Sentence

#1 \_\_\_\_\_

Describe:

A.

B.

C.

Examples of descriptive language (sense words, similes or metaphors, vivid words):

Topic

Sentence#2 \_\_\_\_\_

Describe:

A.

B.

C.

Examples of descriptive language (sense words, similes or metaphors, vivid words):

Topic Sentence #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Describe:

A.

B.

C.

Examples of descriptive language used:

First Sentence of

Conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_

Transitions used \_\_\_\_\_