

Narration



As a mode of expository writing, the narrative approach, more than any other, offers writers a chance to think and write about themselves. We all have experiences lodged in our memories which are worthy of sharing with readers. Yet sometimes they are so fused with other memories that a lot of the time spent in writing narrative is in the prewriting stage.

In this stage, writers first need to select an incident worthy of writing about and second, to find relevance in that incident. To do this, writers might ask themselves what about the incident provided new insights or awareness. Finally, writers must dredge up details which will make the incident real for readers.

Principles of Writing Narrative Essays

Once an incident is chosen, the writer should keep three principles in mind.

1. Remember to involve readers in the story. It is much more interesting to actually recreate an incident for readers than to simply tell about it.
2. Find a generalization which the story supports. This is the only way the writer's personal experience will take on meaning for readers. This generalization does not have to encompass humanity as a whole; it can concern the writer, men, women, or children of various ages and backgrounds.
3. Remember that although the main component of a narrative is the story, details must be carefully selected to support, explain, and enhance the story.

Conventions of Narrative Essays

In writing your narrative essay, keep the following conventions in mind.

- Narratives are generally written in the first person, that is, using "I." However, third person ("he," "she," or "it") can also be used.
- Narratives rely on concrete, sensory details to convey their point. These details should create a unified, forceful effect, a dominant impression. More information on sensory details is available.
- Narratives, as stories, should include these story conventions: a plot, including setting and characters; a climax; and an ending.

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For questions and suggestions, please e-mail us at leolink@stcloudstate.edu.

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The Writing Center
770-836-6513
www.westga.edu/~writing
writing@westga.edu

Narrative Essay

A narration is the telling of an event that has happened to you. At times, you can make a statement clearer by relating a specific event in detail. You can present the details in the order in which they happened to help clarify the action and consequences of the event.

Writing a Good Thesis for a Narrative Essay

- ◆ Begin with an important event that occurred in a relatively short period of time.
For example, you could write about taking your driver's test, your high school graduation, or a family event, but you wouldn't really want to write about your entire senior year.
- ◆ Narrow your subject until you can cover it within your page/word limit.
If you wrote about a family event, you could not tell everything that each person said or did during the event. Instead, focus on one person or one specific occurrence: "I did not realize how important my family was to me until we stopped speaking because of a misunderstanding."
- ◆ Make sure that your thesis has a point.
Your audience must understand why you are telling them this story. Imagine that you are writing your essay for someone other than your professor. What do you want the audience to understand about you or about the situation?

Proceeding with a Narrative Essay

After you have a good thesis statement, these guidelines will help you develop your ideas into an essay:

- ◆ Make up a list of all the details involved with the experience.
For this list, write down whatever comes to mind without censoring your ideas or correcting grammar.
- ◆ Arrange these details in chronological order.
Although you do not have to write your story in exact chronological order (you may use flashbacks or foreshadowing, for example), remember that you want your story to be clear to your audience. To achieve this clarity, keep the details in a logical order.
- ◆ Using this list, prepare a rough draft of your paper.
Use time signals such as first, then, next, after, while, during, and finally to help connect the details as you move through the paper.
- ◆ See if you can divide the story into separate stages (what happened first, what happened next, what finally happened), then put each stage into a separate paragraph.

In narratives, it may be difficult to write a topic sentence for each paragraph. You may want to start new paragraphs where natural shifts or logical breaks seem to occur.

- ◆ Consider including dialogue; this strategy helps a story to come alive.

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Narrative Essay Personal Checklist

Use this checklist to determine if you have fully developed your paper. Make any revisions necessary until each question can be answered "yes."

1 – Unity

- Is the thesis of the essay easily understood even if it is only implied?
- Does each supporting paragraph back up your thesis?
- Is each paragraph necessary for the reader to understand the essay?

2 – Support

- Are there at least two separate supporting points for your thesis?
- Do you have specific evidence for each of your supporting points?
- Do you have enough specific evidence for each of your supporting points?

3 – Coherence

- Do you have a clear method of organization?
- Did you use transitions and connecting words?
- Do you have an effective introduction, conclusion, and title?

4 - Audience and Purpose

- Do you have an appropriate audience in mind? Can you describe them?
- Do you have a purpose for the paper? What is it supposed to do or accomplish?
- Does the purpose match your assignment?

5 - Sentence Skills - Consult a grammar guide, such as *Harbrace*, to check for errors in grammar or sentence structure. These typically include:

- Sentence fragments
- Fused sentences
- Incorrect verb forms
- Problems with subject and verb agreement
- Problems with pronoun and antecedent agreement
- Punctuation problems, including: apostrophes, quotation marks, semicolons, colons, commas, dash, hyphen, and parentheses

Adapted from *College Writing Skills with Readings*, Fourth Edition by John Langan.
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