

## Narration\Narrative



Narration is a *story* written about a personal experience. Writing a narrative essay provides an opportunity to get to know and understand yourself better. One of the best ways to reveal who you are is to write about how you became aware of something, gained a new way of seeing the world, a new insight. While such awareness can occur for apparently unexplainable reasons, it most often happens when you encounter new ideas or have experiences that change you in some way. During the process of writing a narrative, you will learn ways to articulate personal experience to inform and entertain others. Narratives provide human interest, spark our curiosity, and draw us close to the storyteller. In addition, narratives can do the following:

- Create a sense of shared history, linking people together.
- Provide entertainment. Most people enjoy a thrilling movie or an intriguing book.
- Provide psychological healing. Reading or listening to the narrative of someone who faced a life crisis similar to one you are experiencing can help you through the crisis. They can also help the writer deal with the crisis.
- Provide insight. Narratives can help you discover values, explore options, and examine motives.

### Characteristics of Narration

Narrative essays describe specific experiences that changed how you felt, thought, or acted. The form of a narrative is similar to a story in that it describes how your character is feeling by "showing" through his/her actions, rather than by coming right out and "telling" your readers. However, a good narrative isn't just an entertaining story, but has a point to make, a purpose to convey. In writing a narrative essay, your purpose is not to merely tell an interesting story but to show your readers the importance and influence the experience has had on you. This experience may be used as a springboard for reflection.

A good narrative:

- **involves readers in the story.**  
*It is much more interesting to actually recreate an incident for readers than to simply tell about it.*
- **relates events in sequence.**  
*The creation of specific scenes set at actual times and in actual places. Show, don't tell. Re-create an event by setting it in a specific time and space.*
- **includes detailed observations of people, places, and events.**  
*Do you recall sights, sounds, smells, tactile feelings, and tastes? Use actual or re-created dialogue? Give actual names of people and places.*
- **presents important changes, contrasts, or conflicts and creates tension.**  
*Do you grow from change? Is there a conflict between characters? Is there a contrast between the past and the present?*
- **is told from a point of view--usually the author's point of view.**
- **focuses on connection between past events, people, or places and the present.**  
*How relevant is the event today? How relevant will it be in your future?*
- **makes a point, communicates a main idea or dominant impression.**  
*Your details, specific scenes, accounts of changes or conflicts, and connections between past and present should point to a single main idea or dominant impression for your paper as a whole. While not stating a flat "moral" of the story, the importance of your memory must be clear to your reader.*

### Planning Narration

- first, select an incident worthy of writing about,
- second, find relevance in that incident (writers might ask themselves what about the incident provided new insights or awareness),
- finally, dredge up details which will make the incident real for readers.

Good stories occur everywhere and can be told about anything. They are as likely to occur in your own neighborhood as in some exotic locale. Potential stories happen daily; what makes potential stories actual stories is putting them into language, recounting them, orally or in writing. Good stories are entertaining, informative, lively, and believable; they will mean something to those who write them as well as to those who read them. Subjects for good essays have no limits. You already have a lifetime of experiences from which to choose, and each experience is a potential story to help explain who you are, what you believe, and how you act today. When beginning, you might want to ask yourself:

- Did you ever have a long-held belief or assumption shattered? Can you trace the change to one event or a series of events?
- Is there a particular experience that you observed that has had a profound influence on your life?
- Is there a person that who has greatly influenced you?
- Is there a decision that you had to make, or a challenge or an obstacle that you faced?
- Was there ever a moment in your life when you decided to reform, to adopt a whole new outlook?
- How would you characterize your attempt? (Successful? Unsuccessful? Laughable? Painful?)

## Structuring Narration

A narration is simply the telling of a story. Whenever someone recounts an event or tells a story, he or she is using narration. A narration essay recounts an event or tells a story to illustrate an idea. A narration essay may be entertaining or informative. There are five basic steps to writing a narrative essay.

### 1. Purpose

*Why* are you telling the story? Every narration must have a point or purpose, usually to entertain or to inform.

### 2. Context

You should establish the context of your narrative early in the essay. You can follow these basic guidelines: who, what, where, when.

### 3. Point of View

A narrative essay may be written in the first-person (I) or third-person (he, she, it) point of view; do not use second person (you). If you were part of the action, the first-person provides the best perspective. If you are relating an event based upon other sources, use the third-person point of view. In some circumstances, you may be forced to choose the point of view (if, for example, you were a witness, but not a participant). Once you have decided upon a point of view, stay consistent with it.

### 4. Details

Include enough details for clarity; however, select only the facts that are relevant.

### 5. Organization

A narrative usually follows a chronological time line; however, you may find flashbacks a creative option as long as the narrative can be clearly followed by the reader. Most narratives are told in the past tense. You should keep tenses consistent.

## Here are some subject suggestions:

### Winning and Losing

Winning something—a race, a contest, a lottery—can be a good subject, since it features you in a unique position and allows you to explore or celebrate a special talent. The truth is that in most parts of life, there are more losers than winners.

While one team wins a championship, dozens do not. So there is a large, empathetic audience out there who will understand and identify with a narrative about losing. Although more common than winning, losing is less often explored in writing because it is more painful to recall. Therefore, they are fresher, deeper, more original stories to tell about losing.

### **Milestones**

Perhaps the most interesting but also the most difficult experience to write about is one that you already recognize as a turning point in your life, whether it's winning a sports championship, being a camp counselor, or surviving a five-day solo camping trip in mid-winter. Writers who explore such topics in writing often come to a better understanding of them. Also, their very significance challenges the writers to make them equally significant for an audience that did not experience them. When you write about milestones, pay special attention to the physical details that will both advance your story and make it come alive for readers.

### **Daily Life**

Commonplace experiences make fertile subjects for personal narratives. You might describe practicing, rather than winning the big competition, or cleaning up after, rather than attending the prom. If you are accurate, honest, and observant in exploring a subject from which readers expect little, you are apt to pleasantly surprise them and draw them into your essay. Work experiences are especially fruitful subjects, since you may know inside details and routines of restaurants and retail shops that the rest of us can only guess.