



**Academic Support Center
Writing Center**

Narrative Essay

Resource: Brigham Young University-Hawaii

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.

When you're writing a narrative essay, loosen up. After all, you're just telling a story to someone, something you probably do every day in casual conversation. Use first person and talk it through first. You might even want to either tape record your story as if you were telling it to someone for the first time or actually tell it to a friend.

Once you get the basic story down, then you can begin turning it into an essay. If you feel that you lack life experience, then you may choose to write about someone else or write about an observation you've made about a recent event.

In a successful narrative essay, the author usually makes a point.

In addition, stories are usually ones that are neatly arranged like a road map that take the reader from point A to point B to point C. However, in real life, and in our own personal experiences, things aren't so straightforward as A-B-C. Characters, facts, places, conversations and reporting what happened, where you went, what you saw and what you did aren't always so neatly pulled together. Therefore, that is your job, as the writer, to pull together all the elements so they bring the reader to the universal truth, the lesson learned or insight gained in your experience.

Features

1. The story should have an introduction that clearly indicates what kind of narrative essay it is (an event or recurring activity, a personal experience, or an observation), and it should have a conclusion that makes a point.
2. The essay should include anecdotes. The author should describe the person, the scene, or the event in some detail. It's okay to include dialogue

as long as you know how to punctuate it correctly and as long as you avoid using too much.

3. The occasion or person described must be suggestive in that your description and thoughts lead the reader to reflect on the human experience.
4. The point of view in narrative essays is usually first person. The use of "I" invites your readers into an intimate discussion.
5. The writing in your essay should be lively and show some style. Try to describe ideas and events in new and different ways. Avoid using clichés. Again, get the basic story down, get it organized, and in your final editing process, work on word choice.

Basic qualities of a narrative essay:

A narrative essay is a piece of writing that recreates an experience through time. A narrative essay can be based on one of your own experiences, either past or present, or it can be based on the experiences of someone else. 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:

1. Identify the experience that you want to write about.
2. Think about why the experience is significant.
3. Spend a good deal of time drafting your recollections about the details of the experience.
4. 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 recreate the experience for your readers. 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:

It's often effective to begin your narrative with a paragraph that introduces the experience and communicates the significance. This technique guarantees that

your readers will understand the significance of the experience as they progress through the narrative.

Another effective technique is to begin the essay by jumping directly into the narrative and then ending the essay with a paragraph communicating the significance of the experience. This approach allows your readers to develop their own understanding of the experience through the body of the essay and then more deeply connect to your expression of the significance at the end.

You might also consider introducing the experience in the first paragraph but delaying your expression of the significance of the experience until the end of the essay. This approach heightens your readers' sensitivity to the significance of the narrative.

Revising your narrative essay:

After spending time away from the draft of your narrative essay, read the essay and think about whether the writing effectively recreates the experience for your readers.

Ask other people to read 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.

Potential prompts for your narrative essay:

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.

Achieving a goal. Think about a particularly meaningful achievement in your life.

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.

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.

A change in your life. Think about a time when something significant changed in your life.

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.