

How to Write:

A Narrative Essay

There's nothing like *reading* a great narrative. Whether in novel or essay form, a narrative piece of writing transports readers into the time and space of the world portrayed by the writing.

There's also nothing like *writing* a great narrative. Through reflecting upon an event, and through recreating the experience for other readers, writing a narrative essay can enable you to develop new, subtle, and rewarding perspectives.

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 actually 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.
-

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.
 - ❖ Identify where more details and descriptions are needed/should be taken out.
-

Potential prompts for your narrative essay:

If you're having trouble choosing an experience to write about, take a quick glance through these prompts. They might help you remember or identify a particularly interesting or significant experience to focus on.

- **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. 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.
- **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 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.
- **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.