

## Sample Narrative Essay

Learning something new can be a scary experience. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was learn how to swim. I was always afraid of the water, but I decided that swimming was an important skill that I should learn. I also thought it would be good exercise and help me to become physically stronger. What I didn't realize was that learning to swim would also make me a more confident person.

New situations always make me a bit nervous, and my first swimming lesson was no exception. After I changed into my bathing suit in the locker room, I stood timidly by the side of the pool waiting for the teacher and other students to show up. After a couple of minutes the teacher came over. She smiled and introduced herself, and two more students joined us. Although they were both older than me, they didn't seem to be embarrassed about not knowing how to swim. I began to feel more at ease.

We got into the pool, and the teacher had us put on brightly colored water wings to help us stay afloat. One of the other students, May, had already taken the beginning class once before, so she took a kickboard and went splashing off by herself. The other student, Jerry, and I were told to hold on to the side of the pool and shown how to kick for the breaststroke. One by one, the teacher had us hold on to a kickboard while she pulled it through the water and we kicked. Pretty soon Jerry was off doing this by himself, traveling at a fast clip across the short end of the pool.

Things were not quite that easy for me, but the teacher was very patient. After a few more weeks, when I seemed to have caught on with my legs, she taught me the arm strokes. Now I had two things to concentrate on, my arms and my legs. I felt hopelessly uncoordinated. Sooner than I imagined, however, things began to feel "right" and I was able to swim! It was a wonderful free feeling - like flying, maybe - to be able to shoot across the water.

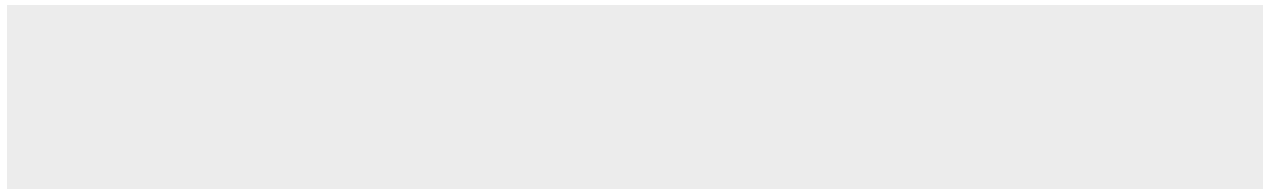
Learning to swim was not easy for me, but in the end my persistence paid off. Not only did I learn how to swim and to conquer my fear of the water, but I also learned something about learning. Now when I am faced with a new situation I am not so nervous. I may feel uncomfortable to begin with, but I know that as I practice being in that situation and as my skills get better, I will feel more and more comfortable. It is a wonderful, free feeling when you achieve a goal you have set for yourself.

### Narrative Essays

1. The first important thing to remember about a narrative essay is that it tells a story. The author may write about
  - an experience or event from his or her past
  - a recent or an ongoing experience or event
  - something that happened to somebody else, such as a parent or a grandparent
2. The second important thing about a narrative essay is that the story should have a point. In the final paragraph, the author should come to an important conclusion about the experience that has just been described.

Read this **sample narrative essay**, and then read the notes below.

1. The sample essay begins with a general statement, "Learning something new can be a scary experience." This statement introduces the subject of the essay, which is a particular learning experience that the author had. The use of "I" in the essay indicates that what is being described is a personal experience.
2. The essay is essentially a story about something that happened. The author gives sufficient details about the people, place, and events so that the reader gets a clear idea of how the author feels about them. In the essay, the author "stood timidly" and the teacher "smiled" and was "patient." These words indicate the author's fears and the sense of security provided by the teacher who helped the author get over her fear.
3. In the final paragraph of the essay, the author reflects on the larger meaning or importance of the experience described. The author concludes that learning to swim has helped her to feel more confident about herself in other new situations. The idea that self-confidence comes from conquering your fears is something that all people can relate to. This is the point of the story.
4. The essay is well-organized. After the introduction, the author describes the experience as it happened in time -- going to the pool the first day, having the first lesson, and the result of the subsequent lessons. The author might have chosen, however, to talk about the things she learned in order of their importance or difficulty.
5. The writing in an essay should be lively and interesting. Try to engage the reader's interest by adding details or personal observations. Sharing personal thoughts and details invites the reader into author's world and makes the story more personal and more interesting.



## **SAMPLE ESSAY:**

### **Brown, Achievement: Martial arts competition**

A faint twinge of excitement floated through my body that night. A hint of anticipation of the coming day could not be suppressed; yet to be overcome with anxiety would not do at all. I arduously forced those pernicious thoughts from seeping in and overcoming my body and mind. I still wonder that I slept at all that night.

But I did. I slept soundly and comfortably as those nervous deliberations crept into my defenseless, unsuspecting mind, pilfering my calm composure. When I awoke refreshed, I found my mind swarming with jumbled exhilaration. The adrenaline was flowing already. After a quick breakfast, I pulled some of my gear together and headed out. The car ride of two hours seemed only a few moments as I struggled to reinstate order in my chaotic consciousness and focus my mind on the day before me. My thoughts drifted to the indistinct shadows of my memory.

My opponent's name was John Doe. There were other competitors at the tournament, but they had never posed any threat to my title. For as long as I had competed in this tournament, I had easily taken the black belt championship in my division. John, however, was the most phenomenal martial artist I had ever had the honor of witnessing at my young age of thirteen. And he was in my division. Although he was the same rank, age, size, and weight as I, he surpassed me in almost every aspect of our training. His feet were lightning, and his hands were virtually invisible in their agile swiftness. He wielded the power of a bear while appearing no larger than I. His form and techniques were executed with near perfection. Although I had never defeated his flawlessness before, victory did not seem unattainable. For even though he was extraordinary, he was not much more talented than I. I am not saying that he was not skilled or even that he was not more skilled than I, for he most certainly was, but just not much more than I. I still had one hope, however little, of vanquishing this incredible adversary, for John had one weakness: he was lazy. He didn't enjoy practicing long hours or working hard. He didn't have to. Nevertheless, I had found my passage to triumph.

My mind raced even farther back to all my other failures. I must admit that my record was not very impressive. Never before had I completed anything. I played soccer. I quit. I was a Cub Scout. I quit. I played trumpet. I quit. Karate was all I had left. The championship meant so much because I had never persevered with anything else.

In the last months, I had trained with unearthly stamina and determination. I had focused all my energies into practicing for this sole aspiration. Every day of the week I trained. Every evening, I

could be found kicking, blocking, and punching at an imaginary opponent in my room. Hours of constant drilling had improved my techniques and speed. All my techniques were ingrained to the point where they were instinctive. Days and weeks passed too swiftly. . . .

I was abruptly jolted back into the present. The car was pulling into the parking lot. The tournament had too quickly arrived, and I still did not feel prepared for the trial which I was to confront. I stepped out of the car into the bright morning sun, and with my equipment bag in hand, walked into the towering building.

The day was a blur. After warming up and stretching, I sat down on the cold wooden floor, closed my eyes, and focused. I cleared my mind of every thought, every worry, and every insecurity. When I opened my eyes, every sense and nerve had become sharp and attentive, every motion finely tuned and deliberate.

The preliminary rounds were quiet and painless, and the championship fight was suddenly before me. I could see that John looked as calm and as confident as ever. Adrenaline raced through my body as I stepped into the ring. We bowed to each other and to the instructor, and the match began.

I apologize, but I do not recall most of the fight. I do faintly remember that when time ran out the score was tied, and we were forced to go into Sudden Death: whoever scored the next point would win. That, however, I do recall.

I was tired. The grueling two points that I had won already had not been enough. I needed one more before I could taste triumph. I was determined to win, though I had little energy remaining. John appeared unfazed, but I couldn't allow him to discourage me. I focused my entire being, my entire consciousness, on overcoming this invincible nemesis. I charged. All my strenuous training, every molecule in my body, every last drop of desire was directed, concentrated on that single purpose as I exploded through his defenses and drove a solitary fist to its mark.

I was not aware that I would never fight John again, but I would not have cared. Never before had I held this prize in my hands, but through pure, salty sweat and vicious determination, the achievement that I had desired so dearly and which meant so much to me was mine at last. This was the first time that I had ever really made a notable accomplishment in anything. This one experience, this one instant, changed me forever. That day I found self-confidence and discovered that perseverance yields its own sweet fruit. That day a sense of invincibility permeated the air. Mountains were nothing. The sun wasn't so bright and brilliant anymore. For a moment, I was the best.

### **Comments:**

*The admissions officers admired this essay for its passion and sincerity. In fact, most of the noted drawbacks were based on the writer being too passionate. "Kind of a tempest in a teapot, don't you think?" wrote one. Other suggestions for improvement were "purely editorial" such as the overuse of adjectives and adverbs, using a passive voice, and making contradictory statements. "For example, he says, 'I slept soundly and comfortably as those nervous deliberations crept into*

*my defenseless, unsuspecting mind, pilfering my calm composure.' How could he sleep soundly and comfortably if the nervous deliberations were pilfering his calm composure? There are a few other examples like that that I won't go into here. I would just suggest that the author look carefully to be sure his ideas stay consistent and support one another."*

*What I like about this essay from the point of view of an admission officer is that I am convinced that the change in attitude described by the author is real. I do believe that he will carry with him forever the hard-won knowledge that he can attain his goals, that perseverance and hard work will eventually allow him to succeed in any endeavor. This is an important quality to bring to the college experience. Especially when considering applications to prestigious institutions, the admission committee will want to feel sure that the applicants understand the need for hard work and perseverance. Many times the strongest-looking applicants are students for whom academic success has come so easily that the challenges of college come as a shock. I always like hearing stories like this, of students who know what it means to struggle and finally succeed.*

SAMPLE ESSAY:

### **Harvard, Hobbies and interests: Violin**

Struck with sudden panic, I hastily flipped through the many papers in my travel folder until I spotted the ticket. I nervously thrust it toward the beaming stewardess, but took the time to return her wide smile. Before stepping into the caterpillar tunnel I looked back at my parents, seeking reassurance, but I sensed from their plastered-on grins and overly enthusiastic waves that they were more terrified than I. I gave them a departing wave, grabbed my violin case, and commenced my first solitary journey.

Seated in the plane I began to study the pieces I would soon be performing, trying to dispel the flutterings in my stomach. I listened to some professional recordings on my Walkman, mimicking the fingerings with my left hand while watching the sheet music.

"Where ya goin'?" smiling businessman-seatmate interrupted.

"To the National High School Orchestra," I answered politely, wanting to go back to the music. "It's composed of students chosen from each state's All-State ensemble."

After three days of rehearsal, the orchestra would be giving a concert at a convention center in Cincinnati. I focused back on the music, thinking only of the seating audition I would have to face in a few hours.

When I arrived at the hotel in Cincinnati, instruments and suitcases cluttered every hallway, other kids milled around aimlessly, and the line to pick up room keys was infinitely long. In line I met my social security blanket, a friendly Japanese exchange student, [name], who announced proudly and frequently, "I fro Tayx-aas!" Both glad to have met someone, we adopted each other as friends of circumstance, and touched on a few of the many differences between Japanese and American culture (including plumbing apparatuses!)

Soon all of the performers received an audition schedule, and we went rushing to our rooms to practice. I had an hour until my audition, and repeated the hardest passages ad nauseam. When my time finally came, I flew up to the ninth floor and into the dreaded audition room. Three judges sat before a table. They chatted with me, futilely attempting to calm me. All too soon they resumed serious expressions, and told me which sections to perform. They were not the most difficult ones, but inevitably my hands shook and sweated and my mind wandered. . . .

I felt giddy leaving the audition room. The immense anxiety over the audition was relieved, yet the adrenaline still rushed through me. I wanted to yell and laugh and jump around and be completely silly, for my long-awaited evaluation was over. After dinner the seating list would be posted and I would know just where I fit in with the other musicians, all of whom intimidated me by their mere presence at the convention.

Solitary, having been unable to find [name] or any of my three roommates, I entered the dining room. I glanced feverishly around the giant room which swarmed with strangers. I gathered up all of my courage and pride for the first time ever, and approached a group I had no preconceived notions about. I sat quietly at first, gathering as much information as I could about the new people. Were they friend material? After careful observation of their socialization, I hypothesized that these complete strangers were very bright and easy to talk to, and shared my buoyant (but sometimes timid), sense of humor. I began to feel at home as we joked about S.A.T.'s, drivers' licenses, and other teenage concerns. I realized then how easy it is to get along with people I meet by coincidence. I became eager to test my newfound revelation.

The flutterings returned to my stomach when I approached the seating lists which everyone strained to see. "I knew it; I got last chair," I heard someone announce. My flutterings intensified. I located the violin list and scanned for my name from the bottom up. My tender ego wouldn't let me start at the top and get increasingly disappointed as I read farther and farther down. "There I am, seventh seat. Pretty good out of twenty," I thought. . . .

Every day at the convention seemed long, only because we did so many wonderful things. We rehearsed for at least seven hours each day, made numerous outings, and spent time meeting new friends.

On the second day, during a luncheon boat ride on the Ohio River, [name] and I sat together, both dreaming of Japan. Looking over at her as we talked, I remembered that in two days I would be torn from the young, promising friendships I had been building. When some friends--including a few I had met at the dinner table on the first night--approached us, bearing a deck of cards, I became absorbed in a jovial game and quickly forgot my sorrow.

Rehearsals were magical right from the start, because everyone rapidly grew accustomed to the strangely professional sound of the group and began to play without reserve, with full dynamics. I continually gazed, wide-eyed, around the large, bright room, watching others, admiring their skill. We were surrounded by pure talent, and the sky was our limit. We blossomed under the conductor's suggestions, using our pre-developed technique to its fullest.

Each time the orchestra played, my emotion soared, wafted by the beauty and artfulness of the music, bringing goose-bumps to my skin and a joyful feeling to my soul. I felt the power of the group--the talent and strength of each individual--meld into a chorus of heavenly sound. I was just where I wanted to be. I had everything I'd ever need. I was no longer doubting myself among strangers; I was making music with friends.

### **Comments:**

*This essay contains a good example of wowing the committee with a good closing sentence. Last lines are usually hard to manage. However, this essayist does a great job with hers, and the panel definitely noticed.*

*The last sentence of the essay is wonderfully composed.*

*The last line of this essay captures what I think are the two strong points of this piece. First of all, the author is an accomplished musician. No matter what sort of institution you are applying to, be it a music program, a liberal arts university, or a technical institution, strong musical ability will always be a big plus with the admission committee. This is because they know that proficiency in music requires self-discipline, a desire to improve and a willingness to learn. If you have achieved a notable level of accomplishment in some area of music, and have also succeeded in maintaining good grades, it tells an admission officer that you can manage your time well and set your priorities. The second strong point of this essay is the author's description of how she made friends and became completely immersed in appreciating and enjoying the entire experience. This tells an admission officer that she will almost certainly take to the college experience the same way, that she will overcome initial shyness, throw herself into a new situation, and soon extract every ounce of pleasure and personal growth from the experience. She will certainly be an asset to the incoming class.*

*Good essay, well written and heartfelt.*

*This was a nice essay. The writer took her time to formulate her ideas about this experience and was keen to stay focused on telling her story succinctly. She took this very important opportunity in her life and was able to tell the reader a vivid account without overdoing it.*