

Narrative Essay

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.

When you write a narrative essay, you are telling a story. Narrative essays are told from a defined point of view, often the author's, so there is feeling as well as specific and often sensory details provided to get the reader involved in the elements and sequence of the story. The verbs are vivid and precise. The narrative essay makes a point and that point is often defined in the opening sentence, but can also be found as the last sentence in the opening paragraph.

Since a narrative relies on personal experiences, it often is in the form of a story. When the writer uses this technique, he or she must be sure to include all the conventions of storytelling: plot, character, setting, climax, and ending. It is usually filled with details that are carefully selected to explain, support, or embellish the story. All of the details relate to the main point the writer is attempting to make.

To summarize, the narrative essay

- is told from a particular point of view
- makes and supports a point
- is filled with precise detail
- uses vivid verbs and modifiers
- uses conflict and sequence as does any story
- may use dialogue

The purpose of a narrative report is to describe something. Many students write narrative reports thinking that these are college essays or papers. While the information in these reports is basic to other forms of writing, narrative reports lack the "higher order thinking" that essays require. Thus narrative reports do not, as a rule, yield high grades for many college courses. A basic example of a narrative report is a "book report" that outlines a book; it includes the characters, their actions, possibly the plot, and, perhaps, some scenes. That is, it is a description of "what happens in the book." But this leaves out an awful lot.

What is left out is what the book or article is about -- the underlying concepts, assumptions, arguments, or point of view that the book or article expresses. A narrative report leaves aside a discussion that puts the events of the text into the context of what the text is about. Is the text about love? Life in the fast lane? Society? Wealth and power? Poverty? In other words, narrative reports often overlook the authors' purpose or point of view expressed through the book or article.

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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 the use of specific details is available on another page.
- Narratives, as stories, should include these story conventions: a plot, including setting and characters; a climax; and an ending.
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