



DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Narrative Essay

A narrative essay tells a story by relating its events in an organized manner so that it proves a point.

Narratives in College Writing

Narratives Prove a Point

College writing uses narratives to prove a point by telling an event in logical order. For example, in a narrative essay about a camping trip, the purpose may be to show how camping can turn into a disastrous event.

Do Not Just Tell the Story

Instead of just telling the story, choose the details and organize the specific events of the story so that they will support the thesis. For the above example, select the particular details from the trip that show *why* camping can turn out disastrously.

Types of Narrative Organization

Chronological Order

A narrative may present events in the exact order in which they took place. Chronological order moves from the beginning to the end, from first to last.

Begin with the Middle or End

In writing fiction or a personal account, a narrative may begin with the middle or end of the story for variety. Then, the events that led up to that particular point in the story may be presented.

Flashbacks

A narrative may also begin with the present and use a series of flashbacks, which interrupt the present in order to tell about past occurrences or events, to tell the story.

Make the Narrative Interesting

Use Detail

The reader needs to see what is being discussed in the paper, so use vivid details, like imagery, and give specific information, such as the time of day, precise dates, and exact locations.

Vary Sentences

Be careful not to begin every sentence the same way. Also, avoid using sentences that use the same pattern; instead, use a variety of sentence structures.

Instead of: *We woke up in the middle of the night. We found our campsite flooded. We packed up our belongings and moved.*

Try: *In the middle of the night, we awoke from a deep sleep to find our campsite flooded with water. We were forced, unfortunately, to pack up our belongings and move upstream as quickly as possible.*

Use Dialogue

Dialogue is useful to help develop characters and to make the narrative more interesting. A reader would rather hear specific people speak than read about them.

Use Consistent Verb Tense

Be sure to keep verb tense consistent so that the reader can understand the time sequence. There are times, however, to shift verb tense in order to reflect a time shift in the narrative; for example, when using flashbacks, the verb tense may shift from present to past tense.

Use Transitions

Words and phrases that connect not only help organize time sequences, but also help readers know the order of the events and indicate time changes. Some examples of transition words are *first*, *second*, *next*, *meanwhile*, *immediately*, *earlier*, *after*, and *finally*.

Basic Structure of a Narrative Essay

Introduction

State the thesis here. (See the University Writing Center's handout on Thesis Statements for more information.)

Body

Present the series of events that make up the narrative in a very clear and organized manner.

Conclusion

Bring closure to the story; restate the thesis here.

Example of an Informal Outline for a Narrative Essay

Introduction: Thesis statement-Due to unusual circumstances, what I expected to be a relaxing camping trip with my family actually turned out to be quite a disastrous event.

Stage 1 of the trip: My entire family ended up getting separated for hours while hiking the winding mountain trails.

Stage 2 of the trip: While canoeing, my brother caused our boat to capsize, leaving both of us soaking wet in the frigid water.

Stage 3 of the trip: Much of our food supply was ruined by raccoons and mice, causing us to look elsewhere for nourishment.

Stage 4 of the trip: In the middle of the night, we awoke from a deep sleep to find our campsite flooded with water.

Stage 5 of the trip: When my father locked the keys in the car, we were forced to hike to higher ground in order to find transportation to our home.

Conclusion: Overall, the unexpected chain of events truly turned my family's trip into quite an unusual experience.

As the informal outline expands into a personal narrative, be sure to include vivid details that will help develop the story. Also, be sure to include transitions to signify a shift from one stage of the event to the next. Finally, it is often appropriate to use the first-person voice for narrative essays.

Kirszner, Laurie G., and Stephen R. Mandell. *Patterns for College Writing: A Rhetorical Reader and Guide*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. Print.