

NARRATIVES

The word narrative comes from Latin meaning "to recount" or "recall," which suggests its nature: To tell a story (personal and/or public) or to elaborate about something (usually personal).

TYPES OF NARRATIVES

To clarify, narratives may either retell a series of events or discuss (or reflect on) a topic from a personal perspective.

In a sense, you find two types of narratives:

* Stories (chronological-based narratives)* Reflections (element-based narratives)

Narratives are used on their own, as narratives or narrative essays, or to support a larger structure such as an argumentative essay, a proposal, or an application essay for a job. You might have even written a narrative for a scholarship or for entrance into college. Typically, admissions offices ask students to write a short narrative essay, such as: Explain why you want to attend this college.

Narratives can be fictional or non-fictional (however, they are usually non-fictional or true). In fact, most contemporary non-fiction narratives (sometimes referred to as creative nonfiction or literary nonfiction) represent the bulk of narrative writing completed in college courses.

To begin, we will discuss story-based narratives.

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF STORY-BASED NARRATIVES

1) Narratives are descriptive and often vivid (producing clear images in the mind). They are full of details. Most narratives work hard to engage the sights, sounds, scents, tastes, and other senses of the reader by providing vivid and engaging details/description.

Example:: You might say, "We drove in my friend's car."

In a narrative, you might be more detailed-oriented and specific:

Revised: "We drove in my friends fire engine red 2024 Mustang convertible."

Revised: "We drove in my friends rust-bucket red 1976 Ford Pinto."

In a sense, you want to help the reader/audience to "envision" or "visualize" particulars. This act makes the narrative much better.

Engage the senses!

Example: (Poor Description)

A young man entered the nightclub and walked up to a very old woman.

Revised: (Vivid Description)

A handsome, young man (about twenty) approached a frail, older woman (about eighty years old). He wore cowboy boots, blue jeans, and a plain white t-shirt, and smelled like cheap cologne. The old woman wore an old beat-up dress and dusty old flats.

Consider adding sensory details when possible.

Consider:

- * Color
- * Shape
- * Size
- * Taste
- * Smell
- * Sound

and other sensory descriptors help authors to create wonderful mental pictures for their readers.

2) Narratives work to inform the reader through narration. In a sense, it may be fair to say: If you don't have a narrator, you don't have a narrative.

First-Person Singular Narration

The first-person narrator is the most powerful of the three forms. The strength of the first-person narrator is its rhetorical value. From childhood onwards to adulthood, we are bombarded with narratives using "I," and we learn to trust when people tell us stories. The author's ethos (or credibility) helps, along with the components of the narrative, to persuade, enlighten (or teach), and amaze us.

Example:

I often wonder why the world is so oppressive when we are single. Being single isn't easy. In fact, I can talk a mile in these shoes about the incredible disadvantages of being single. First, there is the loneliness. Second, there is the sex-less-ness. Third, there is the late-night-Margarita-Cosmopolitan-kiss-ass-show to attempt to score some companionship and maybe some affection. And, finally, there is the eventual return to the black hole... the singularity, where you realize that "I hate being single." But, I often wonder: Is marriage any better?

Note the heavy use of "I" in this first-person account/reflection.

Third-Person Narration

Finally, the third person narrator may be the most often used, since we often tell stories and even write using the third person. Not usually found in a personal narrative, the third person narrative helps us to separate ourselves from the story (as though we were only witnesses and not necessarily participants, even if we were...).

Example:

Jack didn't know what was coming, and when Kim opened the door she let him have it. She planted the wettest, most endearing kiss that she could muster onto his lips. His eyes seemed to bulge out of his head, followed by a huge sigh of bliss. Cheek-to-cheek and lip-to-lip, they seemed locked together for hours, as if they had loved each other since the womb, although that might be somewhat inappropriate (considering the circumstances of their long and sometimes arduous work relationship).

Essentially, there are two types of third person narrators:

The third person narrator can be “omniscient” (that is, having knowledge of everything happening in the story, including the thoughts of those participating – other characters’ thoughts).

Or, the third person narrator can be “limited” (that is, having knowledge of most everything happening in the story, but only knowing his/her own thoughts and not the thoughts of others).

3) Story-Based Narratives are considered with a sequence or series of events. Sequence refers to a linear time pattern found within a narrative where event A is followed by event B, which is followed by event C, and so forth. (Linear Pattern of Time)

Event 1----- Event 2----- Event 3 ----- Event 4 ----- Event 5

However, narratives based solely on a series of events may break conventional linear patterns and appear non-linear (having flashbacks or other changes in the sequence). (Beginning the story with the ending)

Event 5 ----- Event 1 ----- Event 2----- Event 3 ----- Event 4

4) Stories provide context and identify the setting, usually early in the introduction. The setting usually gives us some sense of time and the space where the plot unfolds.

Example:

In the fall of 1969, I opened my eyes lost in a sea of people standing on a farm in rural New York. Holding my hand was my soon-to-be wife, Jennifer, my friend Eric, and his sister Julie.

5) Story-Based Narratives also contain the following qualities:

- * Problems/Concerns/Antagonists* Protagonists
- * Series of Events
- * Characters/Sub-characters
- * Style (which includes the language used by the writer and any ornaments used)

Moreover, they contain

- * Narrators/Narrative Voice (usually, a first-person narrator or a third-person narrator)*
- Tone (the overall attitude or mood which is conveyed throughout the narrative)

Narratives can contain ornamentation, where things such as symbolism, imagery, irony, personification, dialogue, monologues, or other techniques are used to create interest in the writing.

HOW ARE STORY-BASED NARRATIVES USED?

Story-based narratives used at the college and professional-level include:

- * Biographies* Autobiographies
- * Memoirs

- * Creative Nonfiction
- * Oral Histories
- * Case Studies
- * Diagnostic Reports or Treatment Plans

ARRANGEMENT (A.K.A., ORGANIZATION)

Story-Based narratives follow a particular structure, usually a mostly linear pattern. They include an introduction (or beginning), mid-section (or middle), and a conclusion (or ending).

INTRODUCTIONS

Introductory Material is concerned with the questions:

- * Who? * What?
- * When?
- * Where?
- * Why?

The introduction is primarily a place where the conditions of the narrative and any primary elements of the setting are revealed (such as space and time). The introduction may establish the conflict or the protagonist/antagonist relationship. The introduction may provide a back-story or develop a familiarization with the characters.

MIDDLE/MIDPOINT

The main structural components of a narrative are found in the middle of the narrative, where the series of events really begins to unfold. In this section, the reader finds the bulk of the events which help to structure the narrative. Here, action/conflict may begin to rise until you reach the conclusion of the narrative.

CONCLUSIONS/ENDINGS

Conclusions contain some of the most interesting elements, such as the conclusion to the narrative, as well as things such as solutions, resolutions, twists in the plot, poetic justice, and the end of the action/rising action.

In the ending, we learn morals (from Didactic types of narratives); we learn lessons; we learn about lives and are able to begin to process the central meaning behind the narrative.

TIPS FOR NARRATIVE WRITING

- * Try as much as possible to keep the narration the same. Write the narrative all in the first-person or all in the third-person. Some crossover is fine, but you do not want to keep your reader moving back and forth between perspectives (this shift may be mentally exhausting and confusing). * For story-based narratives, try to develop your story before you write it. Again, pre-write, and even storyboard for story-based narratives (create slides detailing where you are going with the story).
- * Use vivid language (go heavy on the details and description).

* Keep your tense consistent during each section of the narrative (Remember: Time is one of the most important factors in a story-based narrative).

* Have a reader review your work and suggest changes (Have them focus particularly on things which they do not understand or which need clarification or more explanation).

* Remember be playful. Have fun with the story: Some exaggeration is allowed. However, if you must report only straight facts, report only the facts.