

DRAFTING 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). To clarify, narratives may either retell a series of events or provide an extrapolation of personal philosophy/belief/preference or other facet of a person.

In a sense, you find two types of narratives:

- +Story-Based Narratives (Private or Public Stories)
- +Personal Narratives (Self-Insight or Self-Elaboration)

Narratives are used on their own (as narratives or narrative essays), or they are used to support a larger structure such as an argumentative essay or proposal.

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 non-fiction or literary non-fiction) represent the bulk of narrative writing completed in college courses, especially when narrative are used to support a larger structure, such as an argumentative essay or application materials for an occupation.

Narratives, regardless of whether they are story-based or personal contain a theme or a central idea. That is, they contain a particular focus and/or message. As a subset of language studies, Narratology is primarily concerned with understanding such information, as well as understanding the structure of narratives. Many theorists in narratology discuss how these themes/ideas are approach; in addition, they work diligently to discuss how the narrator and his/her style approach the audience.

Also, narratives are extremely vivid. They are full of almost too many 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.

Finally, one of the most substantial aspects of a narrative (if not they most substantial aspect) is the use of narration. 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. And, this statement is true.

Narrative use one of three possible forms of narration.

- +First-Person Singular (or the personal "I")
- +First-Person plural (or the inclusive "we")
- +Second Person (or the commendable/accusatory "you")
- +Third Person (the "removed" narrator).

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 creditability) helps, along with the components of the narrative, to persuade, enlighten (or teach), and amaze us.

EX:

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.

FIRST-PERSON PLURAL NARRATION

The plural first person relies on inclusion or a sense of pseudo-group-credibility to convince people that what we say is true.

EX:

Last week, while camping in Montego Canyon, we decided to take a short hike, where we ran into a herd of angry cattle. And, we were all scared. You should have seen it. We ran as fast as we could to head out of there and back to the trailhead. In what seemed like a few seconds, we must have ran half a mile from a few bulls chasing the colorful, patterned surfaces of our backpacks. And, yet, we could not simply move out of their way. The walls of the canyon permitted only a forward/backward "march," which became a "run" in this case.

Note the heavy use of you in this account. Notice how, even though one person is telling the story, there is a sense of group participation (this is what we might call pseudo-group credibility). The use of we, our, and other pronouns of the second person permit this form of credibility and it is found nowhere else in the English language.

SECOND-PERSON NARRATION

Second-Person narration is interesting rhetorically. While you can use the second person narrative to tell a story, second person narration works more or less as for types of writing involving praise, eulogy, or affirmation (positive second-person narration). And, conversely, second person narratives are also good for writing involving indictment, condemnation, or accusation (negative second-person narration).

EX: (Negative Second-Person Narration)

You should be ashamed of yourself. You should not have stayed at Jeff's house last night. Jeff is much older than you, and you know (being a young woman) that it might not be very prudent or classy. Although our families have been friends for years, I can't believe that you would take advantage of that friendship by allowing yourself to become intoxicated and be lured into the subtle pleasantries of a man's bed. Well, what do you have to say for yourself? Because, I cannot believe that you would do such a thing. You have disgraced yourself, this family, and him. What's he going to say to his parents when they find a woman's bra and panties in his room? Hmmm... And, what do you think they are going to say to him? Think long and hard about what you did.

Or,

EX: (Positive Second-Person Narration)

Jack, you are a wonderful friend. You are a wonderful partner. In the years that we have been in business together, you have helped our company to grow and to prosper. You may

remember when I was scared about the prospects of putting all of my savings and my time into this endeavor, but I am happy to say that it provided us with fruit. You can see our new cars and our new houses. These are things that we would not have without your hard work and determination. My friend, you are wonderful, and I am truly thankful for you.

Note the heavy use of you in both examples.

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...).

EX:

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).

STORY-BASED NARRATIVES

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

- +Biographies
- +Autobiographies
- +Memoirs
- +Oral Histories
- +Creative Non-Fiction/Literary Non-Fiction
- +Case Studies

Most Story-Based Narratives contain the following qualities:

- +Problems/Concerns/Antagonists
- +Protagonists
- +Series of Events
- +Characters/Sub-characters
- +Setting (Time/Space)
- +Vivid Description (Heavily Detailed with Modifiers)
- +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.

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.

EX: (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).

EX: (Beginning the story with the ending)

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

With the use of a linear series of events, the author can choose to include special effects involving temporality (or time) such as:

+Foreshadowing

+Rising Action

+Foreshadowing

+Flashbacks

+Flash-forward

+Repetition of Time

+Side stories (or Stories within Stories)

And other effects, which may help to create interest on the part of the reader.

STORY-BASED NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

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).

INTRODUCTION

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).

EX:

In the fall of 1969, I opened my eyes lost in a sea of people on 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.

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.

MID-SECTION

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.

CONCLUSION

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.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

Narratives which are personal focus on identifying things about the personal self, which may not be known or understood by the reader.

Some personal narrative which you might find at the college and professional-level include:

- +Personal Statements (for Employment or for Personal Enrichment)
- +Self-Portraits
- +Auto-ethnography

Personal narratives may be devoid of any sort of series of events, and they may not contain any sort of sequence of events. However, they may loosely discuss personal elements, characteristics, components, or traits in a linear order.

EX:

Element 1 ----- Element 2 ----- Element 3 ----- Elements 4

For example, a personal statement used for employment may discuss an author's interests in the position (element 1), his/her expertise for the position (element 2), and then his/her attributes (element 3).

Likewise, something like a self-portrait or an auto-ethnography might discuss specific life and/or visual traits, such as what you look like (element 1), how you act (element 2), what you do (element 3), and other elements of the personal.

EX:

I am a shy person. I can see how shyness can be somewhat liberating. I don't have to approach people. I don't have to interact with people. I can simply be. Shyness is nice for some people. And, shyness doesn't have to stop you from doing all the things in life that you would like to do.

TIPS FOR DRAFTING NARRATIVES

+Try as much as possible to keep the narration the same. Write the narrative all in the first-person, all in the second-person, or all in the third-person. Some cross-over 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).

+For personal narratives, decide on the content before writing the narrative. You might want to do some free listing or attempt to outline your thoughts before engaging wholeheartedly in the writing of the narrative.

+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).

+Keep organized, but do not be afraid to break sections up into smaller (digestible) paragraphs.

+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 narratives are inherently creative, which is evidenced by lore, legends, and the long cross-cultural oral traditions of civilizations past. So, be playful, unless you must report the straight facts. In the case of reporting straight facts, report only the facts.