

STRUCTURE OF A PERSONAL NARRATIVE ESSAY

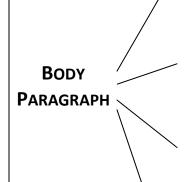
"Narrative" is a term that refers to what we more commonly call "stories." Narratives written for college, or personal narratives, tell a story, usually to illustrate some truth or insight. Here are some tools to help you structure your personal narrative.

Introduction

The "Hook" Start your paper with a statement about your story that catches the reader's attention, for example, a relevant quotation, question, fact, or definition.

Set the Scene Provide the information the reader will need to understand the story: Who are the major characters? When and where does the story take place? Is it a story about something that happened to you, the writer?

Thesis Statement The thesis of a narrative essay plays a slightly different role than that of an argument or expository essay. A narrative thesis can begin the events of the story: "It was sunny and warm out when I started down the path"; offer a moral or lesson learned: "I'll never hike alone again"; or identify a theme that connects the story to a universal experience: "Journeys bring both joy and hardship."



"Show, Don't Tell" Good story telling includes details and descriptions that help the reader understand what the writer experienced. Think about using all five senses—not just the sense of sight—to add details about what you heard, saw, and felt during the event. For example, "My heart jumped as the dark shape of the brown grizzly lurched toward me out of the woods" provides more information about what the writer saw and felt than, "I saw a bear when I was hiking."

Supporting Evidence In a personal narrative, your experience acts as the evidence that proves your thesis. The events of the story should demonstrate the lesson learned, or the significance of the event to you.

Passage of Time Writing about events in a chronological order, from beginning to end, is the most common and clear way to tell a story. Whether you choose to write chronologically or not, use transition words to clearly indicate to the reader what happened first, next, and last. Some time transition words are *next*, *finally*, *during*, *after*, *when*, and *later*.

Transitions In a narrative essay, a new paragraph marks a change in the action of a story, or a move from action to reflection. Paragraphs should connect to one another. For example, the end of one paragraph might be: "I <u>turned</u> and <u>ran</u>, hoping the bear <u>hadn't noticed</u> me," and the start of the next might be: "There <u>are</u> many strategies for surviving an encounter with a bear; 'turn and run' <u>is</u> not one of them." The repetition of words connects the paragraphs. (What does the change in <u>verb</u> tense indicate?)*

CONCLUSION

The Moral of the Story The conclusion of a narrative includes the closing action of the event, but also should include some reflection or analysis of the significance of the event to the writer. What lesson did you learn? How has what happened to you affected your life?

OUTLINING YOUR NARRATIVE

Try applying this structure to your own writing: write sentences for the corresponding elements of your introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion in the space provided below.

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Begin your paper with a "hook" that	
catches the reader's attention and then set the scene. Where is the event set?	
What time of year? How old were you when this happened?	
State your thesis : what you learned, or how the event is significant to you.	

Body paragraphs: write three significant moments from the beginning, middle, and end of the event.

bouy paragr	aphs: write three significant moments from the beginning, middle, and end of	the event.
Para. 1:	Topic sentence:	Note:
Beginning	Detail 1.	Don't forget to
Action		"Show, Don't
	Detail 2.	Tell": List
		sounds, smells,
	Detail 3.	sights, tastes,
Para. 2:	Topic sentence:	and textures that
Middle	Detail 1.	you remember.
Action	Detail 1.	Your experience
	Detail 2.	is your
	Detail 2.	"evidence." Use
	Detail 3.	transition words
	Detail 51	to indicate the
Para 3:	Topic sentence:	passage of time.
End Action	Detail 1.	
	Detail 2.	
	Detail 3.	

Conclusion:

Analyze and reflect on the
action of the story, including
how the events are significant
to you.

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Writing Strategies to Consider

First Person vs. Third Person Narratives are a mode of writing in which writers often use first person perspective ("I saw", "I did"). Check with your instructor to determine whether you can use "I" when telling your story.

*Verb Tense: Reporting vs. Reflecting The events of most narratives are told in past tense: "As I hiked, I felt the warm sun on my back." Use present tense when reflecting on the events: "Now I know how unprepared I was". Notice the change in tense in this sentence as the writer reflects on the past event, from the present.