

How to Approach a Narrative Essay

Narrative Essays are essays that tell a personal story to the reader. They are similar to descriptive essays in that they use descriptive language in relaying the events of the narrative, but unlike a descriptive essay, they have a point or underlying lesson for the reader to learn. Narrative essays focus on a specific event that happened in your life, such as your first day of school or a time you learned a new skill.

Special Characteristics of a Narrative Essay

Has a thesis statement, but it is more implied than overt

Uses descriptive language, and only occasionally dialogue, to “show” instead of “tell” the story and to evoke emotions and feeling in the reader

Usually narrowly focused on a specific event or limited time event

Tells a lesson without coming out and stating it

Uses 1st person viewpoint (I, me, we, etc.) since the story is personal

Does not include citations from outside sources.
After all, no one knows your story better than you!

Told in a chronological order from beginning to end

Steps to Writing a Narrative Essay

1. **Read through the prompt well** noting any specific requirements from your instructor. Some may want dialogue while others might not. Some will state the need to use 1st person, but some may ask you to not use it. Some may give you a specific area you can write about, like your first day at a new job, while others may give more open prompts, for example, writing about an experience where you learned something new or an experience where you felt you grew as a person.
2. **Decide on an incident that happened in your life** if one is not provided in your prompt. It can be a specific event that happened in few hours or a day, but nothing that takes place over days, months, or years. For example, instead of writing about the vacation you took to Hawaii, talk about climbing a volcano during this trip.

Tip: This event should have a lesson that you learned that you wish to give to your reader so they can learn the same lesson. For the lesson, think on a broad scale like, learning to appreciate what you have, the importance of always telling the truth, learning to relax and enjoy life, or anything else you can think of.

3. **Write an outline.** Outlines are great because they help us stay focused when writing. Your paper should start with an introduction which sets the stage for the event that is to come and a conclusion that wraps everything up.

Tip: When telling your story, remember to explain what happened in the same order it happened. When we skip around, it can confuse our reader about what is happening when and they can lose sight of the lesson to be learned.

4. **Start writing!** Think about what information you would need to know if someone was telling this story to you. If you get stuck, pretend you are telling this story to a friend. What would you say to them and how would you say it? Write that.

Tip: At this point, grammar and punctuation are not really important. The main thing is to get your thoughts on paper. You can always clean up grammar later. Just make sure to use specific language that conveys your ideas and feelings well.

Introduction Tips: Provide background to lead up the telling of the event in your body paragraphs. Make sure to include any important people, provide the setting of where the event took place, and any important background information that will help your reader understand why this event is significant.

Thesis Tips: The last sentence of the introduction should be your thesis. The thesis is implied instead of being directly stated like a classic essay. It sets the stage for the event that is to come in your body paragraphs. Some examples are: "Though I didn't know it at the time, my life was going to change forever" or "Little did I know how this was going to impact me."

Conclusion Tips: Include a concluding paragraph at the end that discusses the effects of the event and what you learned from the experience. Be sure to keep this in 1st person viewpoint. 2nd person viewpoint (you, your, etc.) should never be used in academic writing, so don't revert to it in your conclusion. We want to hint at the lesson learned instead of telling our reader what they need to do with phrases such as, "You should..."