

Personal Narration Notes -- 075/110

A Personal Narration Paragraph/Essay

1) A personal narration is an account of some event that has occurred in your life, some experience you have had -- for example, an embarrassing job interview; a proud moment as a high school athlete; a frightening childhood encounter with a vicious dog.

2) Narrow down your topic for a paragraph or an essay:

Don't try, for example, to write about your entire vacation to Hawaii; instead write about one incident during this vacation -- going to a luau, surfing for the first time, or learning to hula.

Choose an event which spans a short period of time so you can cover it in depth in a paragraph or a short essay.

3) Write in first person (I) -- the use of "I" makes your narration a "personal" one. (Note: Your instructor may also allow third person point of view.)

4) Cover at least four elements in your paragraph/essay:

- a) setting (place, surroundings)
- b) characters (people involved)
- c) plot (the action, the details of the event)
- d) significance -- the main point or impression you want to convey.

5) Be certain that you have a strong topic sentence or thesis statement that expresses an opinion or clear main idea (unless your instructor makes this optional).

To arrive at a topic sentence or thesis statement in a personal narrative, ask yourself: "What did this experience mean to me?" Try using a fill-in-the-blank approach:

1) My first attempt at water skiing was very _____.
(The word you use to fill in the blank is the opinion word in your topic sentence. It could be "disastrous," "gratifying," etc.)

2) I really _____ the tour of Chinatown in Chicago last summer.
(Your opinion word could be "enjoyed," "disliked," etc.)

6) Observe clear chronological (time) order in your narration.

7) Sometimes a background sentence is necessary to "set-up" the narration, to take the reader quickly to the "heart" of your story. Such a sentence usually appears first in the paragraph or essay and indicates the "who, what, when, where, or why" of the narration.

EXAMPLE: Last winter my sister Joan and I spent two weeks in Florida.
While there...

NOTE: This is not a topic sentence or thesis, but rather a "lead-in" sentence. Your topic sentence or thesis would follow this lead-in sentence. (In an essay, other types of lead-in sentences may also be used.)

- 8) Don't forget to include transitions wherever necessary in your narration. Since you're using chronological order, your transitions will often be time transitions:

after leaving the house
when we first arrived
in the morning
later that day
after an exciting afternoon
during the evening
that night
as soon as we got home, etc.

- 9) If the actual words of a person in your paragraph are important, use dialogue (direct conversation) with quotation marks.
- 10) Write as concretely as possible -- use names, specific details, pictorial description, etc.
- 11) Sample OUTLINE of a personal narration essay (outlining can also be used with a paragraph assignment):
- I. Introduction: When I was in the second grade, I allowed my friends to persuade me to play a prank on my teacher. This early traumatic experience taught me that there are right and wrong times for humor. (OR: This experience proved to be one of the worst of my childhood.)
 - II. Body: Setting up the prank was very exciting. I spent hours collecting roaches and spiders.
 - III. Body: I arrived at school an hour early with a jar filled with dozens of hideous, crawling insects. I put them in place.
 - IV. Body: The reaction of Mrs. Jackson and the class. My getting caught! I never knew exactly how Mrs. Jackson figured out who was responsible for the "bugging," but somehow she did.
 - V. Conclusion: After this escapade, I reserved my sense of humor for my friends only and vowed that I would analyze a situation carefully before jumping into it.