



Student Tip Sheet #1: Personal Narrative

What it is

A personal narrative is a true story about something that happened in your life. The best stories come from our most important memories.

A personal narrative could be written as a story, for example, "The Most Unusual Day of My Life." It could also be written in the form of a letter to someone.

Generally, personal narratives:

- give background information (who, what, where, when, why)
- describe a series of events in order
- use past tense (for example: *walked*, *talked* and *went*)

What it can look like

- diary
- log
- memoir
- paragraph
- journal
- letter
- photo essay
- essay
- autobiography
- postcard
- poetry
- story

Planning tools

- Multi-use master #1: Planning web
- Activity page: Re-create a happy childhood memory



Plan

1. Select a subject. Think of a single memorable event that happened in your life. Look for an experience that happened over a short period of time. It could have happened in five minutes or an hour. Keep your story to a single experience that happened over no longer than one day.
2. Collect your thoughts. Use a web or a list to help organize your thoughts.
3. Answer the 5Ws – Who? What? When? Where? and Why? – about the experience.

Write

1. Start at the beginning. Put yourself at the beginning of the experience (“I was looking out the window...” or “As I turned the corner...”) and continue to add details as you work through your story from beginning to end.
2. Add physical details. Help your readers see what you saw by including details that will help them make a picture in their minds. For example:
As I slowly stepped into the bright light, my knees began to buckle and I had to remind myself to breathe.
3. Add sounds, tastes, smells and textures. Sounds make readers feel as if they are there, living in the adventure with you. Include at least one other sense that is important to your story.
4. Add dialogue. Dialogue can make a story seem more real, and can bring characters to life.
5. Add thoughts and feelings. Show what you were thinking and how you were feeling by what you make your characters say and do.

Crafting a good beginning

- Explain that the job of the beginning is to hook the reader: to introduce the characters, problem and setting in a way that will make the reader want to read on. A good strategy when discussing beginnings is to have a collection of books handy, each one illustrating a different good beginning technique.

GOOD BEGINNINGS

TITLE	TECHNIQUE	EXAMPLE
<u>I Want A Cat</u> by Tony Ross	1. Problem - states what the main character wants or needs.	The first sentence tells the reader that Jesse wants a cat.
<u>Weslandia</u> By Paul Fleishman	2. Conversation - start in the middle of an interesting conversation.	Wesley's mother is complaining.
<u>Code Red At the Supermall</u> by Eric Wilson.	3. Action - start in the middle of some exciting action, use strong verbs.	The scene is one where a shark is heading towards a girl.
<u>Martha Speaks</u> By Susan Meddaugh	4. Something Weird - start with a bold, challenging or puzzling statement.	Martha is fed alphabet soup and begins to speak.
<u>Charlotte's Web</u> By E. B. White	5. Question - start with a thought-provoking question.	Fern asks her mother where Papa is going with the axe.
*****	6. Sound Effects - start with the sound of something intriguing.	CRASH! Grandma's priceless vase slips out of my fingers and hits the floor.
<u>Meredith's Mixed Up Magic</u> By D. Lachner	7. Description - often of the setting. This is the most difficult way to hook the reader.	A very interesting description of the smoke curling around the chimney.

JAIL - DO NOT USE THESE BEGINNINGS EVER!

Once Upon a time - this is only for fairy tales. Also try to stay away from starting any story with the word "Once".	Hi My Name is... The author should never speak directly to the reader.	This story is about ... Show us by what the characters say, do, feel and think - Don't tell us!
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Check your writing

In this personal narrative...	Excellent	Okay	Needs work
1. My beginning sentence grabs the reader's interest.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I tell the story from my personal point of view.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I tell the story in 1-2-3 order.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I include enough background information that the reader understands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when the story takes place • where it took place • who is involved • what happened • why it's an important memory for me 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
5. I tell the story in the past tense. (For example: <i>walked, talked, said.</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

To make my story more realistic, I could add details about... _____



Multi-Use Master #4: Story Planner

Name: Hi Date: _____

Title

Setting	Characters
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The problem or challenge facing the main characters:

Events

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Ending (How did the main character(s) solve the problem or meet their goal?)