

Personal Narrative



Level 5

Introduction

Personal narratives are a type of storytelling. To write a personal narrative, choose a recent event in your life and tell the story of it to your reader. You can also write from a fictional or historical perspective. Whatever event you choose to relate, your goal is to make it a carefully written, interesting story!

Prewriting

Ideally, your topic should have one or more of these elements:

- * An exciting, momentous, or significant event in your recent past
- * A focus on a “moment in time”: an exciting roller coaster ride or the day you were chosen for the lead in a church play
- * A fictional, first-hand account of an important historical event
- * You will usually be the central character, but a story with other interesting characters is better than one in which you are the sole subject.

Use our graphic organizers—the Characterization Grid and Story Map—to plan out your story.

- * If your story is about things you know well, like a personal story, the Characterization Grid may be particularly helpful.
- * The Story Map is useful, too, in recalling details that you may have forgotten. For instance, say you are writing about a white-water rafting trip. The thrill of running the rapids is probably uppermost in your mind; the details of starting off and finishing up may not be so clear.
- * Also important in this phase is choosing when to start and end the episode. Keep it simple so you can concentrate on writing the actual narrative well.

Drafting

Once the prewriting is done thoroughly and well, the drafting process is straightforward. Don't be discouraged if it is either too long or too short at first. Longer papers can be edited; shorter papers probably need more detail and more concrete words added. Note, though, that all of this belongs to the editing stage. Get the story down first; then return to edit it when you are fresh.

Editing

Self proof for grammar and punctuation, and ask yourself these questions:

- * Does the story flow well?
- * Have you chosen good, strong, specific verbs that help the reader picture the action of the story?
- * When you have described scenery or clothing or gestures, is each word clear, crisp, precise, and concrete so that it brings up a clear picture in your mind?
- * Does the story include interesting information about the characters? Does the reader feel as if he “knows them”? If not, perhaps another little scene, a few adverbs, or a few details about their appearance, tones of voice, gestures with hands, etc., might be in order.
- * Are there any spelling or usage errors?
- * Is your dialogue punctuated correctly? (Look it up in an English handbook if you don't know.)
- * Give your edited draft to your teacher for her comments when it is complete.

Polishing and Presenting

As usual, take your teacher's marked-up copy back to your computer and enter the changes. Then print a final copy for presentation.

The tendency is for students to be less concrete and specific about things they know. These graphic organizers will help you paint your characters vividly.