

Narrative

Quite simply, a narrative relates a series of events. Two key words that help define a narrative are "action" and "time." The focus of a narrative is the relating of a series of events (action) over a finite amount of time. The time covered by a narrative could be years, seconds, or anything in between.

Significance in the Workplace

Many people must accurately document action over time. Consider the following:

- A police officer recording the events leading up to an arrest
- A medical professional reporting on changes in a patient
- An employer recording observations of an employee's work performance for a job review
- A person recording the process used in an attempt to fix or create something

Purpose in Writing a Narrative

Your purpose in writing a narrative can vary, depending on your situation.

- Explain "what happened" in a purely objective manner
- Offer insights learned from a particular series of events ("What have I learned?" "What meaning can I draw from what happened?")

Action

Action is central to any narrative. A well-written narrative goes beyond suggesting action; a well-written narrative re-creates action, making the reader feel as though she or he is there.

It's important to understand that action simply refers to something happening; we sometimes have a tendency to associate action only with the really dramatic stuff like sky diving, car chases, and home runs in the bottom of the ninth.

Action can be very subtle like taking a deep breath, tying a shoe, or winking. Dramatic or subtle, the action should be the driving force of your narrative.

Point of View

Narratives can be written from the first person (I, me, my, we, us) point of view or from the third person (he, she, they) point of view.

Key Events

It's pretty rare that you would document every possible action.

She sat up. She looked to the left. She looked to the right. She blinked. She bent her thumb. She blinked again. She scratched her wrist...

Instead, you want to focus on key actions or events when writing your narrative. That puts the responsibility on you, the writer, to determine what is and what is not key.

Once you've identified your key events, you'll want to describe them in detail. Present secondary events, as appropriate, in a less detailed fashion. Leave out those events that don't contribute to your purpose.

Dialogue

Dialogue (recording people's exact words) can go a long way toward helping your reader feel like he or she is there (a goal of narrative writing). Well-written dialogue resembles actual conversation, but simplifies it a bit by leaving out the repetition that is a natural part of most of our speaking habits.

Organization of a Narrative

Most narratives are written in a chronological fashion; you record the events in the order in which they happened. Be sure to include time markers (words like "next," "ten-minutes later," "the next day," "moments later," etc.). Time markers will help your reader track the passage of time, one of the important elements of a narrative.

Sometimes, writers will start a narrative at a dramatic moment in the story, and then backtrack to the beginning, then proceeding in a chronological manner.

Examples of Narratives

The following examples of narratives are from Wink, an online journal that publishes work written by students at Western Wisconsin Technical College.

[[LINK TO EXAMPLES FROM WINK]]

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