

Narrative essays need to tell a story, and they need to recreate the experience in that story for the reader, in order for the reader to understand the point, or thesis. Since you are telling a story it does need to have a beginning, middle and an end, however you only want to use the details that help you prove your thesis, by recreating the moments for the reader. Description is very important because you are describing the experience for the reader so that they can try to relive it through your words. It should include many sensory details that help the reader live in the moments you are telling them about. It should appeal to the senses (sight/sound/taste/touch/smell) and use vivid, descriptive vocabulary.

Step by step guide to writing the narrative essay

1. **Pick an appropriate story idea-**
  - a. Your idea needs to be:
    - i. Interesting
    - ii. lend itself to description so it can be developed with many sensory details
    - iii. narrow enough to be developed in just a few paragraphs- (around 2 pages of writing)
    - iv. able to convey your point (thesis)
2. **Narrowing down your story idea** -Narrowing down your story idea is of critical importance to a narrative essay. Read the following example to see how this thought process works.

Let's say your original story idea was to write about a car wreck you were in.

***Original story idea-*** A car wreck

This is too general for a narrative essay so you would need to narrow that to make it more specific.

***Narrowed story idea-*** When my Honda was hit by a Jeep Cherokee

This is closer but the idea could be narrowed many times until it is right for the essay.

***Story idea narrowed again-*** The instant of impact between my Honda and a Jeep Cherokee

***Story idea narrowed even more-*** What happened to me at the moment of impact between my Honda and a Jeep Cherokee

3. **Developing your thesis statement-**At this point you have a story idea that you can write about in your narrative essay. However you now need to ask yourself- What is the point of my essay going to be? What am I going to be trying to prove with my story? In order to do this you will need to ask yourself questions like: What changed in me when I had the experience? What did I learn? What was memorable? What was my take-away from that experience?

***Thesis statement example:*** At the moment of impact between my Honda and a Jeep Cherokee I learned the true fragility of life.

4. **Outline your narrative essay-** All stories have a beginning, middle and an end. You will need to outline your essay around these three parts. Think of it as 3 scenes that get you from the beginning, to the most exciting piece and finally to the end where you make your conclusion or thesis.

5. **Select Descriptive Images for each part-** Choose descriptive images for the beginning, middle and end of the essay. Think of these questions for each part.
  - a. What do you remember seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, touching?
  - b. What movements were taking place around you?
  - c. What were you feeling?

For example-

**Beginning-** (what do you remember from when it started) maybe it was raining hard, you had been driving for hours and your eyes were bone dry even though it was soggy outside-maybe you remember that your friend was snoring in the seat beside you

**Middle-** (as the climax is taking place-what was happening as it became more dramatic)- screech of brakes, shrieking, blinding lights, car spinning out of control, sense of panic

**End-**(When did you come to your realization? How were you feeling? What was going on?) everything in slow motion, realizing you were ok, feeling grateful

6. **Write your statement of purpose** (essentially what is the thesis you are going to be trying to convince your readers of with your narrative essay?)
  - a. Writing down your purpose will help you stay on track with what you are writing and make sure your essay does what it is supposed to. This is not how you will write it in your essay. It is to be used to provide you with focus as you write.

Example- The purpose of my essay is to convince the reader about how fragile life is.

7. **Write your introductory paragraph**
  - a. Write a grabber beginning to catch the reader's attention- Sometimes this can be done by making a comment, asking a question, or starting in the middle of the action and then filling in the details
  - b. Let the reader know your purpose (why you are writing this story)- it doesn't need to be directly stated but it should be implied.
  - c. Avoid using "I" phrases like -"In this essay I will.." (very boring)

Example- I hit the brakes expecting to hear the squeal and shriek of the tires but there was an ominous silence, interrupted only but the sleepy noises of my friend who was oblivious to the fact that we were facing death. Silently the car was hydroplaning on the puddles on the pavement, pulling us into the other lane where the Jeep Cherokee was headed straight for us. As we hurtled towards the oncoming traffic I knew we were about to die. Or at least that's what I thought at the time.

8. **Write the Body of the Essay-** tell the complete story that accomplishes your purpose.
  - a. Select a form of organization that makes sense- most likely chronological (time) order- this could be instant by instant, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, year by year- whatever suits your story best.
  - b. Brainstorm what happened with details
  - c. Decide what parts of the story are needed and what parts are not
  - d. Write selectively. Leave out any details that don't advance or accomplish your purpose.

Example-If you heard a cow moo the instant your Honda collided with the Jeep would that help your story? Probably not- it would only be a distraction. So you would leave that detail out.

**9. Set the scene of the story**

- a. You should take time to set the scene for your story (basic details)- ie. Who are you? Where are you? Why are you there? Etc.
- b. Use highly descriptive language- paint a picture for the reader so they feel they are a part of the story
- c. Use description to set the scene- describe people, events, and other things as they come up in the story  
Example- Outside the rain was pouring down and visibility was next to nothing. My car made its way through the darkness illuminated only by the headlights that tried to part the curtain of fog in our path.

**10. Use the language of the senses as you write**

- a. Sights, sounds, smells, taste, touch, movement- if you heard a cry- Exactly what kind of cry was it? Use a thesaurus and stretch your imagination to find the correct word for effect. Was it a shriek, bawl, moan, blubber, yelp, wail, sob, keen, whimper, bellow? Each of these words has a different connotation implying different meanings.

**11. Make the climax the most vivid part of the essay**

- a. Write it, if you can, so that everything comes together or is resolved in an instant, or that there is a moment of realization.

Example- "Suddenly I realized..." "Out of nowhere came the thought.." "My child's limp body twitched and I knew..." "One shot was fired and the eagle crumpled..."

**12. Write a Conclusion**

- a. Think about your purpose and then what you want the reader to take away from the story.
- b. Sum up the story. Remind the reader why you told it and what it should communicate to them. Do you have a parting word? If not try paraphrasing your thesis or statement of purpose.

**13. Proofread**

- a. For sentence structure read the essay backwards sentence by sentence to see if there are any sentence errors in structure, punctuation or spelling.
- b. Then read it aloud forward, listening for smooth transitions, ease in following the descriptions. Add transitional phrases or sentences where needed.
- c. Read it aloud to someone else- you will hear errors you did not see before and they can give you feedback about where you could make improvements.

**14. Write your good copy.**