

FIRST ESSAY: NARRATIVE/DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY

Narration & Description: (See also your Reinking textbook, chapters 5 and 6, and <http://kareyperkins.com/classes/112/112modes.html> for more information on particular writing modes.)

Narration, most simply, is telling a story – it is dynamic – it moves through time so it is organized chronologically. It is about an EVENT, something that HAPPENS. Think of narration as a “verb” whereas its counterpart, description, is a “noun.” Narration has CHARACTERS – people in the story – and usually has dialogue or conversation – they talk to each other.

Description is painting a picture of a concrete physical object or place. It is usually more static than narration. It appeals to the **senses** (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch/feeling) and uses analogies, similes, metaphors and other **comparisons** – comparing the object/place being described to something else that is familiar to us. (He was as mean as a snake; the room was as dark as a cave; he was slower than molasses in January.) Description is usually organized **spatially**.

Narration and description go hand in hand. When telling a story, there will be places and objects in your story that you want to describe to the reader. Good narration has good description in it. Narration is one of the most natural forms of communicating, and we encounter it, and “do” it every day. Every day we “narrate” the days events to people in our lives when we tell them what happened to us – or what happened in the movie we just saw or story we just read. Plays, books, movies, short stories, TV shows, biographies, documentaries of people’s lives – these are all narration. Even reality shows like “Survivor” and “the Bachelor” are forms of narration – a story of what is happening to these people (that has been orchestrated and manipulated more than we might know.) Narration and description can be used in other kinds of writing as well. You may write a persuasive or argumentative essay that uses a case history or example to make a point – the story of the person is a narration.

The Thesis is a central impression: Narrative/descriptive writing does NOT follow the five paragraph essay format. Rather than a three-point thesis, your thesis statement will be a CENTRAL IMPRESSION that your story or description will then prove. For example, if you are describing the locker room, your central impression might be that it is dark, dingy and smelly. Your thesis would be “The locker room was filthy.” All details in the essay will support that impression. Or you if you describe your mountain retreat, your central impression might be that it is peaceful and beautiful, and all your descriptions will support that impression. With narration, there is usually something learned from the story. The central impression must be consistent.

Specificity: All good writing, but especially good narration, is specific and detailed: It is concrete, particular, exists in time and place, and appeals to the sense. We will do many specificity exercises to work on this.

Appeal to the senses: The sense we tend to focus on the most is sight. When most students write a narration/description essay, there are often many details about what one SEES – and the other senses are neglected. After you write your essay, go back through it and think of what you can HEAR, SMELL, TASTE, FEEL in the essay as well as see. Add those details as you revise it. Again, pacing and scope are important. In a three page essay, you will focus on the details and senses that most help support the central impression you want to make, and leave out the others. Save those for the book.

Avoid clichés: See your handbook for more discussion of figurative language and clichés.

Conversation and Quotes: Quoted conversation is particularly interesting because it is specific – the exact words spoken by the character at the time – and so put us right there in the story. You must be aware of the pacing and scope of the story – since this is only a 2-3 page essay, you may not quote everything that everyone says, but you may choose instead the important quotes, and paraphrase the other conversation. This is called indirect vs. direct discourse. When you quote, you will follow these guidelines:

- A NEW paragraph at the beginning of each new speaker.
- A speech tag (“he said” or “she replied”) preceding the quote receives a comma after it.
- A speech tag following the quote receives a period after it, while the quoted speech, even if a full sentence, gets a comma.
- PUNCTUATION GOES INSIDE THE QUOTATION MARK AT THE END OF THE QUOTED WORDS (unless it is a research paper and you have a citation following the quote)
- **Direct discourse** looks like this:

Mary commented, “Joe, it looks like it’s going to snow.”

“How can you tell?” Joe asked.

“The sky is gray.”

“I must agree with you, Mary,” Joe replied.

- With **indirect discourse**, you paraphrase what is said and do not use quotation marks. You do not paragraph for each new speaker. It looks like this:

Mary noticed that the sky was gray and commented to Joe that she thought it might snow. Joe agreed wholeheartedly.

- See your handbook for more information.

ASSIGNMENT

Write a narrative/descriptive essay that is mostly **narrative**, that is telling about an **event** from your life. "The most _____ event of my life was _____." A narrative essay is a true story that has a beginning, middle, and end. Well-written narrative essays contain action, dramatize conflict ending in a clear resolution, assume a distinct point of view (1st or 3rd person), and often contain dialogue and good description. Your textbook chapter 5 will help you more with this, as well as your essay readings.

If you choose, instead, your narrative/descriptive essay can be more **descriptive** than narrative. Description is "drawing a picture" of something. For description, you will focus on one particular **place** or **object**, and have a central impression that all the details in the essay will support, such as "My mountain log cabin is peaceful," or "The locker room was filthy." You will appeal to the senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) and you will use comparisons - metaphors and similes - to further illustrate your topic. See your textbook chapter 6 for more information on description.

Post your rough draft in the threaded discussions as a Word document, and give feedback to at least TWO other students on their essay. (Choose students that have not yet received two peer reviews so everyone gets two reviews). Download their essays to your desktop and use Word "track changes" and "insert comment" under the "Review" tab.

Then **bring your essay (three copies) that you have revised based on your peer reviews to class next week** for more peer review and workshopping

SUBMISSION FORMAT – for final drafts

We will be doing "portfolios" of all your essay work in this class (for each essay.)

The final draft of all your essays must be submitted to me in person in a **paper two-pocket folder**. Final essays are to be turned in during class, not sent to me via email, mailbox, or eCollege iOptimize. They will be word-processed, double-spaced, with a 10 and 12 point font and 1" to 1 ½ " margins. A **right-justified heading** with *your name, class and section, my name, date, and assignment name* must also be included at the top of the first page of your final draft. Example:

Your Name Here
English 112
For Prof. Perkins
Jan 17, 2010
1st Essay: Example

The essay portfolio folder should include the final draft and previous drafts, in reverse order, as follows. Make SURE you place whatever you want graded (presumably your final draft) FIRST in the portfolio:

- **final draft (placed first in the portfolio)**

The order of the rest of the work on your essay is less important, but here is a suggestion:

- **peer review sheet filled out by your peer (in-class)**
- **revised (second iteration) essay with peer review comments (posted on-line)**
- **the first rough/peer-edited draft(s) with written editing comments from instructor or peers**
- **a thesis/outline peer reviewed (posted on-line)**
- **two methods of invention (freewriting, brainstorming, etc.)**
- **[WWW.TURNITIN.COM](http://www.turnitin.com) report**

Essay will not be accepted without a www.turnitin.com report.

Work must be **secured** in the two-pocket folder. Do **NOT** turn in your work in a manila folder/envelope or 3 ring binder; it will not be accepted in that format and you will then be marked down for lateness. Assignments received after the deadline will receive a 10-point deduction per calendar day.

Portfolio folders should **not** contain MY assignments or copies of handouts given to you or from the web. Only YOUR completed work should be included. Failure to turn in work according to specifications will result in a 10% drop in your grade on that folder, or if it is sufficiently disorganized or enough work missing, a zero will be given.