



Narrative—Autobiographical Writing—Introduction

For the Teacher: This lesson comes with three bonus power point presentations providing variations on the autobiography theme. Each can be used independently of the other, but should be used after the main power point is shown.

For the Student:

- Think about a typical school day.
 - To whom do you talk?
 - What do you say?
 - Chances are, you probably talk with friends about your experiences since you last met
 - When you tell a friend about what you did during the weekend or describe a funny thing that happened to you, you are engaging in **autobiographical narration**—telling a story from your own life.
 - These stories may be funny or sad, short or long.
- Autobiographical narration sometimes takes written form.
 - Write a cousin about a concert you attended
 - Relate a story about yourself on a job or college application
 - Send an e-mail about your day
 - Text-message a friend about the test you just aced

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Narrative—Autobiographical Writing—Definitions

- **Autobiographical writing** tells a story about an event or experience in the writer's own life.
- An autobiographical narrative can be as simple as a description of a recent car trip or as complex as the entire story of a person's life.
- Autobiographical writing usually includes:
 - The writer as the main character
 - A sequence of events
 - Conflict or tension between characters or between a character and an outside force
 - An insight gained by the writer
- **Eyewitness accounts** retell events personally witnessed by a writer.
- **Personal narratives** reveal a writer's opinions, feelings, and insights about an experience.
- **Autobiographical incidents** tell of a memorable or pivotal event in a writer's life.
- **Memoirs** contain a writer's reflections on an important person or event from his or her own life.
- **Anecdotes** are brief, true, and usually humorous stories that contain a definite conclusion.



Choosing Your Topic

- Choose a topic for your autobiographical narrative that you find important or interesting.
- Strategies for Generating Topics:
 - **You Were There!** Choose as a topic an exciting event that you witnessed.
 - **Consider the Moment.** Write the following words on a sheet of paper: *Funny, Exciting, Interesting, Puzzling*. Then, try to recall moments in your life that fit each of these categories. Finally, choose one of these moments as the basis of your narrative.
 - **Make a Blueprint.**
 - Draw a floor plan of a significant place in your life.
 - Label the rooms or areas, and, if you like, draw in details like furniture or trees.
 - Then, make a list of words, phrases, sentences, names, or activities that come to mind as you “walk through” this special place.
 - Review your ideas, and choose one as the basis of your narrative.
- If you are having difficulty coming up with your own topic, consider these suggestions:
 - **Anecdote about a Surprise.** Recall a time when you were truly surprised. In a brief anecdote, tell the story of the situation and your actions.
 - **Memoir.** Think of a person who has influenced your life in a positive way. In a memoir, recount one incident that shows why that person is a worthy role model.
 - **Personal Narrative about a Time of Change.** Write about a period of transition in your own life. Describe fully the people and events that prompted such a change.
 - **Responding to Literature.** “A Child’s Christmas in Wales” is a real-life story taken from the life of its writer, Dylan Thomas. Read the story and search your memory for your own interesting childhood experiences. Choose your own childhood story to tell.
 - **Responding to Fine Art.** Look closely at a work of art. Why might the scene pictured inspire a piece of autobiographical writing? Study the setting and characters in the painting, and write an autobiographical narrative that comes to mind.

Narrowing Your Topic

- Narrow your topic so that the scope of your narrative is manageable. Try this technique to do so:



Narrative—Autobiography—Prewriting

- Use Carbon Paper to Narrow a Topic
 - Insert carbon paper between two sheets of notepaper.
 - Using an empty pen or a pen that is “unclicked,” write on the top sheet anything that comes to mind about your topic. Write for at least five minutes.
 - Remove the top sheet and the carbon paper, and review what you wrote. Choose the aspect of your topic that interests you most.

Audience & Purpose

- Your audience and purpose for writing will have an impact on the details that you choose to include and the type of language that you use.
- The following chart highlights strategies for achieving your purpose, depending on your audience.

Type of Narrative	Audience	Purpose	Strategy
Anecdote about a humorous event	Classmates	To entertain	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Use light-hearted, informal language■ Emphasize or exaggerate absurd or comical situations
Memoir about an influential friend	General Audience	To inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Include ample background information since the audience may not be familiar with the subject.■ Develop details about the subject that explain his or her actions.

Gathering Details about your Characters

- Before you write your autobiographical narrative, gather details about your characters that will help bring them to life for your readers.
- Use a character profile like the one that follows to help you gather details about characters—the people in your narrative.

Character Profile

- What are the character's name, age, profession, and background?
- How would you describe the character's personality, habits, and likes or dislikes?
- What dreams or goals does this character have?
- What has this character achieved in life?





Narrative—Autobiography—Prewriting

- What do other characters in your narrative think about this character?
- Why is the character important to the narrative you are going to relate?

Gathering Details about the Setting

- The setting is the time and place in which the events of the narrative unfold.
- The setting locates your reader in your narrative, explaining when and where the action of the story takes place.
- Fill out a setting chart like the one that follows to help you get started.

		
TIME/YEAR	PLACE	PHYSICAL DETAILS
Fall, 19th Century (You are very old)	Cairo, Egypt	Pyramids Camels Sand



The Writing Process—Narrative—Autobiography—Drafting

Shaping Your Writing

- During the drafting stage, give your narrative its shape.
- Decide
 - where and how to begin and end it,
 - which characters to develop fully,
 - and which events to highlight.
- Just like fictional stories, autobiographical stories should capture and hold the reader's interest.
- Think about your real-life story as if it were fiction.
- To do so, identify the timeline of events and decide on where to begin and end your story.
 - List the events, and identify the climax, or high point of interest, in the story.
 - Then, arrange the rest of the events so that they follow the structure of a plot diagram.

Elements and Chronology of a Plot

- Events—Introduce the characters, setting, and conflict.
- Conflict—refers to a struggle that takes place in the story between a character and a force of nature (such as a tornado), or within a character's mind.
- Rising Action—during the part of the story, the conflict develops and increases
- Climax—this is the high point of interest, the turning point, in the story
- Falling Action—These events directly follow the climax of the story. The suspense and tension decreases.
- Resolution—Loose ends are tied up and questions are answered in this part of the story.

Providing Elaboration

- To *elaborate* means “to develop in detail.” Make your narrative compelling to readers by using elaboration.
- **Add dialogue.** Provide dialogue that re-creates conversations or that reveals the thoughts that went through your head while you were in a particular situation. As you draft, develop your character and the characters of others through dialogue.
- **Explode the Moment.** In everyday life, a moment of time passes quickly; there's little opportunity to observe it in detail. In a narrative, a moment can be “exploded.”
- As a writer, you have the luxury of putting it under a magnifying glass, turning it upside down and inside out, and examining it from a variety of angles.
- Asking questions about an action or event is one way to get started.





Revising Your Overall Structure

- A first draft is not a final product. To make it into something wonderful, you need to trim, shape, and polish it. Following are some aspects you should look at as you begin to revise your narrative.
- **Create Unity.** Review the individual elements of your autobiographical narrative to make sure they are unified and that they work together.
- Each paragraph should help develop the overall impression you want to leave with your readers.
- Sentences within each paragraph should work to develop the paragraph's main idea.
- Each sentence in the narrative should have a clear relationship to the sentences around it.
- Delete those sentences or details that do not move events forward or create an image for the readers.
- **Form Functional Paragraphs**—As you revise, make sure that your paragraphs perform specific narrative functions. Following are major functions your paragraphs might serve:
 - **To sustain interest:** Reread the longer paragraphs in your work to evaluate their ability to hold the readers' interest. If necessary, revise these paragraphs by breaking them into shorter ones that keep the readers involved in the story
 - **To achieve desired effects:** Intersperse short one- or two-sentence paragraphs with longer ones to achieve desired effects, such as indicating a shift in time, a change in mood, or the occurrence of a major event.
 - **To signify a change in speaker**—Indicate which character is speaking by beginning a new paragraph each time a different character begins to speak.
 - Because these paragraphs show that another character is speaking, they allow you, the writer, to avoid repeating "he said" or "she said."
- **Revising Your Sentences**
 - Vary your Sentence Lengths. In narrative writing, variety in sentence length can "spice up" your narrative.
 - Make your writing more expressive by breaking up passages that have consecutive short sentences or consecutive long sentences.
 - Use different sentence types to help make your writing more interesting and mature.
- **Revising Your Word Choice**
 - Evaluate your use of *Me*, *Myself*, and *I*.



The Writing Process—Narrative —Autobiography—Revising

- When you are writing a narrative from the first person point of view—such as a *memoir*, *personal narrative* or *eyewitness* account—you will probably use the personal pronouns *me* and *I*.
- It's particularly important, therefore, to make sure that you use these pronouns correctly.
- *I* and *we* are **subject pronouns**; they act as the subjects of a sentence. *Me* and *us* are **object pronouns**; these pronouns receive the action of the verb or are objects of prepositions or verbals.
- "**Case**" is the form of a noun or pronoun that indicates its use in a sentence.
- Use the **nominative case** for the subject of a verb and for a predicate nominative.
- Use the **objective case** for the object of any verb, preposition, or verbal.
- Review your draft to see whether you've used the objective case of a pronoun following a linking verb.
- If so, replace the objective case pronoun with a subject pronoun and examine the effect on your writing.
- Decide which better suits your audience and purpose.



The Writing Process--Narrative—Autobiography—Peer Review

Author _____ Date _____

Peer Reviewer _____

- A peer reviewer can help you assess the clarity and effectiveness of your narrative and spot any errors that you have missed.
- Photocopy this work sheet and distribute it to peer reviewers, along with a copy of your narrative.
 - Have reviewers respond by filling in the work sheet.
 - Consider the comments of your peer reviewers as you prepare your final draft.

QUESTIONS	RESPONSE/SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS
Does the opening of the story grab your interest? Would you read on if you came across this story in a magazine? Why or why not?	
Are the characters and settings described well? Why or why not?	
Are the language and details in the story appropriate for the intended audience? Why or why not?	
Are there any story passages that get bogged down in unnecessary detail? Which ones are they?	
Are there any other areas that need improvement or other suggestions that you would make? What are they?	



The Writing Process—Narrative—Autobiography—Editing & Proofreading

- Before sharing your narrative, check it for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
- Since most narratives contain a lot of details involving characters, make sure that you have used pronouns consistently and correctly.
- Then, use the following strategies to give your narrative a final polish.
 - **Quotation Marks**—Dialogue should be set off with quotation marks. Begin a new paragraph with each new speaker. Look at this example:
 - "These students are very bored," I said. "They need interesting games that they can play inside in the winter."
 - "Well, then, perhaps you could invent a new game," the doctor replied.
 - **Punctuation Marks**—Place punctuation marks that indicate the way in which the dialogue is spoken inside the final quotation mark:
 - "How about that!" exclaimed Judy.
 - "Who's there?" asked the leader.
 - **Find it in your Writing**
 - Review the use of dialogue in your narrative.
 - Be sure that you've correctly punctuated each instance of dialogue.
 - Also, check to be sure that you've begun a new paragraph with each new speaker.



The Writing Process--Narrative—Autobiography—Rubric for Self-Assessment

Narrative—Autobiography Rubric for Self-Assessment

Name _____

Total Score _____

	Score 4	Score 3	Score 2	Score 1	Your Score
Audience & Purpose	Contains details that engage the audience	Contains details appropriate for an audience	Contains few details that appeal to an audience	Is not written for a specific audience	
Organization	Presents events that create an interesting narrative; told from a consistent point of view	Presents a clear sequence of events; told from a specific point of view	Presents a confusing sequence of events; contains a point of view that is inconsistent	Presents no logical order; is told from no consistent point of view	
Elaboration	Contains details that create vivid characters; contains dialogue that develops characters and plot	Contains details that develop character and describe settings; contains dialogue	Contains characters and setting; contains some dialogue	Contains few or no details to develop characters or setting; no dialogue provided	
Use of Language	Use of language creates a tone; contains no errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling	Uses vivid words; contains few errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling	Uses clichés and trite expressions; contains some errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling	Uses uninspired words; has many errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling	

