

## *Guidelines for a Narrative Paper*

A narrative is an account of an incident or a series of incidents that make up a complete or significant action. Some narratives might be short: a joke, for example. Some might be quite long: a novel, for instance. The important point to keep in mind about narratives is that they have five properties: *situation*, *conflict*, *struggle*, *outcome*, and *meaning*.

*Situation* is a background for the action. It provides a context for your narrative. Your reader should know the "when, where, and why" surrounding a particular incident or series of incidents. The situation is usually described only briefly, in a few sentences. In an essay, the situation is part of the introductory paragraph.

*Conflict* is at the heart of any narrative. It may be a problem in the surroundings, with another person or people, or within the individual.

*Struggle* is how you (or the central character of your narrative) deal with the conflict. The struggle is not necessarily physical; it might be a dilemma that faces you or the central character.

*Outcome* is the result of the struggle.

*Meaning* is the significance of the story--what you learned from your experience. The meaning might be deeply philosophical or very simple, depending on the subject of your narrative.

Not only should you include the five properties of the narrative in your essay, but you should also use several techniques that enhance these properties:

Use *imagery*, *descriptive words*, and *specific details*.

Use *dialogue* (the exact words of a speaker, enclosed in quotation marks) where appropriate. Don't overuse dialogue, though; you don't want an essay that has direct quotations strung together, one after another. Well-placed dialogue is much more effective.

Use *transitional words* that move the story forward. Most narratives will be told in chronological order (the order in which events occurred), so you would use words like *after*, *finally*, *when*, *while*, *later*, *before*, *next*, *during*, *soon*, *then*.

Use *consistent tense*--most narratives use the past tense because they are relating events that have already taken place. However, in certain narratives, you might decide to use the present tense to create a sense of immediacy. The following sentences, for instance, use the present tense: I *see* the twister. I *run* for the door. I *lock* the door behind me. Whichever tense you choose, make sure that you are consistent throughout your narrative.

*Always check with your instructor regarding guidelines for your particular assignment.*