

Writing a narrative essay

Overview

A narrative piece of writing tells a story containing a sequence of connected events which may be real or imaginary. Essays containing a strong narrative arc and a sense of tension and resolution are the most successful. For example, a story should have a brief introduction and then a main section and a conclusion. In order to do this effectively, you need to plan your essay carefully. You will need to convince your reader from the outset that this is a story worth following, so your opening should be dynamic and exciting.

Tips for writing a narrative essay

Language – think about:

- **the audience for your essay** – your reader will expect to be engaged by your story. Plot, characterisation and description are important.
- **the structures and vocabulary you use** – you will need to consider how you link together the parts of your story. You will need to use adjectives and adverbs and a rich vocabulary to keep your reader interested. Using a range of tenses will give depth to the story.
- **ways in which you can make your writing exciting** – think about what makes a good story for you. Plan your essay before beginning to write so you know how it will develop. Think of words to express horror, delight, happiness, sadness etc.

Organisation:

- **use paragraphs for structure** – these will break up the story and allow you to give e.g. changes in viewpoint, plot surprises, descriptions. The essay should as a minimum have a beginning, a middle and an end.
- **make sure you include the story prompt** – try to visualise your story before starting to write, thinking about you will incorporate the words and at what point in your narrative they will feature.
- **make connections between sentences and paragraphs** – the story should flow with each element following on from what went before. Use connecting words such as 'so', 'then', 'however', 'nevertheless'.
- **how to engage your readers** – use your imagination and make sure your story has a good plot. Preferably, have some turning points or climaxes and don't be afraid to use punctuation (e.g. question marks, exclamation marks) to bring your writing alive.

Example of a narrative essay

	Comments
<p>The storm arrived that evening with a very strong wind and lashing rain. The trees were blowing in all directions and looked as if they were about to be dragged out at the root. Chloe was looking out of the window of her little cottage at the edge of the woods. She felt frightened but was also excited and impressed by the forces of nature.</p>	<p>The first paragraph includes the essay prompt (the first five words). It sets the scene and introduces the reader to the character.</p>
<p>The sky was completely black except when the lightning turned it white for a second or two. Rain was thundering down, and the windows were rattling with the force of it. Chloe didn't like thunderstorms and she would normally hide under a table even though she knew that it probably wouldn't protect her. Unfortunately, she was alone in the house. Her mother had gone into town for a meeting and her father was out with friends. "It'll be all right", she thought as she went to shut a window that had blown open, but she was really terrified as she looked out. She prayed for the storm to end.</p>	<p>The descriptions further set the scene and the reader is wondering what might happen. The character of Chloe is also further developed.</p>
<p>Suddenly, she heard a great big bang. An enormous tree had fallen just in front of the house! Chloe cried out and ran down the corridor to the front door to see what had happened. The house was shaking with the wind, and she remembered with horror that Jasper the cat might be outside. She wanted to go and look for him, but it was far too windy and dangerous to go outdoors.</p>	<p>The use of the word 'Suddenly' creates a break in the narrative and is the climax point to which the essay has been building.</p>
<p>The storm lasted about half an hour but it seemed like an eternity for Chloe. As quickly as it had come, it disappeared, and it became completely and eerily quiet. She opened the door a little and looked out. The garden was in a bad state with branches everywhere – it looked as though a tornado had hit!</p>	<p>The story moves on with the use of a new paragraph. A mixture of long and short sentences keeps the reader interested.</p>
<p>She stepped outside. All was silent. No birds, no animals. Nobody outside. Chloe was worried; she felt odd as if something was about to happen, but she didn't know what. As she turned round, she was shocked to see that the door had closed behind her.</p>	<p>A change of pace brings the reader back from the climax point. The short sentences here serve to create a troubling atmosphere. There is a sense of tension and suspense and the ending leaves things uncertain.</p>