

What Is Narrative Writing?

Narrative writing is best defined as a story. You tell stories every day and may not realize it! How was school today? What did you do in science lab? Did you go somewhere after school? How did your meeting with the coach go? Why didn't you finish your homework? What happened at the dance? All of these questions elicit stories—stories with a beginning, middle, and end.

Narratives are usually told in chronological order; each event is unfolded in exactly the order it happened. What differentiates a good narrative from a not-so-good narrative? The way the story is told. How do you describe your characters? Do you make the setting real? Is the conflict strong? Do you use words and phrases to make your listeners feel they are part of the story? When you write narratives, you must keep the same intensity as when orally sharing a story. When you tell a story, you have the power to change your inflection. You can whisper the secrets, scream at the enemies, change voices for different characters, and emphasize the words that need emphasis. When you tell a story, you can use your arms to imitate verbs like *grab* and *crush* or hold your hands up high in fear or shock and use your facial expressions to mimic the characters' reactions. The main difference between an oral story and a written story is that a written story can last forever. Oral stories may last but are changed over time. When you write, remember that your words exist. Your stories will exist. Write with the intensity that you need to tell a story. Make your narratives come alive and exist because of you!

Narrative writing encourages readers to participate in the story. Strong narratives let the readers feel so involved that they feel for the characters and the conflicts they face. This is called *empathy*. When readers empathize with the characters and the situations they face, the reader will also identify with the characters' thoughts and feelings. Personal narratives (narratives written about your own experiences), nonfiction narratives (stories written about actual events and actual people), and fictional narratives (invented stories) let readers experience things they may never otherwise experience; teach readers about someone, something, or an event in a way that readers understand; and provide escape from the reader's world. All narratives share the same components crucial to intriguing narratives: beginning, middle, climax, and end in proper sequence; believable, non-stereotyped characters; vivid settings; accurate point of view; authentic voice; lively, original descriptions; and a message or theme.

What makes a successful story worth writing and reading? First, an interesting story. Chances are that if it interests you, it will also interest your readers. Second, you, as author, must combine and integrate narrative components, manipulate words and sentences, and engage your reader. You must create the story that must be written. You must create the story that needs to be heard.

