

# 10.1 Narration

## Learning Objectives

1. Determine the purpose and structure of narrative writing.
2. Understand how to write a narrative essay.

**Rhetorical modes** simply mean the ways in which we can effectively communicate through language. This chapter covers nine common rhetorical modes. As you read about these nine modes, keep in mind that the rhetorical mode a writer chooses depends on his or her purpose for writing. Sometimes writers incorporate a variety of modes in any one essay. In covering the nine modes, this chapter also emphasizes the rhetorical modes as a set of tools that will allow you greater flexibility and effectiveness in communicating with your audience and expressing your ideas.

## The Purpose of Narrative Writing

Narration means the art of storytelling, and the purpose of **narrative writing** is to tell stories. Any time you tell a story to a friend or family member about an event or incident in your day, you engage in a form of narration. In addition, a narrative can be factual or fictional. A **factual story** is one that is based on, and tries to be faithful to, actual events as they unfolded in real life. A **fictional story** is a made-up, or imagined, story; the writer of a fictional story can create characters and events as he or she sees fit.

The big distinction between factual and fictional narratives is based on a writer's purpose. The writers of factual stories try to recount events as they actually happened, but writers of fictional stories can depart from real people and events because the writers' intents are not to retell a real-life event. Biographies and memoirs are examples of factual stories, whereas novels and short stories are examples of fictional stories.

**Tip**

Because the line between fact and fiction can often blur, it is helpful to understand what your purpose is from the beginning. Is it important that you recount history, either your own or someone else's? Or does your interest lie in reshaping the world in your own image—either how you would like to see it or how you imagine it could be? Your answers will go a long way in shaping the stories you tell.

Ultimately, whether the story is fact or fiction, narrative writing tries to relay a series of events in an emotionally engaging way. You want your audience to be moved by your story, which could mean through laughter, sympathy, fear, anger, and so on. The more clearly you tell your story, the more emotionally engaged your audience is likely to be.

**Exercise 1**

On a separate sheet of paper, start brainstorming ideas for a narrative. First, decide whether you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then, freewrite for five minutes. Be sure to use all five minutes, and keep writing the entire time. Do not stop and think about what to write.

The following are some topics to consider as you get going:

1. Childhood
2. School
3. Adventure
4. Work
5. Love
6. Family
7. Friends
8. Vacation
9. Nature
10. Space

**The Structure of a Narrative Essay**

Major narrative events are most often conveyed in **chronological order**, the order in which events unfold from first to last. Stories typically have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and these events are typically organized by time. Certain transitional words and phrases aid in keeping the reader oriented in the sequencing of a story. Some of these phrases are listed in **Table 10.1 “Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time”**. For more information about chronological order, see **Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”** and **Chapter 9**

## “Writing Essays: From Start to Finish”.

Table 10.1 Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time

after/afterward	as soon as	at last	before
currently	during	eventually	meanwhile
next	now	since	soon
finally	later	still	then
until	when/whenever	while	first, second, third

The following are the other basic components of a narrative:

- **Plot.** The events as they unfold in sequence.
- **Characters.** The people who inhabit the story and move it forward. Typically, there are minor characters and main characters. The minor characters generally play supporting roles to the main character, or the **protagonist**.
- **Conflict.** The primary problem or obstacle that unfolds in the plot that the protagonist must solve or overcome by the end of the narrative. The way in which the protagonist resolves the conflict of the plot results in the theme of the narrative.
- **Theme.** The ultimate message the narrative is trying to express; it can be either explicit or implicit.

### Writing at Work

When interviewing candidates for jobs, employers often ask about conflicts or problems a potential employee has had to overcome. They are asking for a compelling personal narrative. To prepare for this question in a job interview, write out a scenario using the narrative mode structure. This will allow you to troubleshoot rough spots, as well as better understand your own personal history. Both processes will make your story better and your self-presentation better, too.

### Exercise 2

Take your freewriting exercise from the last section and start crafting it chronologically into a rough plot summary. To read more about a summary, see [Chapter 6 “Writing Paragraphs: Separating Ideas and Shaping Content”](#). Be sure to use the time transition words and phrases listed in [Table 10.1 “Transition Words and Phrases for Expressing Time”](#) to sequence the events.

#### Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your rough plot summary.

## Writing a Narrative Essay

When writing a narrative essay, start by asking yourself if you want to write a factual or fictional story. Then freewrite about topics that are of general interest to you. For more information about freewriting, see [Chapter 8 “The Writing Process: How Do I Begin?”](#).

Once you have a general idea of what you will be writing about, you should sketch out the major events of the story that will compose your plot. Typically, these events will be revealed chronologically and climax at a central conflict that must be resolved by the end of the story. The use of strong details is crucial as you describe the events and characters in your narrative. You want the reader to emotionally engage with the world that you create in writing.

### Tip

To create strong details, keep the human senses in mind. You want your reader to be immersed in the world that you create, so focus on details related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch as you describe people, places, and events in your narrative.

As always, it is important to start with a strong introduction to hook your reader into wanting to read more. Try opening the essay with an event that is interesting to introduce the story and get it going. Finally, your conclusion should help resolve the central conflict of the story and impress upon your reader the ultimate theme of the piece. See [Chapter 15 “Readings: Examples of Essays”](#) to read a sample narrative essay.

### Exercise 3

On a separate sheet of paper, add two or three paragraphs to the plot summary you started in the last section. Describe in detail the main character and the setting of the first scene. Try to use all five senses in your descriptions.

### Key Takeaways

- Narration is the art of storytelling.
- Narratives can be either factual or fictional. In either case, narratives should emotionally engage the reader.
- Most narratives are composed of major events sequenced in chronological order.
- Time transition words and phrases are used to orient the reader in the sequence of a narrative.

- The four basic components to all narratives are plot, character, conflict, and theme.
- The use of sensory details is crucial to emotionally engaging the reader.
- A strong introduction is important to hook the reader. A strong conclusion should add resolution to the conflict and evoke the narrative's theme.