

NARRATIVE ESSAY

Characteristics of a Narrative Essay

- The purpose is to inform or to tell a story
- Writer is a storyteller
- Describes a person, scene, or event in detail (emphasis on showing rather than telling)
- Information is presented in a chronological order
- Written in 1st person voice (using “I”), somewhat informal
- Can include dialogue

- Sample focus of the paper:
 - one’s high school years
 - a favorite family member

WARNING: If the purpose of your writing is not to inform, but rather to analyze something or to persuade a reader about something, it is possible you have wandered into the wrong essay. Please check our other handouts on writing Critical and Persuasive Essays to determine which is the most appropriate for your writing purpose.

When writing a paper, you should follow these six steps. This handout guides you through the six steps for writing a Narrative Essay.

- Step 1. Organizing your Thoughts (Brainstorming)
- Step 2. Researching your Topic
- Step 3. Developing a Thesis Statement
- Step 4. Writing the Introduction
- Step 5. Writing the Body of the Essay
- Step 6. Writing the Conclusion

Step 1: Organizing your Thoughts (Brainstorming)

Believe it or not, there is almost no topic on which your mind will draw a complete blank. Even if you know very little about the subject matter, you are likely to respond based on something you heard or read on the topic/subject, or even your basic values. It is imperative to take an inventory of what you know first. This kind of brainstorming can be done in a number of ways:

- **Free writing** – writing quickly, without stopping, editing, or self-correcting to become aware of what you **already** know, think, or feel on a topic
- **Subject tree** – related ideas, connecting outwards from the main topic, in a tree form
(See illustration 1)
- **List** – free flow of ideas on a topic (See illustration 2)

- **Clustering** – main topic is in the middle circle, all related associations are linked to the main topic (See illustration 3)
- **Outline** – framework of an essay, which includes main points, followed by the breakdown into sub-points (See illustration 4)

Below are visual illustrations of these brainstorming methods. When using them, simply rely on what you **already** know on the topic – facts, opinions, emotions, and/or concerns.

Subject Tree

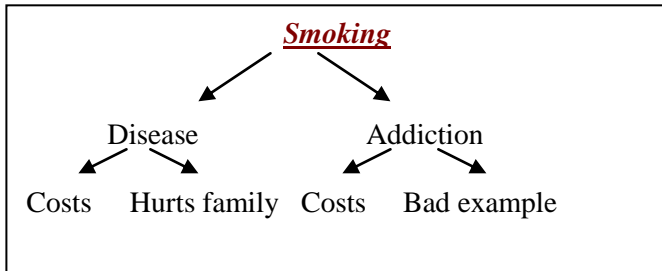


Illustration 1

List

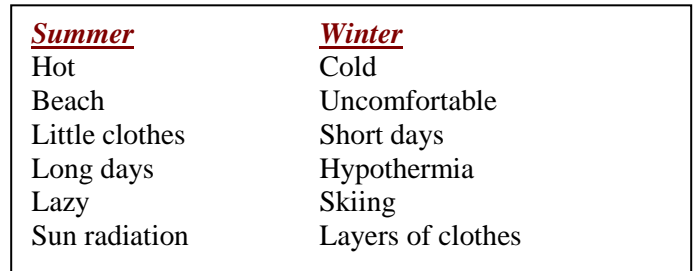


Illustration 2

Cluster

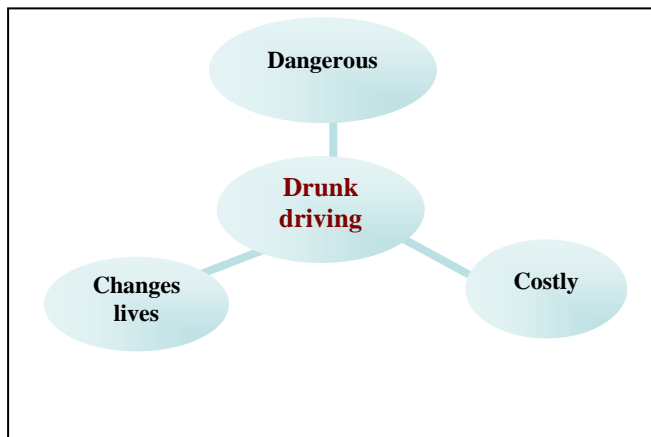


Illustration 3

Outline

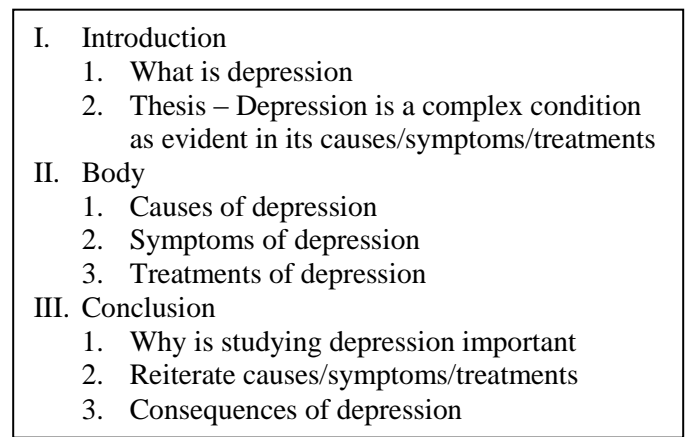


Illustration 4

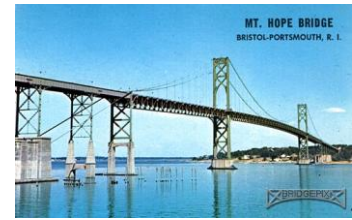
This is not the time for evaluating your ideas; instead, it is the time for an **outpour** of ideas on all background knowledge you have on the topic. Once your thoughts are on paper, you can start organizing them by grouping ideas and identifying areas where more information is required.

Step 2: Researching your Topic

Narrative essays are unique in that research is conducted within the scope of your personal life and experiences. This means that research may consist of utilizing personal artifacts, memorabilia, anecdotes, and conversations.

NOTE: The two steps – organization of thoughts and research of the topic – interrelate. In other words, organizing your thoughts may identify gaps in your knowledge, which may lead you to conduct necessary research. However, once you conduct research, you should re-organize your thoughts to evaluate the clarity of the topic.

Step 3: Developing a Thesis Statement

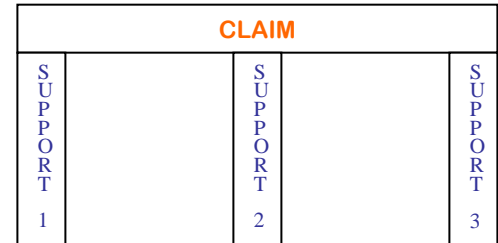


Developing a thesis is like building a bridge. In a bridge, the cross-beam (driveway) has to be held up by strong columns in order for the bridge to function. Similarly, **a thesis has two main components** – a claim and the supporting details that sustain it. In the bridge analogy, a cross-beam represents a claim, and the columns represent supporting details.

Claim

A claim is a one-sentence statement that

- Makes an assertion or takes a stance
- Is based on a generalization
- Is not a fact
- Is debatable
- Must be presented in the introduction of the essay



Example

When making a claim, ask yourself any of the following:

- What point am I trying to make?
- What am I trying to say?
- What am I getting at?

My family laughs a lot. (Weak because it is an easily observable fact)
 Laughter has always been an important part of my family. (Stronger because it presents a position)

Supporting Details

Supporting details provide the means for reinforcing the claim, and can be organized in different patterns – 1) categories/topics or 2) time frames/chronological periods.

Example

Thesis Statement

To create a thesis statement, combine the claim and the supporting details in one sentence. The direction of your essay can change depending on the pattern in which you organize the supporting details.

Supporting details organized into categories:

Laughter has always been an important part of my family; it has helped us to get comfortable after long separations, made it easier to deal with difficult times, and served as a form of entertainment.

Supporting details organized into time frames:

Laughter has always been an important part of my life, supporting me throughout my childhood, teenage years, and my adult life.

NOTE: Writing is a fluid process. As you complete your essay, you may realize that your thesis needs to be modified to reflect your position better.

Step 4: Writing the Introduction

The introduction is the most general part of the paper. It helps provide a roadmap for further discussion or analysis. This simplified formula offers components for a basic introduction:

Definition: Identify, define, and/or describe the topic, concept, or literary theme. What will you be talking about?

Relevance: Show the importance of your topic, concept or theme. How does it relate to or impact society?

Thesis: Copy the thesis statement you generated in the previous step.

Topic: Laughter in my family

Definition: Laughter is a part of everyday human interaction. It helps build positive experiences between individuals.

Relevance: Laughter is “the best medicine” for overcoming anger and “breaking the ice.” It makes people happier, more relaxed, and better able to cope with everyday challenges.

Thesis: Laughter has always been an important part of my family; it has helped us get comfortable after long separations, made it easier to overcome difficult times, and has served as a form of entertainment.

Step 5: Writing the Body of the Essay

The body of the essay is the most detailed part. It involves addressing each supporting detail in a separate fully-developed paragraph. Make sure to include the necessary details, illustrations, and examples to support the claims.

It is imperative that each supporting detail be announced or introduced within the text. This introduction is called a **topic sentence** and is found at the beginning of a paragraph. The topic sentence is a statement made about the supporting detail.

Topic sentence 1: Laughter has helped my family create a comfort zone, making it easier to reconnect after long separations.

Topic sentence 2: Laughter has helped us cope during the most difficult times, relieving the pressure of unbearable situations.

Topic sentence 3: Finally, laughter, and jokes keep us entertained, while strengthening our family bond.

Step 6: Writing the Conclusion

Conclusion brings the paper to a close. It should be similar to the introduction, but worded differently. It allows you to reiterate and summarize the main points of the essay. The following components comprise a conclusion:

Relevance: Why was this important to write about?

Review: What main points did you discuss?

Summary: What do you claim and conclude?

Relevance: Many families use laughter as a source of joy and healing.

Review: Laughter has helped my family unite after prolonged separations, made painful times easier to endure, and offered good times.

Summary: Laughter has, and continues to be, the balancing force of my family.