**Narrative Essay**

OBJECTIVES:

* Analyze sample short stories to recognize important themes and structures;
* Demonstrate an understanding of these themes and structures by creating a rough draft of your own narrative short story;
* Develop editing skills by utilizing the peer edit sheet to edit rough drafts in order to enhance their papers;
* Implement all of these skills by producing a polished final narrative story.

**Why write a narrative?** I like to begin my ENG 101 class with the narrative essay. The narrative has a twofold purpose. Because students are writing about an important event in their lives, students find it easy to write helping them get acclimated to college writing and expectations. And, since students are sharing about their own lives, the narrative helps me get to know them more personally building community in the class. ☺

**Format**: This assignment should be typed, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font. Papers should have 1 inch margins. Make sure to title your essay and include a “Name Block” in the top left corner which includes your name, my name, the class, and the date: MLA format.

**Purpose:** To demonstrate competence in writing at the collegiate level. In addition, this essay is designed to prompt you to reflect on your past experiences and describe an event in your life with compelling details and a clear sense of organization.

**Length:** You should aim for 500 words (2 typed pages, double line space) but I’m not counting. Tell your story. Write with integrity. If it takes you 700 words, so be it. But it really should not take you fewer than 400 (or I will question the time and attention you gave to this assignment). If you’re more comfortable using a familiar format for structure, aim for the basic 5 paragraph structure (*but it is NOT required for this assignment*- you can certainly have 6 or 8 or 10 paragraphs if that’s what it takes to share your story in an authentic way).

**Assignment:** In a well-organized, focused essay, tell a story about a moment in your life when you encountered a monster or felt like a monster. Do not try to tell your entire life story; instead, narrow your topic to one single incident (consisting of mainly a single narrative), and completely describe it with some underlying purpose (thesis), which may be a lesson you learned or taught someone else. Do not let this essay merely become an accounting of a personal story. There should be a REASON that you are telling this particular story; focus on the point of the lesson you learned or the experience you had.

Your narrative should focus on **one** of the following prompts:

1. Each of us has experienced moments of fear or terror in our lives. These moments are often instigated by another person or some entity that is beyond our control. We often consider these obstacles as “monsters” – from bullies on the playground, to the snarling dog down the street, to cancer or some other debilitating disease, even anxiety or depression. An important part in the development of our identities is learning how to cope with these monsters. Briefly describe a monster that you encountered, and explore how you dealt with the fear that the monster evoked. How do you think the process of experiencing and dealing with your fear shaped who you are today?

2. Many of us have felt like a “freak” or an outsider at some point in our lives. Have you ever had the experience of not fitting in or being treated like a monster because you were different from everyone else in some way? Or, perhaps you felt out of control in a situation and acted like a “monster” to somebody else. Maybe you were the bully on the playground tormenting another child. Whether you were treated like a monster or acted like a monster, consider: how did the experience make you feel? How did you deal with it? How has the experience shaped your sense of self? Do you have any regrets?

An important aspect of a personal narrative is honesty; you don’t have to come across as all hero, all victim, or all villain in your story. **People are complex**. You just have to reveal what it means to be human. Remember to keep in mind your audience for this piece is an academic audience, and choose a topic you are comfortable writing about and sharing with your classmates. An effective or engaging approach may be to start with the action of your story and put the thesis in your conclusion.

* Utilize descriptions. As writers, we want our readers to experience this event as we did. We want to bring it to life. Descriptions put the reader in the moment. Make sure they are active descriptions, however**. Do not simply tell the reader that it was exciting. You need to describe the event in such a way that the readers get excited. Do not simply state that it was hot. Provide a description so that readers think that it is hot.**
* Use active voice. Active voice puts readers in the moment. They experience events as they happen. Think of a horror story where you experience running from the psychotic murderer right along with the hero. Here is an example of active voice:

“Nothing moved but a pair of squirrels chasing each other back and forth on the telephone wires. I followed one in my sight. Finally it stopped for a moment and I fired” (Wolff).

*The verbs are all in active voice creating a sense of immediacy*: moved, followed, stopped, fired.

* Use passive voice sparingly to add variety and slow things down. Here is an example of passive voice:
  + “I had been aiming at two old people, a man and a woman, who walked so slowly that by the time they turned the corner at the bottom of the hill my little store of self-control was exhausted” (Wolff).

*Passive voice uses the verb ‘to be’ along with an action verb:* had been aiming, was exhausted.

* Once you have completed a draft, work on the pace of your story. Make sure you have included only the details that support your story. Get rid of any description that gets in the way of your story’s flow. Use active voice as much as possible. Make sure your descriptions are vivid and clear. **Remember too that people have five senses. You can appeal to the reader’s sense of smell, taste, sight, sound, feel.**

As you move into the revision and editing phase, these are helpful reminders to review:

* TRANSITIONS! Transitional words and phrases move your reader through time and space. They alert your reader to the resolution (end). They help your reader make sense of the timing of how events unfold. You will find a list of trantiional words and phrases in the CONTENT section of D2L.
* Avoid cliches and idioms: the passion burns, as red as a rose, as big as a house, etc.
* Avoid giving inanimate objects emotions they do not possess: the evil flames licked the side of the house. Fire is deadly and can be devastating, but it is not evil.
* BE HONEST! Tell the story the way you would naturally tell it and not the way you think your teacher might tell it. Avoid what you think might be impressive language. Be exact in your descriptions. If you want to describe someone’s hair, call it hair. Don’t use tresses because you think that word sounds more sophisticated.
* Be Concise**:**Don’t get bogged down in passive tense or long-winded sentences.
* Always think in terms of the point you are making. Does the information help make that point or does it get in the way?
* Avoid Awkward Language: **Read your papers out loud**. You can hear a sentence that sounds awkward or bad. You may not catch it reading it quietly.

Sample Awkward sentence: *There are profound differences between the two types of personalities that scientists are just beginning to find out.*

Cleaner/More Concise*: Scientists are just discovering profound differences between the two personality types.*

* Redundancy**:**don’t be redundant!!! Now is the time to start building your vocabulary. Use a thesaurus and find better, more accurate words.
* Vary sentences**:**Don’t begin your sentences with the same word. Vary sentence beginnings, endings, lengths, and styles
* Point Of View**:**Be consistent in your point of view. Remember you are telling the story, so it should be in first person (*I, me, my*).
* Consistent Tense: Write this in past tense. It doesn’t work to try to write it in present tense since it already happened.
* Be very careful using vulgarity. I won’t say it is off the table because it might be an important part of the story you are telling, but gratuitous vulgarity for the sake of shock value is unprofessional and boring. Ask yourself if the words you are using are absolutely necessary to the essay. Words are powerful; choose wisely.
* Refer to pages 92-77 of your textbook for practical advice.

**NO research or Works Cited page; this is about YOU, *YOUR* story.**