

Model Lesson: Drafting Personal Narratives: A Strong Introduction

Section 1

We have been learning about personal narratives. Turn to your partner and discuss: What is a personal narrative?

Allow 1 minute. Ask students to respond to the question. (Answer: A personal narrative is a true story that really happened to the writer. It is about events and experiences in the writer's life that really matter and are important to him or her.)

We have brainstormed ideas, narrowed the topic or focus, and written the central idea for a personal narrative. Now, it is time to start writing our own personal narratives.

Personal narratives include a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of a narrative includes a strong introduction. Today, we will learn how to write an interesting and strong introduction.

Now, let's look at the important parts that we need to include in our introductions. Yesterday, we completed the Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative graphic organizer. Find your graphic organizer.

Pause while students locate the organizer.

This organizer helped us to develop a central idea by visualizing or picturing in our minds exactly what happened during this experience. Remember, the central idea tells the reader what the essay is about (states the central idea, theme, or message). It may also provide a clue as to how you, the author, feel about the experience.

Do you remember the central idea of my personal narrative about the snake on the bus during a class field trip? My central idea is "Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips."

The introduction of our personal narrative needs to include the central idea that you wrote on the graphic organizer. You will *not* include all of the details listed on the graphic organizer. These details will help you sequence and develop the body paragraphs in the middle part of your personal narrative. Write "body" next to the list of details.

Pause.

Section 2

The introduction usually will set the tone or reveal the writer's attitude toward the experience being described in the essay. To establish the tone of the essay, the writer thinks about the effect he or she wants the essay to have on the audience (e.g., to laugh, cry, or share the pleasure of a special time or place).

For example, the tone of my essay about the snake on the bus will be light and humorous. I want my readers to laugh as they read about my experience.

Now, think about the central idea of your personal narrative. What effect do you want your personal narrative to have on the audience or reader? Turn and talk with your neighbor.

Pause for several minutes. Have two or three students share their ideas for establishing the tone of their essay.

Section 3

A strong introduction also needs a hook to get the reader interested and motivated to read more. Let's look at some of the ways that other authors have started their narratives and tried to hook their readers' interest.

Distribute copies of the following examples, or display on the overhead or data projector. Have volunteers take turns reading the examples.

Foreshadowing (a hint of something to come)

It was the time of year Farmer Bailey liked best, when summer turned to fall. He whistled as he drove along. A cool breeze blew across his face through the truck's open window. Then it happened. There was a loud thump.

(The Stranger by Chris Van Allsburg, p. 274)

Action

A storm was approaching, but Peter crawled through the strange little hole in the fence anyway.

(Time Traveler, p. 189)

Dialogue

"Bet you can't jump over that rille, Runt," Vern challenged. Gary Kandel hated it when his brother called him Runt. "Watch me, Runt," Vern taunted. "I'll show you how to do it."

(Moonwalk by Ben Bova, p. 614)

Character Description

Reba Jo loved to twang her guitar and sing while the prairie wind whistled through the thirsty sagebrush.

(The Horned Prince by Jackie Mims Hopkins, p. 94)

Setting Description

As they entered the camp, the longest shadows Marven had ever seen stretched across the snow, and he realized with a start that the shadows were the lumberjacks walking in the moonlight. He could smell hay and manure and saw silhouettes of horses stomping in a snowy corral.

(Marven of the Great North Woods by Kathryn Lasky, p. 218)

[Note: You may use these examples or select specific examples from your grade-level anthology.]

Look back over the list of ways to hook an audience (readers). Think about which one you would like to try when you begin writing your introduction. Turn and discuss which hook you want to use in your personal narrative.

Pause for several minutes. Have two or three students share their ideas for including a hook in their introduction.

Section 4

Now, it is time to begin drafting an introduction for our personal narratives. I will show you how to establish tone and incorporate a hook as I draft the introduction for my personal narrative about the snake on the bus. I think that I will begin with some dialogue and foreshadowing to hook my readers.

“Help, Ms. Smith! There’s a snake on the bus!” These are words that no first-year teacher wants to hear. But, I did.

I think I would want to read more. Don’t you? I have given them a hint of what is to come. I also used dialogue to tell exactly what was said when one of my students discovered the snake. Now, I am going to include the central idea of my essay in the other sentences.

There was no doubt that my first out-of-town field trip was about to teach me a valuable lesson: Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips. It’s too bad that my college professors had not covered these important principles before I landed my first job in the classroom.

I have added more information about the experience and included my central idea. Let me read the entire introduction:

“Help, Ms. Smith! There’s a snake on the bus!” These are words that no first-year teacher wants to hear. But, I did. There was no doubt that my first out-of-town field trip was about to teach me a valuable lesson: Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips. It’s too bad that my college professors had not covered these important principles before I landed my first job in the classroom.

Now, it’s your turn. Write the introduction for your personal narrative. Your introduction should include the central idea that you developed yesterday. It should also set the tone by determining the effect you want the essay to have on your readers (laughter, sadness, etc.). And, finally, your introduction should include a hook to interest readers and motivate them to read more.

Monitor and provide support as students write their introductions. Refer students to the Personal Narrative Elements handout and the section on a strong introduction.

Now, read your introduction to yourself.

Pause.

Read your introduction to your neighbor.

Allow 2 minutes.

REFERENCE: Portland Public Schools.

Developing a Narrow, Clearly Defined Focus for Personal Narratives: Three Prewriting Graphic Organizers

Brainstorming Chart for Personal Narratives

List ideas based on your own experiences.

Special Places, Trips, or Vacations	Trials and Tribulations	First Time/Day
Triumphs/Proud Moments	Friendships	Family Traditions
Growing Up	Mistakes	Other Ideas

Narrowing the Focus of an Idea

Brainstorming Idea. *Select one brainstorming idea that is really important to you.*

List and Choose. *List specific things that you remember about this experience. Then read over your ideas. Pick one memory and place a check mark in the box before it.*

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative

Narrowed Focus/Topic. *Copy your singular, significant event/experience here.*

Important Details. *Visualize what happened. List several important details, focusing on what happened and on your feelings, thoughts, and impressions.*

Significance. *What is the significance (importance) of this event/experience, or what was its effect on you then and/or now?*

Central Idea. *Write the central idea of your personal narrative. The central idea should include the singular, significant event and why it's important or meaningful to you.*