

NARRATIVE WRITING

A Narrative is a **story**.

Telling a story well requires putting events in a time sequence; knowing if the story is in first or third person; if it is past, present, or future; and if the story is objective or subjective.

GUIDELINES:

- 1) **SEQUENCE OF EVENTS**—decide what order the events will follow
 - **Chronological order:** arranging events from start to finish
 - **Strength:** logical and orderly; **Weakness:** dull to read
Ex: a person's life from birth to death; a vacation
 - **Flashback:** start in the present, then backtrack to trace previous events
 - **Strength:** interesting and dramatic; **Weakness:** could confuse readers
Ex: a captured criminal confessing to and recounting a crime
 - **Flashforward:** start in the present, then jump to the future
 - **Strength:** interesting and dramatic; **Weakness:** could confuse readers
Ex: a drowning victim imagines what life would have been

- 2) **SPATIAL ORDER**—describe objects or places as they appear in a physical setting to create a logical, orderly visual impression for readers
 - **Travelling**
 - North to south, or east to west
 - **Describing**
 - A room: front to back, side to side, floor to ceiling
 - A house: front yard, first floor, second floor, attic, backyard

- 3) **PERSON**
 - **First person:** use pronouns “I,” “me,” “we,” “our”
 - Strength: personal; engages readers; Weakness: may be biased
 - **NOTE:** Do not use first person unless instructed to write a personal memoir or experience. If writing an argument or opinion, discuss what other people say first, then state your own opinion or position in order to be credible, believable and not biased.
 - **Second person:** use pronoun “you”
 - **Strength:** addresses the reader; **Weakness:** accuses the reader
Ex: the writer asks, “Have you been to Mexico?” This use of “you” is okay; however, if the writer says, “When you commit plagiarism, you

will fail the assignment,” makes readers feel like they are being judged and accused. Avoid using second person “you” if possible.

- **Third person:** “he,” “she,” “they,” “them”

NOTE: Sometimes third person refers to the unseen audience. Third person is often a good choice to keep an essay neutral, unbiased, and credible.

Ex: “Students should come to school prepared to learn.”

“It is important to come to school prepared to learn.”

- 4) **VERB TENSE**—keep past, present, and future tense consistent unless shifting on purpose in a flashback or flashforward.

Ex: “I was driving to Boston in traffic. Then I came to a dead stop.”

NOT: “So I was driving to Boston and come to a dead stop.”

Ex: “I am driving to Boston and get stopped by a cop.”

NOT: “I am driving to Boston and got stopped by a cop.”

- 5) **POINT OF VIEW**

- **Objective:** neutral, unbiased, non-judgmental way to tell a story; often third person; think of a news article—just the facts, no opinion.
- **Subjective:** personal, biased, judgmental way to tell a story; often first person

After deciding how to arrange events in time and space, and what person and point of view to use, improve the narrative flow with connective words and phrases. Note that a comma follows the transition word or phrase:

TRANSITION WORDS AND PHRASES

First, second, third

A short time later

Next,

The next day,

Then,

Finally,