

Writing Workshop

Personal Narrative

Telling a story...

A From Reading to Writing In "Marigolds," the narrator remembers an adolescent act that led to disaster and the beginning of compassion. In "Two Kinds," the writer remembers incidents involving a mother and daughter. These narratives involve events that left a lasting impact on the characters. Writing a **personal narrative** is one way you can explore discoveries and experiences that happened to you or to someone you know. We hear or read about people's experiences every day from personal conversation to newspaper stories.

For Your Portfolio

WRITING PROMPT Write a narrative about something that actually happened to you or to someone you know.

Purpose: To inform and entertain
Audience: Your classmates, friends, or family

Objectives

- write a Personal Narrative
- use a written text as a writing (W1.9)
- revise a draft to improve
- use pronouns that agree with antecedents in number and person (LC1.2, 1.3)

Introducing the

A **Personal Narrative** discussion of what a personal narrative is—an account of something that happened to you, someone you witnessed, or something you heard about firsthand. Many magazines often print personal narratives about people who witnessed a natural disaster or witnessed a public event. Personal narratives can also be about ordinary events such as the one in the story.

Have volunteers share their own unusual, or amusing incident that happened to them or to someone they know. Help students to identify the importance of events in a personal narrative—that from the event, something about the character is revealed.

Basics in a Box

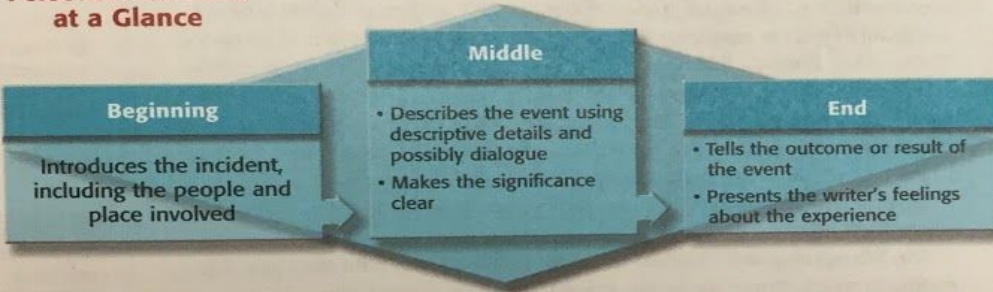
B **Using the Graphic Organizer** In a personal narrative, a personal narrative is organized into a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning introduces the incident, the middle describes the event, and the end tells the outcome and the writer's feelings about the event. The effectiveness of the whole narrative depends on the effectiveness of the whole narrative. The effectiveness of the whole narrative depends on the effectiveness of the whole narrative.

C **Presenting the Rubric** To help students better understand the rubric, review the Standards for Writing. You may also want to show the complete rubric, which is divided into several levels of proficiency. If necessary, explain that tone is the attitude a writer takes toward a subject. The tone of the student model on page 131 is humorous.

Use the rubric to evaluate student writing.

Basics in a Box

Personal Narrative at a Glance



C RUBRIC Standards for Writing

A successful narrative should

- focus on a clear, well-defined incident
- make the importance or significance of the event clear
- show clearly the order in which events occurred
- use descriptive details that appeal to the senses to describe characters and setting
- use dialogue to develop characters
- maintain a consistent tone

LESSON RESOURCES

USING PRINT RESOURCES

Unit One Resource Book

- Prewriting, p. 43
- Drafting, p. 44
- Peer Response, pp. 45–46
- Revising, Editing, and Proofreading, p. 47
- Student Models, pp. 48–53
- Rubric, p. 54

Writing Transparencies and Copymasters

- Writing Transparencies, pp. 11, 20
- Writing Template Copymasters, p. 25

USING MEDIA RESOURCES

LaserLinks

Writing Springboards
See Teacher's SourceBook p. 47 for bar codes.

Writing Coach CD-ROM

Visit our Website:
www.mcdougallittell.com

Teaching the Lesson

Analyzing the Model

“Patella (Alias the Kneecap)”

D This student model focuses on one student’s moment of triumph in his science class after he successfully names all 26 bones on a chart. After students read the model, they can discuss what makes it appealing and fun to read.

Possible Responses: the humorous tone, the authentic dialogue, and the suspense

Then discuss the Rubric in Action, pointing out key words and phrases in the model that correspond to the elements mentioned in the Rubric in Action. Students also may determine the model’s overall effectiveness by evaluating the writer’s use of mechanics and content.

- 1 Have students suggest an alternative opening.

Possible Responses: The time for science had arrived. Mr. Winnekamp asked, “Would anyone like to try the bone chart today?” Or, The greatest day of my career as a student occurred on a cool day in the middle of May.

- 2 Ask students whether they think the dialogue sounds authentic.

Possible Response: Words such as “Oh yeah, right” and “Dream on” are expressions that students actually use in everyday speech.

- 3 Here background information is necessary to clarify why a hush falls over the classroom when Joe accepts Mr. Winnekamp’s challenge. The reader needs to know that the assignment to memorize the scientific names of 26 bones was given on the previous day and that a student had just one chance to take the test.

- 5 The humor lies in the fact that the ordinary situation doesn’t warrant the grand comparison. Have students point out other places where the writer uses humorous exaggeration.

Possible Responses: the “fame and glory” stakes of the test; the chance to be “the best of the best”

Analyzing a Student Model

Joe Hasley
Linn-Mar Senior High School

Patella (Alias the Kneecap)

I’ve never been an exceptional student, but there is one scientific term you can bet I’ll never forget.

It was a cool day in the middle of May. The kind near the end of the school year that just drags on and on. Perhaps the most tedious thing about the last weeks of school was that I was so looking forward to junior high. I hated being treated like a kid all the time and being told where to sit at lunch and that I should keep my desk clean because, “It will lead to good habits in the future.” Yes, the last days of school were tedious.

Except, of course, for the time that could easily be classified as The Greatest Day of My Career as a Student.

The time for science had arrived. Mr. Winnekamp asked, “Would anyone like to try the bone chart today?”

There was an “Oh yeah, right” and a “Dream on,” but all the snickering in the room turned to a dead hush when I said, “Yeah, Mr. Winnekamp. I’d like to take the challenge.”

Now, granted, in order to understand the magnitude of the moment, you may need some background. It had been announced the previous day that anyone who could name all twenty-six bones on the chart at the back of the room would receive twenty extra-credit points and get his or her name on the “I Know My Bones” chart and would receive an official membership certificate to the “I Know My Bones” Club. But, as is always the case when such fame and glory are at stake, there was a catch: You only had one chance to take the membership test. One mistake, one wrong word, and your chance to be the best of the best went down the tubes in one fell swoop.

So now that you know the reason for the class’s amazement, I can continue where I left off.

Mr. Winnekamp and I walked to the back of the room with the class still reeling in shock. When we finally arrived, the chart seemed like a giant peering down to seal my doom. The intensity was nerve-racking.

After an eternity, the solemn silence was broken by the sound of Mr. Winnekamp’s voice. “What is the name of this bone?” he asked, pointing to the head of the skeleton on the life-sized poster. I looked around. Every eye was on me. For a brief second—and only a second, mind you—I might have felt a bit of nervousness run up and down my spine. But, being a Hasley of noble character, I straightened my back, looked him in the eye, and answered him. “That’s the cranium.”

The class let out a huge sigh of relief, but then became as mesmerized as they had been only seconds before when they realized that there were still twenty-five bones to go.

RUBRIC IN ACTION

1 Captures readers’ interest with an intriguing statement

Other Options:
• Start with dialogue.
• Create a brief anecdote.

2 Uses dialogue to introduce the incident

3 Gives important background information

4 Signals the organizational structure

5 This writer uses exaggeration to maintain the humorous tone.



Use McDougal Littell’s *Language Network*, Chapter 18, for more instruction on writing a personal narrative.



To engage students visually, use *Power Presentation 1, Personal Narrative*.

So on we went, me naming each bone he pointed to, in a process that seemed to take hours. After the first couple of bones, though, the class seemed to relax and feel confident I would answer them all correctly. Everyone was pulling for me and cheering every time I got one right. I felt like I was shooting free throws in the final game of the NCAA tournament. Finally we got to the last bone. It was the knee bone. The class, which seconds earlier had been buzzing with anticipation, now fell dead silent.

Now, usually I'm pretty cool under pressure. I've gotten up in front of large groups before and it's no big deal. But this, this was entirely different. Every eye was on me. Mouths hung open. No one breathed. Mr. Winnekamp even started to sweat. The temperature outside was a mild fifty degrees, but you could have fried an egg on my head. The air was so thick you could have hung a map in midair just by driving nails through it. (Well, maybe not that thick, but close!)

People were turning blue because they had forgotten to breathe, so I decided it was time to take some final, decisive action. Calmly, coolly, I started to answer—and then my mind went blank! I couldn't remember! Oh no! My chance for fame and glory shot down because I couldn't remember the scientific name for kneecap. I thought so hard I thought my head would explode. Then, at my lowest moment, when I was in the pit of despair, at the end of my rope, about to lose faith, it hit me.

I looked up. The class was hanging on my every breath. My throat was as dry as carpet. I straightened myself from my hunched position, grabbed hold of my overall straps, looked at the chart, and casually said, "Ah . . . I'm pretty sure that's the patella."

The whole room just exploded. Everyone was yelling and standing on their desks and patting me on the back and hugging me. I think I even saw some tears of joy wiped back. Mr. Winnekamp came up, shook my hand, and presented me with the award.

"It's possible that they may rename the school after you, ya know."

"Gee, I don't know," I said, trying not to appear ungrateful. "Having the school named after me might interfere with my chances of having a 'normal' childhood."

Mr. Winnekamp said he understood.

There were three really good things that happened to me as a result of being the first in my class admitted to the "I Know My Bones" Club. First, I could wear my corduroy overalls to school and not have to worry about anyone picking me up by the straps. Second, I had a lot of new friends. And third, I have missed a lot of questions on a lot of tests, but you can bet that I'll never be at a loss for the answer to the question, "What is the scientific name for the kneecap?"

6 Creates suspense

7 Uses descriptive details to build suspense

8 Uses dialogue to increase the humor

9 Tells the significance of the incident

6 Ask students how the writer creates suspense in this passage.

Possible Response: The writer emphasizes the suspense of the situation with short sentences focusing on key details: "Every eye was on me. Mouths hung open. No one breathed."

7 The writer introduces a twist—his mind went blank just as he was about to name the 26th bone. Have students describe how they felt as they awaited Joe's answer.

8 Dialogue can be used to reveal character as well as to advance the plot. Have students discuss what is revealed about Mr. Winnekamp as well as the writer in this short exchange between them.

Possible Response: Both enjoy the humor of exaggerating the importance of the test.

9 Have students compare the first and last sentences of the model to see how the writer returns to clarify his original statement.

Mini Lesson

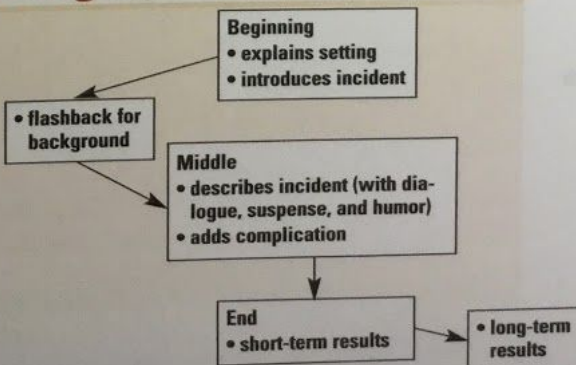
Viewing and Representing

Standard W2.1

PICTURING TEXT STRUCTURE

Instruction One way to structure a personal narrative is to relate the events in chronological order as they happened. Another way is to begin with an interesting statement, description, or dialogue that plunges the reader immediately into the story. The writer of the student model uses a combination of these techniques.

Activity Have students analyze the text structure of the student model by constructing a diagram to illustrate how the writer organized his narrative, such as in the sample at the right.



Guiding Student Writing

Prewriting

Choosing a Subject

If students are having difficulty selecting a topic after they have read the suggestions in the Idea Bank, have them try the following:

- Make a time line of some important events in your life. Choose one event as the subject of your narrative.
- List a few times in your life when something unexpected happened—a surprise gift, a flat tire, a loss of electricity, etc. Choose the incident you think would make the best story.

Planning the Personal Narrative

3. Students may wish to tape together a few sheets of paper for their time line so that they will have room to include significant details about the incident.
4. Remind students that dialogue can help them *show* the events in a story rather than just *tell* about them. Have students choose an action scene that they described in their prewriting notes and write just a few lines of dialogue between two characters to convey the action.

Drafting

The student model represents just one of many effective ways for students to organize their narratives. Suggest that students begin with the easiest, a straight chronological order of events, just to get the basics of the incident down on paper. The time line they made in planning their narratives would be useful here. As they are writing or perhaps when they are revising, students may discover better ways to begin their narratives, such as with a provocative statement as in the model or with an interesting description or piece of dialogue.

Ask Your Peer Reader

Asking a peer reviewer to list the narrative's events in sequence is a good way of checking whether the order of events is clear.

Remind students to use the peer reviewer's feedback when revising their drafts.

IDEA Bank

1. Your Working Portfolio

Look for ideas in the **Writing Options** you completed earlier in this unit:

- **Recollection Diary**, p. 59
- **Mood Diary**, p. 86
- **Disaster Narrative**, p. 123

2. Interviews

Ask three or four people of different ages and with diverse experiences to talk about the most significant event of their lives. Choose one for a narrative and ask additional questions.

3. Superlative Chart

Make a chart showing the incidents you've experienced, seen, or heard about in the last year for each of the following categories: saddest, funniest, scariest, and most exciting.

Writing Your Personal Narrative

1 Prewriting

Your life, though it may seem average to you, is a new and exotic world to other people. Don't be afraid to write about your personal experiences.
Joe Hasley, student writer

Begin by thinking about interesting or unusual events that really happened. First, **recall** personal experiences that have been funny, sad, frightening, or unforgettable. Then, **brainstorm** similar incidents that you were not part of but witnessed. Finally, **list** incidents you have heard about from others. See the **Idea Bank** in the margin for more suggestions. After you select an incident, follow the steps below.

Planning Your Personal Narrative

- ▶ **1. Analyze the nature of the incident.** What was its significance? Why does it stand out in your mind?
- ▶ **2. Decide on the tone you want to create.** How did the incident make you feel when you experienced, saw, or heard about it? What is the main feeling you want to create in your audience?
- ▶ **3. Make a time line.** List all the parts of the event in time order. For each part, stop and list who was involved, where it happened, and some of the significant details. When the list is finished, decide which parts to include in your narrative and which parts you can condense or skip in order to keep the narrative focused and lively.
- ▶ **4. Decide which parts of the narrative to enliven with dialogue or with details that appeal to the senses.** What details could help you show what happened rather than simply telling about it? What dialogue would move your narrative along and make it more realistic?

2 Drafting

You could **begin** by describing the setting or an important character. Or you might give background information or flash forward to an event further along in the narrative. Use your **time line** to help you remember the order of events. As you tell what happened, keep in mind what tone you want to create. Use **dialogue** and plenty of **descriptive details** to help move the narrative along. **End** by telling the outcome.

Ask Your Peer Reader

- Did you understand the order of events?
- Was the tone I used appropriate to the incident?
- How might I increase the audience's interest?
- Which parts may need more details?

3 Revising

TARGET SKILL ► WORD CHOICE Paying attention to word choice, or diction, will make your narrative more lively and interesting. Try to choose specific nouns, verbs, and modifiers. For example, if you are describing someone who laughed, a word like *chuckle*, *snicker*, *giggle*, *guffaw*, or *roar* will show the exact nature of that laugh. Use modifiers, like *velvety* or *shrill*, that appeal to the senses. Use a thesaurus to find specific synonyms for vague words. Check a dictionary for the precise meaning of words you find in a thesaurus before using them.


Mr. Winnekamp and I walked to the back of the room with the class still ^{reeling in} in a state of shock. When we finally ^{arrived} got there, the chart seemed like a giant ^{peering} looking down to ^{seal} arrange my ^{doom} fate. The intensity was ^{nerve-racking} awful. After a while, the serious silence was ended by the sound of Mr. Winnekamp's voice.

4 Editing and Proofreading

TARGET SKILL ► PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT In your narrative, make sure each pronoun you use agrees with its antecedent in number, gender, and person. When the antecedent is an indefinite pronoun, decide whether it is singular or plural. The indefinite pronouns *each*, *neither*, *someone*, and *anyone* are singular, so you must use singular pronouns to agree with them, as in "Did anyone forget her book?"

It had been announced the previous day that anyone who could name all twenty-six bones on the chart at the back of the room would receive twenty extra-credit points and get ^{his or her} their name on the "I Know My Bones" chart and receive an official membership certificate to the "I Know My Bones" Club.

5 Reflecting

FOR YOUR WORKING PORTFOLIO What did you discover about writing a personal narrative? What methods helped you to create a specific tone? Attach your answer to your finished work. Save your true narrative in your Working Portfolio. 

Need revising help?

Review the **Rubric**, p. 131

Consider **peer reader** comments

Check **Revision Guidelines**, p. 1143

Stumped by pronoun and antecedent agreement?

See the **Grammar Handbook**, p. 1205

Publishing IDEAS

- Illustrate your personal narrative and post it on a bulletin board with others by your classmates.
- Record your personal narrative on audio-tape and play it for the class or your family.



More Online:
Publishing Options
www.mcdougallfittell.com

Revising

WORD CHOICE

Ask volunteers to choose a sentence from their narratives to write on the board. Have all students suggest more specific nouns, verbs, and modifiers to improve the word choice of the sentences. Then have students work on word choice in their own narratives.

Editing and Proofreading


PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

Remind students that an *antecedent* is the noun or pronoun that a pronoun stands for, and that the antecedent may appear in the same sentence or in the preceding sentence. For indefinite pronouns that may be either singular or plural, have students first determine their number from the meaning of the sentence before they choose the correct pronoun. For example:

Singular: Has *everyone* packed *his* or *her* supplies?

Plural: Several CDs were removed from *their* cases.

Reflecting

 Encourage students to be specific in reflecting about their writing experience. For example, what specific thing(s) did they discover as they wrote and revised their narratives?

Option

Managing the Paper Load

Before students begin to write, you might review their time lines to be sure they have included enough events.