

# Personal Narrative

The Basics



# Personal Narratives

\*A *personal narrative*

re-creates a specific experience or event in the writer's life.

\*To write an effective narrative, select an experience that you feel strongly about. If you don't find your experience to be all that interesting, imagine how your reader will feel!

Narrative  
vs.  
Memoir  
vs.  
Essay

- \***Personal narrative-** focused on a significant event. (more narrow focus than a memoir)
- \***Personal memoir-** focused on a significant relationship between the writer and a person, place, or object.
- \***Personal essay-** focused on belief or insight about life that is significant to the writer.

# Characteristics:

## *Conflict*

- \*As with any story, your personal narrative must have a *conflict*.
- \*Arguably, the most interesting personal narratives have an *external conflict*.
- \*It is likely that since your narrative is personal, you will have an *internal conflict* as well. Why?

# Characteristics:

## *Characters*

- \*Your narrative must have *characters*, including you, the narrator.
- \***Question:** Is it okay to have just two characters in your narrative?
- \***Answer: Yes!** As with any other story element, just be sure that your characters drive your narrative rather than hinder it. (Too many characters will overwhelm a short piece of writing.)

# Characteristics:

## *Characteristics #2*

- \*Who is your *protagonist*?
- \*Do you have a *antagonist*?  
Do you need one?
- \***Question:** Are your characters *flat* or *round*?  
What is the difference, and why does it matter?

# Characteristics:

## *Dialogue*

- \*A well-written personal narrative includes *meaningful dialogue*.
- \*As the writer, you must ask yourself: when should I narrate a passage, and when should I allow my characters to speak?

# Characteristics: *Details*

- \*Although you are telling a story, you will still be using *sensory details* to paint a mental picture for your readers.
- \*It is important to include **specific** details.
  - >However, a reader doesn't need to know every little thing.
  - >Select details that are important to retelling the story.



# Characteristics:

## *Imagery*

\*Any good story must include *imagery*. *Sensory details* help your reader connect to your story and understand your observation about life, or *theme*.

# Characteristics:

## *Transitions*

\*As with any strong piece of writing, be sure to transition between your ideas. Otherwise, the connection between your ideas will not be clear to your reader. Transitions also improve the flow of your narrative.

# Characteristics:

## *Point of View*

- \*A personal narrative is typically told through a *1st-person point of view*.
- \*The narrator has a *persona*, or a personality or voice, that is displayed and developed throughout the narrative. In some ways, you are playing a role in your own narrative as you tell your story.

# Characteristics:

## *Diction and Tone*

- \*You set a *tone* through the language that you use.
- \*Your *diction*, or word choice, reveals your attitude toward your subject (event, character, etc.)
- \*Diction comes in many forms: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and figurative language.

# Characteristics:

## *Foreshadowing*

\*While a personal narrative doesn't have to be suspenseful, a skillful narrative includes subtle hints about future events.

# Characteristics:

## *Audience Awareness*

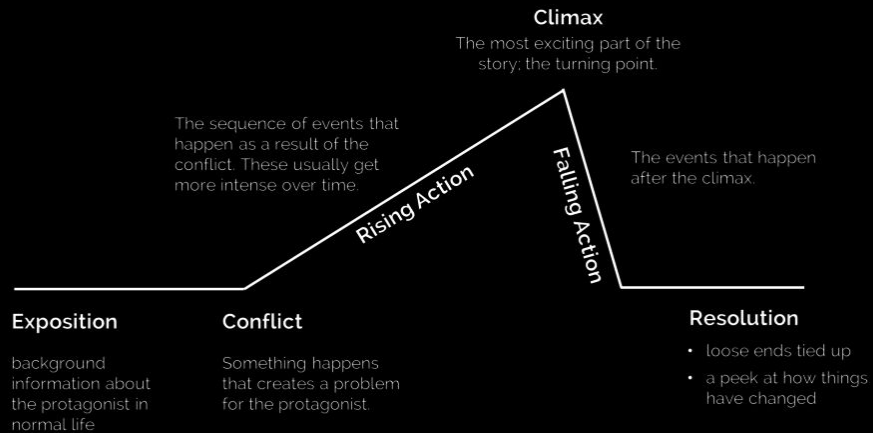
- \*A skillful writer must always think of his or her audience.
- \*What are the underlying assumptions that the author makes about the reader's understanding of society or the world?
- \*What does someone have to believe to accept the story as true?

# Characteristics: *Structure*

- \*What *organizational structure* should a personal narrative take?
- \*Does it have to be organized *chronologically*?
- \*Does it have to include *flashbacks*?
- \*Can you begin a personal narrative in the middle of the action?

# Characteristics: *Structure -plot diagram*

## STORY ARC





# Characteristics:

## *Theme*

- \*What is the **theme** of the personal narrative?
- \*Is the theme explicitly stated?  
Does it *have* to be? *Can* it be?
- \*How does a writer imply a theme through a personal narrative?