

THE NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH

A narrative paragraph ‘tells a story’, that is, it tells about a series of events that happened to the narrator. It is usually told in time sequence with a definite beginning, middle and end.

Any student writing a narrative paragraph for the first time must use *transitions*. These special words help the writer develop a logical, unified paragraph. The most common kind of transition used in narrative writing is the time relationship transition.

Time Relationship Transitions

after	eventually	next	sooner
afterwards	first	now	then
before	in the meantime	once	today
during	later	second	until
earlier	meanwhile	soon	when

Using Transitions in Narrative Writing

Exercise

The following narrative paragraph lacks time transitions. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate transitions to give the paragraph coherence. (*glues* the structure together)

Let me tell you the story about a woman named Jyll and a friend of hers called Jack. – The 1. _____ thing that happened was that Jyll was running out of fresh water at her cabin. She decided she would have to walk into town to pick up some fresh spring water. 2. _____ she left she wanted to contact her neighbour, Jack, to let him know she would be out of the area for the day. 3. _____ she left the cabin, she grabbed the old wooden pail. 4. _____ she would use it as a signal to Jack that she was absent from the cabin. She tied a rope around the handle of the pail and 5. _____ was able to toss the pail up into the air and over the giant arbutus tree next to the cabin.

High up there it could be seen by Jack while he stood on the porch of his cabin down the road. He would know she was away from the cabin. This was a safety measure. Jyll 6. _____ went off to town for the spring water not knowing that Jack had gone tumbling down. 7. _____ that day, it was discovered what had happened. 8. _____ Jyll had gone to fetch the pail for water, she hadn't noticed Jack coming around the bend in the forest path. 9. _____ the doctor and police were able to reconstruct the scene of the crime. It seems that when Jyll threw the pail up in the tree, it hit Jack's crown on its way down. 10. _____ Jack has had his nob patched, but he hasn't seemed the same fellow. 11. _____ Jyll has been known to giggle at Jack's disaster which sometimes gets her in trouble with his mother. 12. _____ Jack and Jyll still play at being neighbours, but Jack won't go near the water pail.

Answers

- | | | |
|-----------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. first | 5. eventually | 9. after |
| 2. before | 6. then | 10. afterwards |
| 3. when | 7. later | 11. in the meantime |
| 4. then | 8. when | 12. today |
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Unity in the Narrative Paragraph

The order in which the events are presented in the narrative paragraph is very important to the overall unity of a paragraph. If your ideas are not presented in time sequence, then the paragraph will be scrambled. We may like our eggs scrambled, but scrambled ideas create a lack of understanding.

Exercise

Try to unscramble the following paragraph by numbering the sentences in the order they should appear.

- _____ Finally I was able to calm down long enough to understand what the man was saying
- _____ In downtown Calgary it can sometimes seem quite dangerous when the sun goes down.
- _____ This danger became very real to me one summer evening.
- _____ Next he leaned ominously into the car blowing toxic liquor fumes across my face.

- _____ During the rush hour one evening after work, I was driving down Centre Street, and was stopped by the red light across from the York Hotel.
- _____ Before I knew what had happened an old man had grabbed my door handle.
- _____ Later I realised how foolish I had been to drive with the doors unlocked.
- _____ Now I started to panic as his hands fumbled on the car seat because I thought he was grabbing for my purse.
- _____ After this experience, my sense of safety in Calgary was destroyed.
- _____ Then I realised all he wanted was a cigarette, and gingerly I extended the pack to him.
- _____ When he started muttering, I drew back even further against the driver's door.
- _____ After snarling, "Darn light stuff", he took two smokes and my lighter, and backed out of the car.

Answers

8, 1, 2, 5, 3, 4, 11, 6, 12, 9, 7, 10

Using Connotative Language in Narrative Writing

The language used in narrative writing helps the reader imagine himself in the events you tell about. Don't just relate the series of events because this creates a boring list. Use specific, vivid words to relate your story instead of passive language.

Example:

Instead of, "It happened while I was standing in the shower, so I couldn't hear the gas leaking

Write, "The blast of water from the shower deadened the other house noises, hiding the deadly hiss of gas."

Exercise

Try re-writing each of the following sentences to make them more connotative. Use your *thesaurus*.

1. The man walked down the street.
 2. The girl hit her knee on the stairs.
 3. The baby cried in her crib.
 4. The cowboy fell off his horse.
 5. The child ran out the school doors.
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Using Dialogue in the Narrative Paragraph

When you recall an experience that you had, do you sometimes smile at remembering what a person said or did, or even get angry over a remembered insult once hurled your way? When writing a narrative paragraph about one event in your life, the use of dialogue will definitely make the event more vivid to your readers. Make sure your characters talk like people in real life. Real people do not use full sentences when they speak. This is your chance to use fragments. Be sure to make the conversation lifelike by using slang, interjections and other 'real' speech patterns.

Example Using Dialogue in Narrative Writing

The lady at the next table to the slob could take it no longer. Secretly I hoped she would do something to stop the obscene slurping coming from his fat lips. I watched her rise majestically from her seat; serious intent, like a soldier on a mission, furrowed her white brow. "Sir", she enunciated clearly to the huge slurping hulk. There was a grunt in return from the grazer, but she had his attention. "Sir, you are inhaling your soup in such a manner as to distract your fellow diners." All activity stopped in the restaurant as we waited for his reply. Astonishment puckered his dimpled jowls to be replaced by a red infusion, which spread from the greyish collar of his neck, slowly gliding to the stark blinking eyes. "Listen, lady," the voice was thick guttural, "who do you think ya are, the Queen of bloody Sheba?"

Beginnings and Endings

A. How to Start

There are various ways to begin a narrative paragraph, but one of the easiest is to use the *W's* – *who, what, where, when, why* – to ensure reader understanding of what you have written. *Who* should clearly introduce the character. Is this an adult, child, etc.? *What* introduces your event to the reader. *Where* helps establish the mood and atmosphere for the setting of the event you are re-telling. *When* expands on the time the event took place, and *Why* is a brief explanation of the circumstances leading up to the event.

Another good method for starting the narrative paragraph is to use an *anecdote*, a brief amusing or interesting story about a real person or event.

B. How to Finish

The most common method for ending a narrative paragraph is to refer back to your *topic* sentence, and by re-wording it, use it to tie up the loose ends of the paragraph. For example, if the topic sentence is, "*Appearances can be deceptive*", re-word the idea into something like "*That is how I learned that the outside does not always reflect the inside.*"

Exercise

Re-write the following topic sentences into concluding sentences.

1. Last night my television set seemed to conspire against me.
2. The worst thing that ever happened to me was the night of the bear.
3. During my teens, school became an enemy that tortured my brain, especially in my grade 10 English class.
4. An adventure can happen to you everyday, so just listen to my story.
5. I'm not the most organised person in the world, and the results of this can have disastrous effects.

Review

1. Pick a topic that has *wide appeal*. Do not limit yourself to a topic that can only be understood by a few people.
2. Make sure to use active, *connotative language*. If you tell a story by simply listing the events that occurred without describing the feelings and atmosphere surrounding that event, the story will be boring and your reader will be bored.
3. Be aware of time order. Use *time relationship transitions* to 'hook' your story together. Do not use transitions that will scramble your readers' minds.
4. To effectively conclude your *narrative paragraph* relate your concluding sentence to the topic sentence. This ensures paragraph unity, and lets you see if you have wandered off topic.