**WHAT TO INCLUDE AND EXCLUDE IN A NARRATIVE ESSAY**

Do include carefully edited true stories or experiences in expository narratives, but don't just try to make up a story to use in an essay. Remember that most fiction is based, however loosely, on real events or experiences that are cleverly altered to fit into a plot plan contrived by the author. Thus, much of the “truth” of the story disappears as other characters, events, circumstances, motives, and feelings are included to enhance reader interest.

Do use some of the techniques of fiction writing discussed in this chapter in expository narrative. Your story or experience doesn't have to be completely true, either, but readers will be suspicious if you write about your recent visit to another planet or your painful, tragic death. Remember that the purpose of your story is to inform, to support your thesis and make your essay move along to its conclusion. Exclude details that make your narrative a blow-by-blow summary that takes forever to relate. For example, in the passage describing Allen and the stray cat, many unnecessary particulars have been eliminated: the kind and quantity of furniture in the room, the styles and colors of clothes Allen and his grandmother are wearing, the cause of the old woman's hearing loss, the kind of work Allen's father did, the way Allen's parents died, the names or breeds of the neighbors' dogs, the name or breed of Allen's dog, or

the name he will give the cat. None of this information is important to the purpose of the narrative.

Narration can play a major or minor role in expository writing. The first essay in the text, by Jeffrey Aran, is mostly narrative. The article on marital strife by Norman Lobsenz (chapter 1) and Gerald Astor's article on body language (chapter 2) include anecdotes. Aside from chapter 3, narration is most heavily used in description (chapter 4) and process analysis (chapter 6), but it can also be found in Jim Sanderson's “househusband” article (chapter 5) and in Benjamin Stein's definition of ignorance (chapter 7). Thus, narration can be an end in itself (a story only) or it can be a means to an end (a story or anecdote that is used to support a thesis).

Whether you write to entertain or to inform, your narration should (1) answer, not raise, questions about who was involved, what happened, and when, where, and how events took place; (2) allow the reader to imagine some details (rather than making him or her read endlessly about them); and (3) illustrate some main idea that provokes thought or discussion about why you wrote it.

*READINGS*

**The Night the President Met the Burglar**

Richard C. Garvey

*The author uses narration to recount a news story that was suppressed for over fifty years. The story is now noteworthy more from a human interest than from a news standpoint. The author uses both direct and reported speech in the article.*

*Although character development is not extensive, Garvey includes sufficient details to explain the actions of the President. Mrs. Coolidge, and the burglar so that we understand the reasons for their behavior.*

A cat burglar invaded the bedroom of the President of the United States, who confronted him, struck a deal with him and helped him escape.

The President and First Lady—she slept through the encounter—never notified the Secret Service and he enjoined a journalist friend not to print the story.

The journalist kept his word, and this is the first time the incident has been reported.

The event occurred in the early morning hours in one of the first days of the presidency of Calvin Coolidge, late in August, 1923. He and his family were living in the same third-floor suite at the Willard Hotel in Washington that they had occupied during his vice presidency. President Warren G. Harding's widow still was living in the White House.

Coolidge awoke to see an intruder go through his clothes, remove a wallet and unhook a watch chain.

Coolidge spoke. “I wish you wouldn't take that.”

The intruder, gaining his voice, said: “Why?”

“I don't mean the watch and chain, only the charm. Take it near the window and read what is engraved on the back of it,” the President said.

The burglar read. “Presented to Calvin Coolidge, Speaker of the House by the Massachusetts General Court.”

“Are you President Coolidge?” he asked.

The President answered “Yes, and the Legislature gave me that watch charm. . . . I'm fond of it. It would do you no good. You want money. Let's talk this Over.”

Holding up the wallet, the intruder bargained. “I'll take this and leave everything else.”

Coolidge, knowing there was $80 in the billfold, persuaded the intruder to sit down and talk. The young man said he and his college roommate had overspent during their vacation and did not have enough money to pay their hotel bill.

Coolidge added up the room rate and two rail tickets back to the campus.Then he counted out $3o- and said it was a loan.

He then told the intruder that there probably would be a Secret Service agent patrolling the hotel corridor and asked if an escape could be made by going back along the hotel ledge. The man left through the same window he had entered.

The President told his wife, Grace, about the event. Later, he confided in two friends, Judge Walter L. Stevens, the family lawyer, and Frank MacCarthy, a free-lance writer and photographer.

The President held MacCarthy to silence and never told him the intruder's name. As the 25th anniversary of the event approached, 15 years after Coolidge's death, MacCarthy, by then working for the Springfield Union asked Mrs. Coolidge to let him use the story.

She declined, saying, “There is already too much publicity given to acts of vandalism and violence.”

MacCarthy honored her request, asking only that she review the story for accuracy and allow him to use it after her death.

Mrs. Coolidge died July 8, 1957, and MacCarthy died less than four months later without publishing his article.

MacCarthy had shared the story with me when we worked together. Because all reasons for secrecy have vanished, this report has been reconstructed from MacCarthy's own article.

1 have called the young man a burglar because MacCarthy's article so identifies him, but his notes show that Coolidge said the young man repaid the $32 loan in full.

**The Helplessness That Triggers Tears**

Jim Sanderson

*Jim Sanderson's sensitively written column, “Liberated Male,” appears regularly in newspapers. The author is unique in that he tries to show the inner feelings of men toward specific life situations and problems. For instance, in many cultures, men are not supposed to cry (except at socially approved functions such as funerals) because tears are associated with weakness. However, psychologists tell us that suppressing emotion causes stress, which in turn triggers physical health problems. In this article, Sanderson tells us that Ben's tears are appropriate to release him from the frustration and anger boiling inside him.*

*Ben's experience is very negative, however, it is not typical of most emergencies that occur in this country. Every day, there are radio, television, and newspaper stories about people helping each other during crises. For example, a businessman pulls a dying pregnant woman from her wrecked automobile and gives her artificial respiration until an ambulance arrives, thereby saving her baby; an entire neighborhood spends the night searching for a missing child; a truckdriver stops on a deserted highway to help an elderly woman with car trouble, a passerby rushes into a burning building to rescue a trapped infant; a bystander jumps into an icy river and risks freezing to death in order to save plane crash victims. As in other societies, many people in the United States react differently to emergency situations. Some are capable of taking command and acting instantly. Others shrink from problems because they are afraid or don't know what to do. Unfortunately, Ben encounters the latter when he needs help.*

*Sanderason states in the beginning that he is relating a true story. There is no other thesis. The author writes objectively to report the who, what, when, where, and how of his friend's experience until the final paragraph, in which the why of Ben's emotional outburst is evaluated. Ben's thoughts and feelings are related, and through his actions we learn a great deal about his character.*

This is a true story, it happened to a friend of mine last week.

Ben had a day off, so he drove his wife to work, took his car to the garage to be serviced and then set off on foot with his two daughters, ages 5 and 8, to do some shopping errands near his home.

He had only been in the store for a moment. As he came out his oldest daughter rushed up to him, blood spurting from a wound in her neck. It had seemed safe enough to leave them playing outside, but the girl had tripped and impaled herself on a sharp wire protruding from a waist-high decorative wire fence.

Ben dropped his packages, smothered the flood flow with his hand as best he could, swept her up in his arms and lurched off down the street, yelling for the younger girl to follow.

Several cars cruised up curiously along the sidewalk. “Take me to the hospital,” he cried, but just as he moved toward the first car it sped away, the male driver staring straight ahead now.

He turned to the second. Two women, horrified, made a gesture of helplessness, and they too drove off. One woman turned to look back at him, her face a mask.

In desperation Ben staggered into a storefront office. It was a chiropractor. “Help me.” The man stood there, opening his hands in supplication: “I can't,” he said. “Please understand, I'm not a medical doctor.”

With a curse Ben turned to the street again, the blood surging out between his fingers, his youngest daughter racing behind him, wailing.

I can't wait for an ambulance, he thought. Somebody has to drive me. The hospital emergency room must be at least a mile away. Without his car he felt unmanned. His daughter was not crying. She looked up at him with a strange, pale serenity. “Daddy, am I going to die?” she asked.

“No, damn it, you're not,” he snapped. “Daddy's going to take care of you.” The promise echoed hollowly in his ears. Ben was a take-charge kind of man—his entire life as a male had been built around the premise of competence and control.

He felt terrorized by his own helplessness. At the most crucial instant of his life he couldn't find the answer. He blundered into another store, a draftsman's office, and put Gina down on a table covered with blueprints. A woman brought him a wet paper towel to help staunch the blood.

And still nobody would agree to drive him to the hospital. The ambulance did come quickly, thank God, but at the hospital there was another delay. They wanted him to go to the Admissions Office to sign papers; they wouldn't start treatment until he did.

“I promised her I wouldn't leave her,” he bellowed. They persisted. He turned, raging, to the doctor, the doctor began to work.

Gina was lucky. The wire had missed the main artery. The wound was cleansed and, at Ben's insistence, closed with skin tape rather than stitches, until a plastic surgeon could decide about scars. Then they walked home, all three hand in hand, quietly, totally exhausted.

Four days later at bedtime, Ben asked his wife to massage his back. She could feel the tenseness in his muscles. “I think Fm going to cry,” he said, surprised.

“Ben,” she answered softly, “let it all come out.

So, for the first time in his adult life, he did. Tears for the fear he'd felt for his child, for the shame of his helplessness and for the panic at not knowing instantly where to turn. Then furious rage at all the people who had turned away or found reasons why they couldn't help.

His tears released him, and they were appropriate. Without purging he would still be carrying this violent emotion around within. In time it would become submerged, piled layer on layer on top of all those other radioactive feelings. Destructive, deadening, forever.

**Comprehension Questions**

1. What was the situation at the beginning of this narrative, What was Ben doing? Why didn’t he have his car? Why was this important? Who was with him? Where was his wife?

2. How did Ben's daughter, Gina, get hurt? What was the nature of her injury? Was it serious?

3. What was Ben's reaction to this emergency?

4. What did the people in passing cars do when Ben asked them to drive him to the hospital? What does the author mean when he says one woman's face was a mask?

5. Why didn't the chiropractor help?

6. What did Gina think was going to happen to her? What did Ben promise her?

7. What happened in the draftsman's office?

8. What caused the delay in treatment at the hospital? How did Ben deal with the problem, What was the doctor's response?

9. Was Gina's wound serious? Why didn't the doctor use stitches to close the wound?

10. What did Ben and his daughters do after Gina's emergency medical treatment?

11. Was Ben still upset about the incident four days later? How do you know? What did he do?

12. How did his wife behave toward him?

13. What did Ben achieve by crying? What would have happened, according to the author, if Ben hadn't cried,

Topics for Critical Analysis, Discussion, and Writing

1. In the United States, anyone who gives medical aid to an injured person can be held responsible for any damage caused by his or her help, no matter how well intentioned it may be. For instance, if a person uses cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) to keep an accident victim alive until an ambulance comes, but in the process breaks the victim's rib which punctures a lung and causes a long and expensive illness, an ungrateful victim may sue his or her rescuer for damages. In addition, chiropractors and other health care professionals who are not licensed physicians can get into serious trouble for giving medical care. As a result, many people are afraid to help accident victims. What are the laws in your country regarding giving help of this kind? Should the laws in the United States be changed? Why or why not?

2. Notice the economy of the article. What important details are included and what unnecessary information is excluded?

3. What is the theme or main idea of the article? What is the author's purpose in writing it?

4. Write an essay in which you discuss the appropriateness of Ben's tears. Should men be discouraged from showing their motions openly? Is it only acceptable for women to cry? Give and discuss specific reasons that support your views.

5. Identify all the people who refused be help Ben and examine their behavior. Why didn't they help? Should Ben forgive them? What if Gina had died?

6. What would you have done if Ben had asked you for help? Would you have driven him and his injured daughter to the hospital if it meant getting blood on the upholstery of your new car or becoming financially liable in some way?

7. Rewrite Ben's narrative as a positive experience.

8. Write a narrative about some emergency that you or a family member faced. Was it a positive or a negative experience? Explain.