

# OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 9 AND 10 WRITING/DIAGNOSTIC

NAME (FIRST AND LAST): \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Structure of a Personal Narrative Essay

(CLRC Writing Center, Santa Barbara City College)

*"Narrative" is a term more commonly known as "story." Narratives written for college or personal narratives, tell a story, usually to some point, to illustrate some truth or insight. Following are some tools to help you structure your personal narrative, breaking it down into parts.*

### Introduction

**The "Hook"** Start your paper with a statement about your story that catches the reader's attention, for example: a relevant quotation, question, fact, or definition.

**Set the Scene** Provide the information the reader will need to understand the story: Who are the major characters? When and where is it taking place? Is it a story about something that happened to you, the writer, or is it fiction?

**Thesis Statement** The thesis of a narrative essay plays a slightly different role than that of an argument or expository essay. A narrative thesis can begin the events of the story: *"It was sunny and warm out when I started down the path"*; offer a moral or lesson learned: *"I'll never hike alone again"*; or identify a theme that connects the story to a universal experience: *"Journeys bring both joy and hardship."*

### Body Paragraph

**"Show, Don't Tell"** Good story telling includes details and descriptions that help the reader understand what the writer experienced. Think about using all five senses—not just the sense of sight—to add details about what you heard, saw, and felt during the event. For example, *"My heart jumped as the dark shape of the brown grizzly lurched toward me out of the woods"* provides more information about what the writer saw and felt than, *"I saw a bear when I was hiking"*.

**Supporting Evidence** In a personal narrative, your experience acts as the evidence that proves your thesis. The events of the story should demonstrate the lesson learned, or the significance of the event to you.

**Passage of Time** Writing about the events of your experience using time chronologically, from beginning to end, is the most common and clear way to tell a story. Whether you choose to write chronologically or not, use transition words to clearly indicate to the reader what happened first, next, and last. Some time transition words are *next, finally, during, after, when, and later*.

**Transitions** In a narrative essay, a new paragraph marks a change in the action of a story, or a move from action to reflection. Paragraphs should connect to one another. For example, the end of one paragraph might be: *"I turned and ran, hoping the bear hadn't noticed me"*, and the start of the next might be: *"There are many strategies for surviving an encounter with a bear; 'turn and run' is not one of them."* The repetition of words connects the paragraphs. (What does the change in verb tense indicate?)\*

### Conclusion

**The Moral of the Story** The conclusion of a narrative include the closing action of the event, but also should include some reflection or analysis of the significance of the event to the writer. What lesson did you learn? How has what happened to you affected your life now?

**There are many kinds of personal narratives, including written ones, documentaries, and speeches. What elements of “narrative” do you recognize in the following three self-representations?**

### **Self-representation One**

(This personal essay was written by a high school senior, Kwasi Enin, who was accepted to all eight schools that he applied to, including all eight Ivy League Schools. According to a Business Insider article, Enin “scored a 2250 on his SAT, had taken 11 AP courses, and was in the top 2% of his graduating class, but that doesn't necessarily show him fully as an applicant. The answer could be in his college application essay.”

<http://www.businessinsider.com/college-essay-high-school-senior-into-every-ivy-league-university-2014-4>)

#### **A Life in Music**

A wrong decision can be the beginning or end to a lifestyle. In the seventh grade, I nearly ended my music career by opting to select a simple course—*Music in Our Lives*—that met the state music requirement. But this decision would have left me empty. With the help of Ms. Brown, my then orchestra teacher, I was able to not only meet the basic requirement, but also continue the beginning of my musical journey. I am not a violist who has joyously played for nine years. I also take music in my life. It is the first self-taught and the longest course I have ever taken.

Music has become the spark of my intellectual curiosity. I directly developed my capacity to think creatively around problems due to the infinite possibilities in music. There are millions of combinations of key signatures, chords, melodies, and rhythms in the world of music that wait to become attached to a sheet of staff lines and spaces. As I began to explore a minute fraction of these combinations from third grade onwards, my mind began to formulate roundabout methods to solve any mathematical problem, address any literature prompt, and discover any exist in an undesirable situation. In middle school, my mind also started to become adept in the language of music. Play the works of different composers, such as *Kol Nidrei* by Max Bruch and *Coriolan Overture* by Ludwig Van Beethoven, expands my diverse musical vocabulary, my breadth of techniques and my ability to practice in order to succeed in solo performances.

Music has also become the medium for my roles in the community. Whole onstage as Big Jule of *Guys and Dolls* during my favorite musical, I helped create a wonderful atmosphere in the school auditorium by singing and dancing. Whenever I perform, whether as a bassist in Men's Doo Wop Group or as a violist in Chamber Ensemble, I become immersed in the conversations between performers and the audience. As I become lost in these conversations, I create blissful memories in which I am truly part of my community's culture—and eventually its history. I would not have the admiration of my teachers and friends if I had not let the charisma of music persuade me to become a performer in my school, town, and state.

Lastly, music has become the educator that has taught me the importance of leadership, teamwork and friendship. It has taught me the importance of order and balance. When I lead a group, I know how strong that group can be if every member puts on hundred perfect effort into our task. Leadership is not always about directing others. The most important task of a leader is to create harmony between each

member of the group, which reveals the group's maximum potential. With improvement and balance comes success, and music taught me all of these virtues. The bonds I have made throughout my school years endure through stress. These powerful bonds came to me because my friends and I endured against the adversity found in high level pieces of musical literature. I thank my teachers, viola and voice for creating the environments that nurtured these friendships and learning experiences.

My haven for solace in and away from home is in the world of composers, harmonies and possibilities. My musical haven has shaped my character and without it, my life would not be half as wonderful as it is today. It was a wise decision to turn down the course Music in Our Lives. The self-guided journey know as music in my life excites my mind every day. My heart sings every day because the journey is always wonderful. Although I hope that my future career is in medicine, I love that I still have much to learn about and from the world of music.

### **Self-representation Two**

(A TED Talk)

<http://tedxteen.com/talks/tedxteen-2012/128-angela-zhang-breaking-down-the-unknown>

### **Self-representation Three**

**(A documentary short film about a skydiver's story of survival)**

<https://vimeo.com/143827216> ("Above All Else" by Yali Sharon)

### **Reflection/Discussion**

Which one did you enjoy the most? What makes a biographical narrative good? What narrative elements do you recognize in the three works?

## Outlining Your Narrative

(CLRC Writing Center, Santa Barbara City College)

### Introduction:

Begin your paper with a <b>“hook”</b> that catches the reader’s attention and <b>set the scene</b> . Where is the event set? What time of year? How old were you when this happened?	
State your <b>thesis</b> : what you learned, or how the event is significant to you.	

**Body paragraphs:** *write three significant moments from the beginning, middle, and end of the event.*

Para. 1: <b>Beginning Action</b>	Topic sentence: Detail 1.  Detail 2.  Detail 3.	<b>Note:</b> Don’t forget to <b>“Show, Don’t Tell”</b> : List sounds, smells, sights, tastes, and textures that you remember. Your experience is your “evidence”. Use <b>transition words</b> to mark the <b>passage of time</b> .
Para. 2: <b>Middle Action</b>	Topic sentence: Detail 1.  Detail 2.  Detail 3.	
Para 3: <b>End Action</b>	Topic sentence: Detail 1.  Detail 2.  Detail 3.	

### Conclusion:

<b>Analyze and reflect</b> on the action of the story, including how the events are significant to you.	
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### Writing Strategies to Consider

**First Person vs. Third Person** Narratives are a mode of writing in which writers often use first person perspective (“I saw”, “I did”). Check with your instructor to determine whether you can use “I” when telling your story.

**\*Verb Tense: Reporting vs. Reflecting** The events of most narratives are told in past tense: “As I hiked, I felt the warm sun on my back.” Use present tense when reflecting on the events: “Now I know how unprepared I was”. Notice the change in tense in this sentence as the writer reflects on the past event, from the present.