

Assignment Guide: The Personal Narrative

Assignment Prompt

For this assignment, you will be writing a personal narrative—a story—illustrating an event or experience exemplifying gratitude. In other words, share a colorful story about an experience or event for which—either during or after the event— you feel or felt thankful.

An example might be writing about your experience as a senior in high school and the teacher who helped you to achieve your goal of graduating and attending college. Another example might be writing a story about your experience growing up in a rural community, acknowledging that it was this small, but mighty, community that made you who you are today, and for this, you are thankful. Sharing a story about a loved one whose influence has been meaningful to you in some way, and thus, you feel so very thankful for their role in your life, or in that particular experience, would also be an example. Finally, [drafting](#) a story about any experience in your life for which you are thankful it occurred would be a great topic to explore for this narrative assignment.

Assignment-Specific Requirements:

Length: This assignment should be at least 550 words.

Thesis: Underline your descriptive [thesis statement](#) or the point of your story.

Sources/Evidence Needed: No outside/[secondary sources](#) are needed.

Page Formatting: See Appendix C - Formatting and Submitting Your Work

MLA Requirements: See Formatting your Essay: [MLA 8th Edition](#)

Rhetorical Mode

A personal narrative is a story about you. Narrative, from the Latin *narrare*, means to narrate a tale or a story. The narrative you will write will be a “personal” narrative. Thus, the story will be written by you, about you, and in a lot of ways, for you. What makes a personal narrative so interesting is that it’s a story with a point or purpose. In other words, a personal narrative is detailed, descriptive, [dialogue-driven](#), and determined to make a point.

Rhetorical Considerations

Purpose:

There needs to be a reason, not only for writing the narrative, but also for why the **reader** should read it. The purpose of the personal narrative is to share a meaningful experience and the lesson learned from the experience. Specifically, the purpose of this essay is to share a story about a time you experienced gratitude.

Audience:

In many ways, we write a personal narrative for ourselves to reflect upon an experience, to grow from an event. However, we want you to imagine that your **audience** is not only you but someone else. The writer needs to know who their **audience** is and how their needs will affect the way the narrative is composed and presented. For example, in addition to writing this story as an opportunity for personal reflection, you may also choose a family member or friend group as your real or imagined **audience**. Selecting a real or imagined **audience** will help you develop your essay with the right **tone**. The **tone** for a personal narrative can be formal or informal; it really depends on your chosen **audience**.

Form:

This piece of writing will be presented using a story format. It will have a beginning, middle, and end. The story will be written with a clear **introduction paragraph**, a body of **story-development paragraphs**, and a concluding paragraph. While a personal narrative is less “formal” than traditional academic writing, your story should have a **thesis statement**. Thus allowing the **reader** to truly understand the point of your story.

Six Features of a Personal Narrative

1. **Essay Organization:** The Personal Narrative is organized with a clear beginning, middle, and end. It should read like a story—with an **exposition**, a **rise action**, a **climax**, a **falling action** and a **resolution** or denouement. While the Personal Narrative is certainly less formal than other academic essays, the point or moral of the story (i.e. the **thesis**) should be very clear to the **reader**.
2. **Transitions:** The Personal Narrative utilizes **paragraph breaks** and **transitional** words and phrases that help the **audience** (or **reader**) flow in and around the story. Read more about paragraph **transitions** in Appendix A.
3. **Character Description:** Develop the **characters** in the story so that the **reader** has a clear understanding of the people in the story—even if the one person in the story is YOU. Help your **reader** learn about the **characters** both by what they say and by what they do.

4. **Sensory Details:** Develop a sense of **imagery** within the story using sensory-driven details. In other words, create a vivid story by helping the **reader** to see, hear, taste and touch just as the **characters** in your story do. Sensory details bring your readers into the story—into the experience you are sharing with them.

5. **Dialogue:** Use internal and/or external **dialogue** to connect the **characters** and help propel the story forward. **Dialogue** helps the writer to “show” rather than “tell” the story to the **reader**. Tips for formatting **dialogue** can be found in Appendix C.

6. **The Thesis** (the message driving your story): Your story’s point or purpose should be structured as a **thesis statement**. And this statement should be underlined. As the direction of your story must be made clear to the **reader**, it would naturally make sense that the point of your story or **thesis** appear somewhere within the first paragraph.