

Write a Narrative

1 GETTING THE IDEA

Narrative writing is writing that relates real or imaginary experiences to tell a story. All narratives have characters, setting, plot, and point of view. As you plan your narrative, think about these elements first.

Narrative Elements

- The **setting** is the time and place of the events that occur in the story. The setting will change depending on what kind of story you want to tell. If you're writing a science fiction story, the setting might be a planet in another galaxy.
- The **characters** take part in the action in your narrative. You can develop your characters through what they say, do, and think. Their actions will both reveal their personalities and lead to story events.
- The **plot**, or what will happen in your story, revolves around the main conflict. The conflict gives your characters a problem that they will solve during the course of the story.
- The **point of view** of your story affects how the story is told and how the reader experiences it. You might choose to write in first-person point of view, which allows you to explore the thoughts and feelings of a single character. Third-person point of view can be limited or omniscient. In third-person limited point of view, the author focuses on revealing one person's thoughts and feelings. In third-person omniscient point of view, the author tells the thoughts and feelings of several characters.

First-Person Point of View	Third-Person Omniscient Point of View	Third-Person Limited Point of View
I stepped out onto the stage to deliver my line. My hands were shaking, and my mouth was dry. I could see Suzanne smiling at me from the other side of the stage.	Jake had only one line in the play, and he timidly stepped onto the stage. Suzanne could tell that he was nervous, so she gave him an encouraging smile.	Jake stepped out onto the stage to deliver his line. He could feel his hands shaking, and his mouth was dry. He looked up to see Suzanne smiling at him from the other side of the stage.

Map Your Plot

Suppose you want to write a story about a boy named Nick who borrowed his father's favorite jacket without asking and then lost it. The settings for this story will be Nick's home and a nearby store. The characters will be Nick, a store owner, and Nick's father. You might plan out your plot using a chart like the one below.

Conflict	Event 1	Event 2	Resolution
Nick doesn't ask for permission to borrow his father's jacket, and then he loses it.	Nick goes out to a store wearing the jacket. Later, he realizes he doesn't have it.	Nick retraces his steps. He sees his father there in the store. The store owner is handing his father the jacket.	As Nick and his father walk home together, his father says he is getting so forgetful—he didn't even remember leaving his jacket at the store. Nick confesses, and his father praises his honesty.

Write Your Narrative Draft: Beginning to End

After you have decided on your setting, characters, point of view, and plot, you are ready to draft your narrative. Your goal is to write a well-organized draft that your readers can understand and enjoy. Here are some guidelines for keeping your writing clear and interesting.

Orient Your Reader Toward the beginning of a narrative, you want to orient your reader by establishing a context for the story. This includes describing the setting, introducing the main characters, and setting up the conflict.

- As you introduce the narrator and main characters, think about their "first impression" on the reader. Make the first thing they say or do in the story reflect something important about their personality or situation.
- Present the conflict early in the story so readers will want to read on to see how it is resolved.
- To grab readers' attention, you might start your narrative with an interesting description of the setting or characters. Or you might start in the middle of the action.

Order Events When you write a story, you need to be sure the event sequence unfolds in a logical way so readers can follow what happens first, next, and last. **Transition words and phrases** can help you convey sequence clearly, show time passing, or shift the setting. The chart shows some examples:

Transition Words and Phrases	Use
<i>First, Next, Then, Finally, After that</i>	shows order of events
<i>Back at school, As we arrived at the beach, When we walked through the door of the creepy old house</i>	shifts setting
<i>As dawn approached, After a long night of waiting, Later that afternoon, The next morning</i>	shows time passing or a jump in time

Pay attention to **pacing**, or how quickly the story moves. Try to keep a balance between action and description. All of the descriptive details you include should relate to the plot so that they don't slow it down. The sequence of events should lead toward a **resolution** of the story's conflict.

Add Description and Dialogue Description and dialogue help bring your narrative to life. When you write a **description**, use **sensory language** to tell how things look, feel, taste, smell, and sound. Using **precise language** will help your readers clearly picture the action. Writing lively **dialogue** can help you develop your characters by giving each one a unique voice.

Conclude the Narrative Your conclusion should resolve the story's conflict and end the story in a satisfying way. The ending shouldn't come out of nowhere but should make sense with the events that have already occurred.

Extend an Existing Narrative

Sometimes, you will be asked to continue a narrative that has already been started. To do this well, pay attention to how the author developed the characters, setting, plot, and theme. This can help you stay true to the narrative as you continue it.

As you continue the story, your plot events and conclusion will be up to your imagination. However, your writing should be consistent with earlier parts of the narrative. For example, any dialogue you write should reflect how the characters already speak. The events you write should make sense with what has already happened in the story. Return to the original narrative often to make sure you are continuing it in a way that makes sense.

Revise and Edit Your Narrative

When you revise, your goal is to put yourself in your reader's shoes. Think about whether someone reading your narrative would be able to follow it and whether he or she would find it interesting. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I establish a setting, characters, a narrator, and a conflict early in the story?
- Is the sequence of events clear and logically presented?
- Do I develop characters in an interesting way?
- Is there a consistent point of view?
- Do I use engaging dialogue and sensory description?
- Do I balance description and action?
- Does my ending follow naturally from the events in the story and resolve the conflict?

Editing is the time to double-check your grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Clarify confusing sentences, and make sure you use sentence variety. If you have time, read your story aloud to yourself or a partner.

Language Spotlight • Intensive Pronouns

When you want to emphasize who is doing the action in a sentence, you can use intensive pronouns such as *myself*, *themselves*, and *ourselves*. Though an intensive pronoun can make sentences clearer, if it is removed from a sentence, the sentence will still make sense. Look at the example below.

Nick decided he would find the jacket himself.

The intensive pronoun must agree with the person or people doing the action in the sentence. Which intensive pronoun correctly completes this sentence?

Nick and his father found the jacket _____.

2 COACHED EXAMPLE

Read the passage.

A Secret Civil War Soldier

Alice was the fourth of six children, and the only girl among five boys. She grew up in Massachusetts in the nineteenth century, surrounded by brothers who let her join in their games and outdoor adventures. When she started to grow tall, her mother tried to teach her ladylike behavior. When Mama wanted her to help in the kitchen, Alice would run and hide high up in the branches of the tallest elm tree till Mama got tired of looking for her. Then, she'd rejoin her brothers and continue from where they'd left off. When the Civil War started and her brothers enlisted in the army, it was only natural that Alice wanted to go, too.

"You can't come," said William as he stuffed an extra shirt into his haversack. William was sixteen, only two years older than Alice, and *he* got to go.

"Stay home with Mama," said Thomas. He was the oldest and spoke with more authority than Will.

"Leave the fighting to *real* men," Samuel added, mussing Alice's hair with one hand.

Alice felt her blood begin to boil. Her brothers sure knew what to do to make her mad. Will, Thomas, and Samuel said their goodbyes and walked down the road to meet up with some other young men who had enlisted. Alice, her parents, and her two younger brothers waved until the young men were out of sight.

As the weeks turned into months, life fell into a new rhythm. Alice was suddenly the oldest sibling in the house, with more household responsibilities. She did her own chores and many that her brothers had done before they left to fight. But Alice did not want to stay home and rip sheets into bandages with the other ladies. She wanted to be a soldier.

So one night, when her parents and younger brothers were asleep, Alice dressed herself in her brothers' clothes, packed a haversack for herself, and crept quietly out of the house. She stopped next to a stream and cut her hair short so she looked more like a boy. Her brothers were always filthy, so she rubbed some dirt on her face and hands. Now no one would mistake her for being ladylike. She walked to another town where she didn't know anyone and enlisted using the first name Daniel.

Growing up with so many brothers helped Alice fit in with her fellow soldiers. No one paid special attention to her, and the others treated her like one of the boys. She minded her own business and spoke as little as possible. She ate her meals alone or sometimes with her new friend, Charles, another quiet soldier. Charles was too young for fighting, but he helped prepare meals and keep track of the unit's medical supplies.

In the first few weeks, Alice and her regiment had a few skirmishes, and Alice knew worse was to come. Still, she was less afraid of battle than she was of her fellow soldiers discovering her secret. Her fear increased when a sharp piece of metal hit her left leg during a battle. A medic rushed over, but she waved him away. "It's nothing," she said, trying to hide the blood that was soaking through her wool trousers.

Alice knew she had to stay out of the medical tent. The medic gave weekly status reports to her commanding officer. And if the commanding officer found out her secret, she would be arrested. But if she didn't get a bandage, her leg could become infected.

Alice saw only one way out of this. She would reveal her secret to Charles, ask him to get her a bandage, and hope he didn't say a word.

Answer the following questions.

- 1** This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

How does the author establish a context at the beginning of the story?

- A. The author plunges the reader into an action-filled scene.
- B. The author uses lively dialogue between characters to give the reader a sense of who they are.
- C. The author describes Alice's home life to give the reader a sense of why she wants to become a soldier.
- D. The author starts with a detailed physical description of Alice to show the reader how she could pass for a young male soldier.

Part B

Which sentence from the text **best** supports your response to Part A?

- A. She grew up in Massachusetts in the nineteenth century, surrounded by brothers who let her join in their games and outdoor adventures.
- B. When she started to grow tall, her mother tried to teach her ladylike behavior.
- C. When Mama wanted her to help in the kitchen, Alice would run and hide high up in the branches of the tallest elm tree till Mama got tired of looking for her.
- D. Then, she'd rejoin her brothers and continue from where they'd left off.

Hint Reread the first paragraph of the story. What do you learn that gives you a sense of where and when the story takes place, and who will do the action?

2 Reread the following sentences from the passage.

She ate her meals alone or sometimes with her new friend, Charles, another quiet soldier. Charles was too young for fighting, but he helped prepare meals and keep track of the unit's medical supplies.

What details in the author's description of Charles set up the idea that Alice will go to him for help later in the story?

Hint Look at the details that the author gives about Charles in this excerpt. What do you know about his character that suggests that he might be able to help Alice?

3 Reread the sentences from the passage.

In the first few weeks, Alice and her regiment had a few skirmishes, and Alice knew worse was to come. Still, she was less afraid of battle than she was of her fellow soldiers discovering her secret.

Underline a transitional phrase the author uses in the sentences above.

Hint Remember that transitional phrases may be used to show time passing. Which words in the passage above refer to time?

