

2 Remembering an Event

Writing about the memorable events and people in our lives can be exhilarating. This kind of writing can lead us to think deeply about why certain experiences are meaningful and continue to touch us. It can help us understand the cultural influences that helped shape who we are and what we value. It can also give us an opportunity to represent ourselves and connect with others. In college courses, we can use our experience to better understand what we are studying; in the community, we can use personal stories for inspiration; and in the workplace, we can use experience to catalyze needed change.



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IN COLLEGE COURSES

For a linguistics course, a student writes an essay analyzing a recent conversation with her brother in light of a book she read for the class. Deborah Tannen's *Gender and Discourse*, in which Tannen argues that when discussing problems, women tend to focus on the problem and their feelings about it, while men typically cut short talk about feelings and focus on possible solutions. The student begins her essay by reconstructing the conversation with her brother, quoting some dialogue from her diary and paraphrasing other parts from memory. Then she analyzes the conversation. Using Tannen's ideas, she discovers that what bothered her about the conversation was less its content than her brother's way of communicating.



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IN THE COMMUNITY

As part of a local history series in a newspaper serving a small western ranching community, an amateur historian helps an elderly rancher write about the winter of 1938, when a six-foot snowfall isolated the rancher's family for nearly a month. The rancher talks about how he, his wife, and the couple's infant survived, including an account of how he snowshoed eight miles to get word to relatives. The details the rancher includes, like the suspenseful description of his exhausting trek, make the event vivid and dramatic for the newspaper's readers.



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IN THE WORKPLACE

A respected longtime regional manager gives the keynote speech at the highway department's statewide meeting on workplace safety. He opens his speech with a dramatic recounting of a confrontation he had with a disgruntled employee who complained bitterly about his work schedule and threatened the safety of the manager and his family. Setting the scene (a lonely office after hours) to help audience members enter into his experience, he describes the taste of fear in his mouth and his relief when a contractor entered the office. The manager follows the anecdote with data showing the frequency of such workplace incidents nationwide and concludes by calling for new departmental guidelines on how to defuse such confrontations effectively.