

Lesson 1 Personal Narrative

Have you ever written a true story about yourself and what you did? You were writing a personal narrative. A personal narrative is a true story an author writes about his or her own experiences.

Tanner wrote a personal narrative about going to work with his mom.

Shadowing Mom

School was cancelled today because the furnace broke. Mom didn't want me home by myself, so she took me to work with her. She is the Activities Director at a senior housing center. It's a place where older people live. Mom says they aren't sick, but they just couldn't keep up the homes they used to live in.

I figured I would just sit in her office and read. Mom had other ideas. Right after we got there, she announced that I would be the caller for the Thursday morning Bingo game. I knew better than to complain, but inside I was screaming. I'm way too old to play Bingo!

There were about 15 people in the dining room waiting to play. They were all talking and laughing. Mom introduced me and helped me get the game started. They all paid attention, even though there was still some talking and laughing going on. They got me to talk and laugh, too. They were teasing me about being too young to play Bingo. Now, that's a laugh!

Spending the day with those people made me realize that people with gray hair aren't just old people. They are funny, full of life, and still interested in the world. They made me feel very welcome. I wouldn't mind going to work with Mom again some day.

Here are the features of a personal narrative:

- It tells a story about something that happens in a writer's life.
- It is written in the first person, using words such as *I*, *me*, *mine*, and *my*.
- It uses time and time-order words to tell events in a sequence.
- It expresses the writer's personal feelings.

Lesson 1 Personal Narrative

Why do people write personal narratives?

They might want to share their thoughts and feelings. They might want to entertain their readers. Often, people write to share their experiences *and* to entertain.

Who reads personal narratives?

If you write a personal narrative, teachers, parents, and classmates might read it. As you think about your audience, ask yourself what you want to share with your readers. What might they learn about you?

What can personal narratives be about?

They can be about anything that actually happens to the author. It might be a happy or sad event, a silly situation or a frightening one.

So, what could you write a personal narrative about? Here are some idea-starters. Look them over.

the earliest holiday I remember
my first sports practice
my greatest accomplishment
the thing that makes me angry

my first day of school
the best family trip
my most embarrassing moment
my biggest challenge

What memories popped into your head as you read these idea-starters? Jot some notes about each memory. One of these could be the start of a great personal narrative!

Idea-starter: _____

Idea-starter: _____

Idea-starter: _____

Idea-starter: _____

Idea-starter: _____

Idea-starter: _____

Lesson 2 Time Order

In a personal narrative, readers need to know when things happen and in what order. Understanding the order of events helps readers put other ideas together, such as why something happened or what meaning an event had. That is what **time words** are for. Think of all the time words or phrases you can, and list them. Here are some ideas to help you get started.



after lunch

Monday

at dawn

yesterday

last week

October

Now, use some of the time words you listed. Write a sentence that could be from a personal narrative. Use a time word or phrase at the beginning of your sentence.

Write a sentence about something you did recently. Use a time word or phrase in the middle or at the end of your sentence.

Write a sentence about something funny or odd that happened to you. Use a time word or phrase at the end of your sentence.

Lesson 2 Time Order

In addition to time words, transition words help readers know when things happen and in what order. Here are some common transition words.

after	as soon as	before	during	finally	first
later	meanwhile	next	soon	then	when

Here is a paragraph that uses some transition words. Circle the transition words when you find them.

During homeroom, my name was called over the loudspeaker. I was supposed to go to the office. As soon as they heard it, my classmates gave me a hard time about being in trouble. My face was about as red as my sweater. When I got to the office, the principal had a really funny look on her face. She went to the window and pointed. Then, I knew what it was all about. My dog had followed me to school. He was sitting right beside the sign that read, "No pets, skateboards, or motorized vehicles on school grounds."

Use some transition words in sentences. Combine them with time words from the list on page 20 if you like.

Write about something that happens in the evening.

Write about two things that happen at the same time.

Write about three things that happen, each one after the other.

Lesson 3 Active Voice

Usually, the subject of a sentence does the action. That is easy to see in this sentence:

Germaine pitched the ball.

The verb in the sentence is an **active verb** because the subject does the action.

What about this sentence?

The ball was pitched.

First, is this a complete sentence? Yes, it is. It has a subject and a predicate. *Ball* is the subject of the sentence. Does the ball do the action? No, the ball does not do the action; the ball “receives” the action. The verb, *was pitched*, is a passive verb because the subject does not do the action.

Passive verbs are always two-part verbs. There is always one of these helping verbs—*am, is, was, were, be, been*—plus a main verb. Does that mean that whenever you see one of those helping verbs, you are looking at a passive verb? No!

Passive verb: Germaine was motioned to the dugout.

Active verb: Germaine was motioning to the manager.

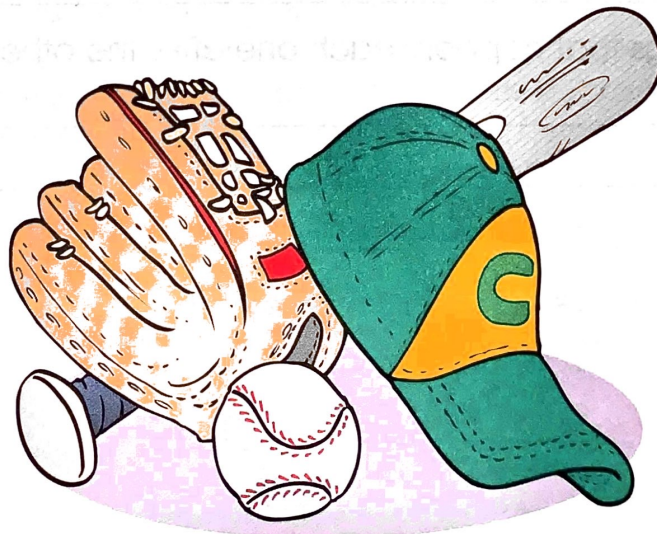
How can you tell the difference? Ask yourself these two questions:

What is the subject?

Is the subject doing the action?

If the answer to the second question is “yes,” then you have an active verb. If the answer is “no,” you have a passive verb.

Sometimes, passive verbs must be used. Maybe what did the action is not known: “A run was scored.” Most of the time, however, writing will be clearer and more interesting when writers use active verbs.



Lesson 3 Active Voice

Compare these two paragraphs. The one on the left is written mostly with passive verbs. The one on the right is written with active verbs. What do you notice?



The first game of the season was won by the Carver Colts baseball team. The first four innings were pitched by Jacob Harrell. Tim Moya was called in as relief pitcher by manager Hal Wells. Hits were made by four Colts team members. Runs were scored by just two of them, Shane Ranson and Mario Miranda.

The Carver Colts baseball team won the first game of the season. Jacob Harrell pitched the first four innings. Manager Hal Wells called in Tim Moya as relief pitcher. Four Colts team members made hits. Just two of them, Shane Ranson and Mario Miranda, scored runs.

Underline the subject of each sentence below. Put an **X** next to each sentence that contains a passive verb.

_____ Jacob pitched well.

_____ Some fans were showing poor sportsmanship

_____ The team was coached well.

_____ The opening pitch was thrown by the mayor.

Practice writing sentences with active verbs. First, look at the sentences above that have passive verbs. Rewrite one of those sentences with an active verb. If you need to, add a subject such as *I* or *we* to the sentence.

Now, write a new paragraph about baseball or another sport. Make sure you use an active verb.

Lesson 4 The Writing Process: Personal Narrative

Personal narratives can be about ordinary things. They don't have to be about the time you crash-landed an airplane, saved the lives of 17 people, and led everyone over a mountain to safety. If we had to wait for that to happen, almost no one would have anything to write about.

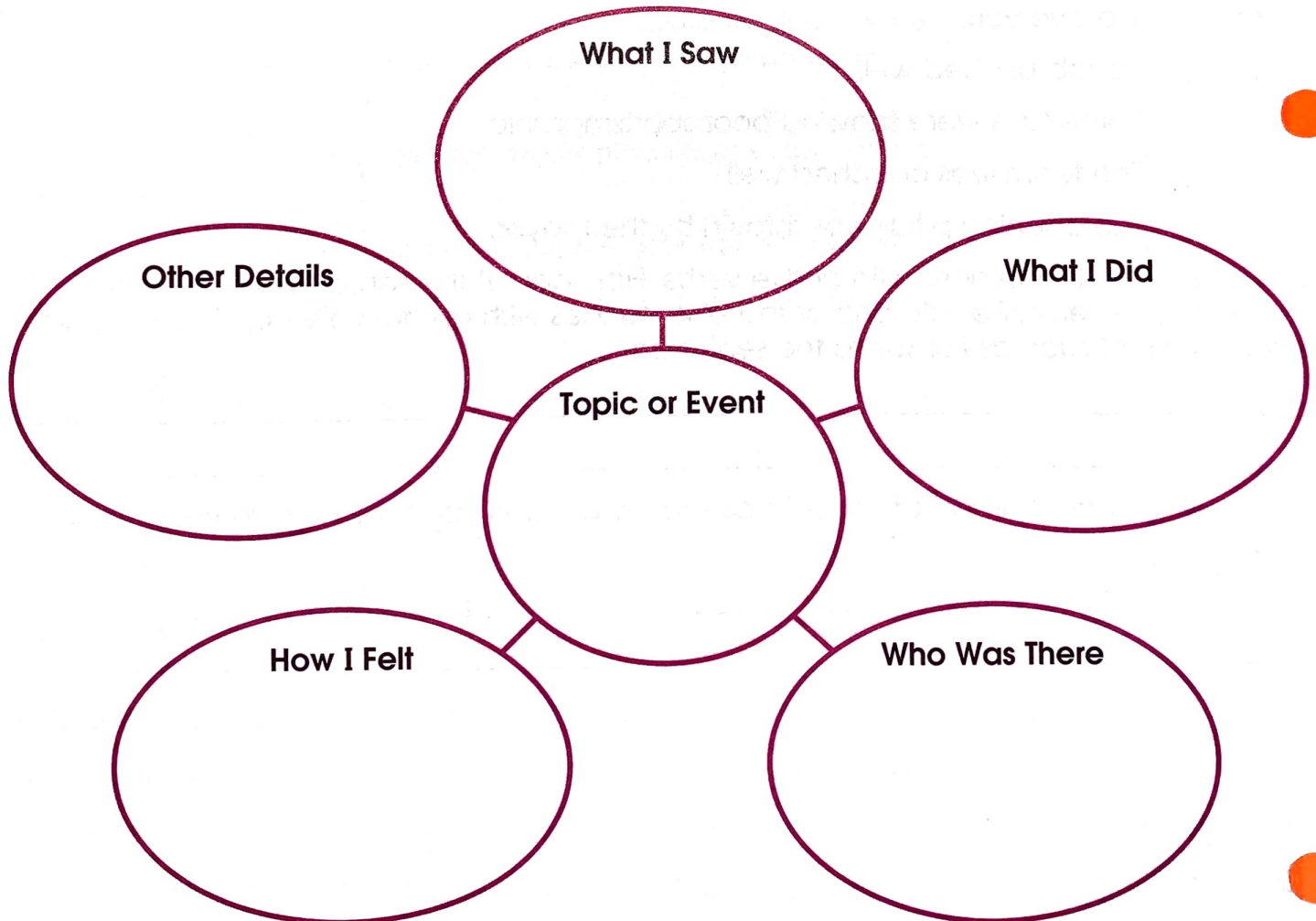
Remember the narrative you read on page 18? Tanner wrote about going to work with his mom. Nothing dangerous or exciting happened. It was just another day, and he learned something along the way. Follow the writing process to develop a personal narrative about one of your own regular days. Maybe you'll learn something along the way.

Prewrite

Look at the idea-starters on page 19 and the notes you made. Choose one of those ideas or another idea that you like, and begin to explore it here.

My idea: _____

Use this idea web to record details. Write down as many as you can.



Lesson 4 The Writing Process: Personal Narrative

So far, you have chosen a topic and recorded ideas. Now, it is time to put your ideas in order. Think about the "story" you are about to tell in your personal narrative. Use the sequence chart on this page to list the events in order. Do not worry about details yet.

A vertical sequence chart consisting of 10 rectangular boxes, each containing a horizontal line for writing. The boxes are connected by downward-pointing arrows, indicating a chronological order of events. There are orange and pink circular markers on the left side of the chart.

Lesson 4 The Writing Process: Personal Narrative

Revise

It is hard even for experienced writers to change their work. But every good writer does it. Writers must look closely at a first draft and make sure that it is as good as it can be.

Answer the questions below about your draft. If you answer “no” to any questions, those are the areas that might need improvement. Make notes on your draft about changes you might make later.

- Did you tell about just one “thing” in your narrative?
- Did you include details to make readers feel as if they are right there with you?
- Did you tell events in order? Did you use time and time-order words to show when events happened?
- Did you tell how you felt about the events? Do readers get a sense of your personal feelings?
- Did you use active verbs?
- Does your story flow well when you read it out loud?

Now, focus on making sure you connected with your audience. Did you remember to ask yourself questions such as: Who will read this personal narrative? What might they be interested in? What do they know about me? What might they learn about me from this narrative?

When Tanner wrote his personal narrative about going to work with his mom, he was not sure how to finish it. Finally, he decided his audience would be interested in how he felt about the day. Here is Tanner’s final paragraph from page 18.

Spending the day with those people made me realize that ~~those~~ ^{with gray hair} people aren't just old people. They are funny and full of life and still interested in the world. They made me feel very welcome. I wouldn't mind going to work with Mom again some day.


Lesson 4 The Writing Process: Personal Narrative

Proofread

Now, correct those last little mistakes. Proofreading is easier if you look for just one kind of error at a time. So, read through once for capital letters. Read again for end punctuation. Read a third time for spelling errors. Here is a checklist to help you proofread your revised narrative.

- _____ Each sentence begins with a capital letter.
- _____ Each sentence ends with the correct punctuation (period, question mark, or exclamation point).
- _____ Each sentence states a complete thought.
- _____ All words are spelled correctly. (If you're not sure, check a dictionary.)

When proofreaders work, they use certain symbols. Using these symbols makes their job easier. These symbols will make your job easier, too.

-  Three little lines under a letter mean that the letter should be capitalized.
- If there is a period missing, do this.
- Can you insert a question mark like this?
- Don't ever forget your exclamation points!
- Fix misspelled words like ~~this~~^{this}.

Use these symbols as you proofread your personal narrative. Remember to read your writing out loud, even if there is no one to listen. Sometimes, you hear mistakes you do not see.

Publish

Write a final copy of your personal narrative on a separate sheet of paper. Write carefully and neatly so that there are no mistakes.