

WRITE THE MEMOIR COURSE PACK

The Giving Tree Collective
**ENRICHMENT
STUDIO** *BY*

WRITE YOUR MEMOIR

BEGINS APRIL 11

WITH
WENDY BYARD



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WHAT IS AN ESSAY?

The different arts and humanities' subjects make their own particular demands on you. You may have to do various kinds of writing – diaries, logs, research papers, case studies – or even write creatively. However, the most common form of writing in arts and humanities' subjects is the essay of which there are many: informative, narrative, persuasive, observational, etc.

The word essay originally meant “an attempt” or try at something, but now it usually means a short piece of writing on a specific subject. It is a *complete* piece of writing that can stand alone – it must make sense to the reader “in itself”. One definition of an essay is by Frederick Crews, professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley. Crews defines an essay as “a fairly brief piece of nonfiction that tries to make a point in an interesting way.”

An essay is fairly brief. While writers will sometimes refer to book-length texts as “essays,” the term usually refers to short pieces that might be published in a magazine or newspaper. Length is never the primary consideration, though. Instead, the length of the essay should be based on whether the point, to the writer’s mind, has been completely discussed, argued, proven, related, etc. The well written essay has a completeness, a wholeness, about it.

Also, most essays have definable beginnings, middles, and endings; however, an essayist might take liberties with structure depending on his/her purpose and the writing strategies they choose to employ.

An essay is nonfiction. That means that the writer of an essay is trying to tell the truth, not merely entertain. A short story isn't an essay because it's fiction. To say that an essay is nonfiction doesn't mean that every word of an essay must be literally true. Hypothetical examples can be an effective way of illustrating a point, as can quotations from fictional works. But such imaginative illustrations should always serve the purpose of clarifying or illustrating a claim that the writer believes to be actually true, in the real world.

An essay tries to make a point – a thesis. This is perhaps the most important and most challenging aspect of the essay. An essay is not just a bunch of words, or even a bunch of paragraphs. An essay all fits together; it all points in one direction. An essay leads to one conclusion. This is what makes an essay different from, say, an article in an encyclopedia, which may be a relatively brief and interesting piece of nonfiction. An essay tries to make a point. It aims to support a single claim. Another way of putting it would be to say that an essay doesn't just have a *topic*; it also has a *thesis*. An essay doesn't just give information about a subject; it supports a statement, a claim made by the author.

Also, an essay tries to make a point in an interesting way. An essay is real writing; it is written to someone. Thus, its goal is to interest readers, to provoke them, to possibly change their thinking, get them involved in the ideas it presents, or even get them to adopt those ideas. It depends on what the author's purpose is for writing the essay. Regardless of the purpose, the essay must try to get and keep the attention of readers. That means catching and keeping their interest by incorporating a variety of tools/strategies/methods.

THE POWER OF NARRATIVE WRITING

by **Melissa Donovan | Feb 4, 2021 | Creative Writing**

What is narrative writing, and why is it so powerful?

The secret is out: narrative is powerful.

A narrative can entertain, inform, and persuade – but most importantly, it can forge deep, meaningful, and lasting connections.

What is Narrative Writing?

A narrative is a spoken or written account of events. The word narrative is often used interchangeably with story, because a narrative is structured like a story: it has a beginning, a middle, and an end (although it's not always presented in that order). A narrative can be true or fictional.

Narrative writing is the act of crafting a written narrative (or story), real or imagined. Here are a few different types of written narratives:

Novels, films, television shows, and plays are narratives.

A narrative essay is written like a short story, but it's an account of real events whereas a short story is fictional.

A short story is also a narrative.

Narratives also appear in speeches, advertisements, lectures, and even in personal encounters.

Have you ever shared a personal story about your life with someone? That was your narrative.

Personal essays, memoirs, and autobiographies are narratives.

We also use the word narrative when discussing how a story is written and structured. We might say that a narrative is messy or tight, that it lacks consistency, or that it's long and winding.

Narrative writing opportunities abound in industries in which stories are told. Some examples include filmmaking and television, marketing, and politics (speech writing).

But we all use narrative: stories are everywhere.

What is the Power of Narrative?

The word narrative is often thrown around by the media, politicians, and commercial enterprises. They understand the power of narrative, which can be used to spread a message, cultivate emotional connections, and control a story in the cultural landscape; in fact, narratives shape culture. Stories have a profound effect on people, from a single individual to the widespread masses.

Let's look at some examples of the power of narrative:

Narrative Changes the World: Consider Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani girl who was shot in the head at age fifteen because she wanted to go to school. Malala survived and went on to become a world-renowned advocate for education, focusing on regions of the world where girls are deprived of schooling. Malala's story, or narrative, was instrumental in making the world stage available to her so she could broadcast her message to the masses and affect positive change. In 2014, she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Narrative Creates Celebrity: Some celebrities excel at using narrative to build their brands and cultivate fans. Watch any music competition show and you'll see the contestants sharing their life stories, often emphasizing the difficulties or conflicts they've experienced. It's been said: conflict is story. When audiences see these contestants' struggles, they want to root for them, and a fandom begins to blossom. Throughout a celebrity's career, the narrative continues, as we watch their highs and lows. It can be a long, ongoing narrative that keeps the fans tuned in and buying books, movies, music, magazines, tickets, and more.

Narrative Wins Races: Politicians use narrative to build emotional and intellectual connections with the public, and as a tool of persuasion, but they are often more invested in controlling the story than sharing it. As they reveal their life stories to us, politicians pick and choose which bits to include, forging a selective narrative that emphasizes their strengths while downplaying their weaknesses. And the best narrative often wins while an unappealing or disagreeable narrative is a losing proposition.

Just as the brain detects patterns in the visual forms of nature — a face, a figure, a flower — and in sound, so too it detects patterns in information. Stories are recognizable patterns, and in those patterns we find meaning. We use stories to make sense of our world and to share that understanding with others. They are the signal within the noise.

So how do we find meaning in stories? How do we use stories to make sense of our world? Let's look to fictional and personal narratives for the answers:

Personal (Nonfiction) Narratives: Storytelling is used in memoirs and documentaries to convey true stories. When we hear about a devastating natural disaster on the other side of the world that affected thousands of people, it's difficult to put it into context. But when we hear firsthand accounts from survivors who describe what it was like to witness and experience the disaster — when we hear their narratives — we can better relate to the events that transpired. We begin to understand what it was like to be there, and our empathy gets engaged.

Fictional Narratives: Fiction is probably the most beloved form of narrative writing and story consumption. Books, movies, television shows, and video games give us made-up stories. Whether a historical novel that carries us into the past so we can gain insight on what it might have been like to live in a world without technology or a science-fiction film that takes us far into the future where technology has surpassed our wildest imaginations, fictional narratives, like true narratives, give us access to experiences that we'll never have and allow us to gain better understanding of the world we live in, and in some cases, the world we might someday live in.

The most successful narratives make the audience feel something. Let me say that again: the most successful narratives make the audience feel something. It is a narrative's ability to evoke emotion (and it can be any emotion) that determines its impact on individuals and groups. Narrative can make us laugh or cry, terrify or mystify us. They can fill us with awe and wonder and glory. Perhaps you've heard the old adage: "People will forget what you said and what you did, but they'll never forget how you made them feel."

Therein lies the greatest power of narrative: its impact on our emotions.

The Science of Narrative

Scientists have examined the power of narrative and made some fascinating discoveries, most of which confirm the experiences that we've all had with books, movies, and other forms of storytelling. It turns out that narrative directly affects the human brain, and its effects can be measured:

Narrative changes our brain activity.

It increases oxytocin synthesis, which increases empathy, trust, kindness, and cooperation.

It alters our emotional state, aligning it with the narrative we're experiencing.

It improves recall and increases attention.

That is real, proven power.

But let's get back to our business – the business of writing.

A Guide to Narrative Writing

Whether we write prose or scripts, narrative writing is a useful tool for sharing our thoughts, experiences, and ideas with others. We can use narrative to pose questions: What will happen when artificial intelligence becomes smarter than humans? What was it like to be aboard the Titanic? What is it like to climb Mount Everest? Or we can use narrative to share real events and experiences with the masses.

But how do we go about writing a good narrative?

There are several key elements that we find in successful narrative writing, which you can use as a guide while crafting a narrative of your own:

Setting: The backdrop of a narrative sets the stage and helps the audience enter a story world. Setting is crucial, even if it only takes a few words to establish.

Characters: They can be made-up characters or real people. Audiences develop relationships with characters; it is through this bond that we connect with stories on an emotional level.

Conflict: All the best narratives are built around a core conflict or story question. We stay tuned in because we want to see how the conflict gets resolved. We want to find out the answers to questions that the story poses and see how the characters solve the problems they've encountered.

Rising tension: As a narrative progresses, the tension increases. There are peaks and valleys, but the tension ultimately rises until the narrative reaches its climax.

Plot: Plot is what happens (the beats of a story) as the narrative follows an arc that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Arcs almost always result in meaningful transformation, which is one of the most appealing elements of narrative.

Action and dialogue: Action and dialogue are how we experience a narrative. The characters say and do things that move the plot forward.

Point of view: Who's telling the story? The voice of the narrative sets the tone for the tale. The narrative point of view gives us a particular perspective on the events taking place.

As you pursue narrative writing, ask whether you're including these essential elements and whether they're woven together seamlessly.

Have you tried your hand at narrative writing? What kind of narrative did you write? Did you aim to educate and inform, share your thoughts and ideas, or entertain audiences? Share your experiences with narrative writing by leaving a comment, and keep writing!

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NARRATIVE ESSAY

This narrative essay uses a personal story to communicate a meaningful point that has a true sense of value for its readers.

Overall Assignment Criteria

1. Your essay should have a **meaningful purpose and point** for a recognized audience.
2. Your essay should be a full **three pages** long, no more, no less.
3. It will be **typed and reflect MLA** (Modern Language Association) style guidelines.
4. You will turn in your essay, along with other assignments and all evidence of your writing process (prewriting, drafting, peer comments, etc.), in your binder. See the **Binder Checklist**.

Essay Criteria

1. A great **title**. Avoid boring, bland, predictable words and clichés. Make the title appropriate to the essay.
2. A great **grabber/hook**. Hook your readers from the start with something funny, scary, mysterious, thought-provoking, etc. Try dialogue or jump right into your story.
3. An **introduction** that provides the tone and the elements of setting: time, place, people involved, etc.
4. A **thesis** somewhere in the essay, typically in the beginning or in the conclusion, that reveals the point of the entire essay. The thesis must be worthwhile to readers!
5. Effective **organization**, which typically means a beginning, middle, and end. Some narratives contain flashbacks or other inventive arrangements.
6. **Substance** through description and details: concrete, specific details (names, places, brand names, etc.) and sensory details (describe sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches), dialogue, how people looked, behaved, and specific incidents and happenings.
7. **Other rhetorical strategies**: foreshadowing, parallelism, vivid and precise verbs, adverbs, and adjectives, climax, thoughts and feelings, syntax, powerful word choices, descriptive action verbs, and other writing strategies (metaphors/similes, alliteration, etc.).
8. Stay **unified** with your topic and thesis. Stick to your point.
9. Be **coherent**. In other words, sentences should flow smoothly and logically, one after another. Transitions help. For instance, when telling a story, use words like: suddenly, minutes later, the next day, etc. Also repeat key words. If the story is about courage, then the word courage and words like bravery, toughness, fearlessness, etc. should be sprinkled throughout.
10. A great **ending**! Avoid a mechanical 'dumping' of a lesson learned. Instead, incorporate thoughts, feelings, tone, and perspective throughout the essay.
11. Few to no **surface errors**. That means no misspellings, run-on sentences, fragmented sentences, etc.
12. **Tight writing**. Avoid rambling, repetition, and unnecessary words, descriptions, and details.

PROJECT SPECIFICS

Write a full 3-page essay (no more, no less) about an event in your past that has helped shape/influence you. Using the concepts covered in class and your textbook, you will write a narrative/memoir essay about an event in your past that is significant to the person you are today. Thus, the essay will have a thoughtful, meaningful point or thesis. Why should readers care about your essay? What will they learn, understand, believe, feel, and/or do as a result of reading it? Have a clear focus and avoid a simplistic point. Instead, do the necessary and challenging work of truly examining a past event in order to discover new and important meanings, connections, consequences, influences, etc.

Assignment Specifics

Your essay will be typed and reflect current MLA (Modern Language Association) style guidelines. In a narrow 3-ring binder, you will turn in your essay and various other assignments. A finder binder checklist will be provided.

Writing Process

- Prewriting Activities

1. Make a short list of events that have been significant in your life and in some way changed, shaped, or influenced you.
2. Free writing: Choose one event from this list and free write about it for two pages, focusing on the following questions:
 - Describe the event. What happened? What were the key moments? How did it build? What was the climax? How did it end?
 - Who was involved and why?
 - Where did it take place? Why might that be important?
 - Why did it occur?
 - How did you feel then? What did you think? How do you feel now? Think now? Why?
 - What have you learned? Might you do differently? How did the event shape, change, or influence you?
 - What do you remember about the event? Details? Conversations? Sensory descriptions (sights, sounds, smells, feelings, tastes)?
3. Engage in one other type of prewriting (webbing, charting, recording yourself, role playing, etc.).
4. Complete the Planning Sheet in this packet, which asks you to determine a purpose and a thesis. What is your point? Why is your point relevant/meaningful to them? What do you hope to accomplish?
5. Create an outline.

-Writing

Create a rough draft(s).

-Revising

1. Conduct reviews of your drafts, soliciting feedback to help you improve. Save reviews/feedback.
2. Use the "15 Great Writing Tips" to edit and revise your drafts. Revise several times. Save drafts.

-Publishing

Submit final paper and all other requested assignments in a binder per binder checklist. Consider entering Mott and state contests (Anna Bradley, other) and publishing your work online or in other media.

1. Have a **meaningful purpose** for readers, a true sense of value. What do you want readers to know, understand, feel, believe, appreciate, or do? Why? Also consider your **audience**. What do they know? Don't know? How would they benefit from your purpose and thesis?
2. Express your particular point clearly in a **thesis** that is to be placed in your introduction paragraph. Be sure to provide an overall **dominant impression of what you observed**.
3. The writer **interprets** the people, movement, patterns, details, etc., **throughout** the essay. It is not enough to simply convey objectively what you observed. Your job as a writer is to reflect deeply on what you experienced as the observer and then create meaning from it, expressing that point of view throughout the paper. Don't just wait for the conclusion to do this. Everything in the paper should support the thesis.
4. An effective **title** (compelling in some way): powerful, memorable, appropriate.
5. An introduction paragraph with an effective **hook/lead**, perhaps some **background on the subject, tone, purpose**, perhaps an indication of the **organization** to follow, and **thesis**. For this size paper, the introduction paragraph should not be longer than 1/2 to 2/3 of a page.
6. **Body paragraphs** that support the thesis. Every single paragraph should directly support the thesis. They should include details, descriptions, patterns, questions, thoughts, and feelings, and rhetorical devices; everything included should be directly *relevant* to the thesis. Cut out anything that is not directly related.
7. An **effective conclusion** (not simply a repeating of ideas or the introduction of new ideas. No rambling.).
8. An effective **organization**. How will you convey your observations? Smallest to largest? First to last? Around a room? Least significant to most? Things close to you, than close to others? Different people? Different objects? Chronologically? Will the organization be effective in achieving your purpose?
9. The essay reflects **substance** (well chosen details that are vivid, precise, concrete).
10. The essay reflects **unity** (Everything is included only to serve the thesis.).
11. The essay reflects **coherence** (In other words, sentences should flow smoothly and logically, one after another. Transitions help. For instance, when describing what you see, use words like next to, across from, behind the, two feet from, etc. Also repeat key words. If the observation is about living with freedom, then the word freedom and words like liberation, autonomy, emancipation, might appear throughout.)
12. There is **description** (describe sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches), dialogue, how people looked, behaved, patterns, specific incidents and happenings, details, etc.
13. There is a strong sense of **place**.
14. **Thoughts and feelings** are included. What was going on in your mind as you observed?
15. Use **powerful words**.
16. The writing is **tight** (no wordiness, rambling, and repetition).
17. The writing achieves a unique **personal style** using a variety of rhetorical methods: metaphors, tone, alliteration, personification, varied sentence length and structure, repetition, foreshadowing, humor, unique phrasing, anecdotes, examples, dialogue, description, slang, ways of speaking, etc.
18. The writing contains little to **no surface errors**: misspellings, run-on sentences, fragmented sentences, misuse of comma, problems with apostrophes, etc. Get proofreaders! Have it read several times for errors. Visit Purdue University's online website for help: OWL (Online Writing Lab). You also may call the Mott College Writing Lab for help: 810.762.0229.

A BASIC ESSAY (VS. WHAT WE ARE WRITING)

Below is a mechanically arranged essay (not too creative) in order to illustrate some often used conventions of the essay. Read it and underline these conventions: hook, thesis, topic sentences, support points, different types of paragraphs, and transitions.

"A dog is man's best friend." That common saying may contain some truth, but dogs are not the only animal friend whose companionship people enjoy. For many people, a cat is their best friend. Despite what dog lovers may believe, cats make excellent house pets as they are good companions, they are civilized members of the household, and they are easy to care for.

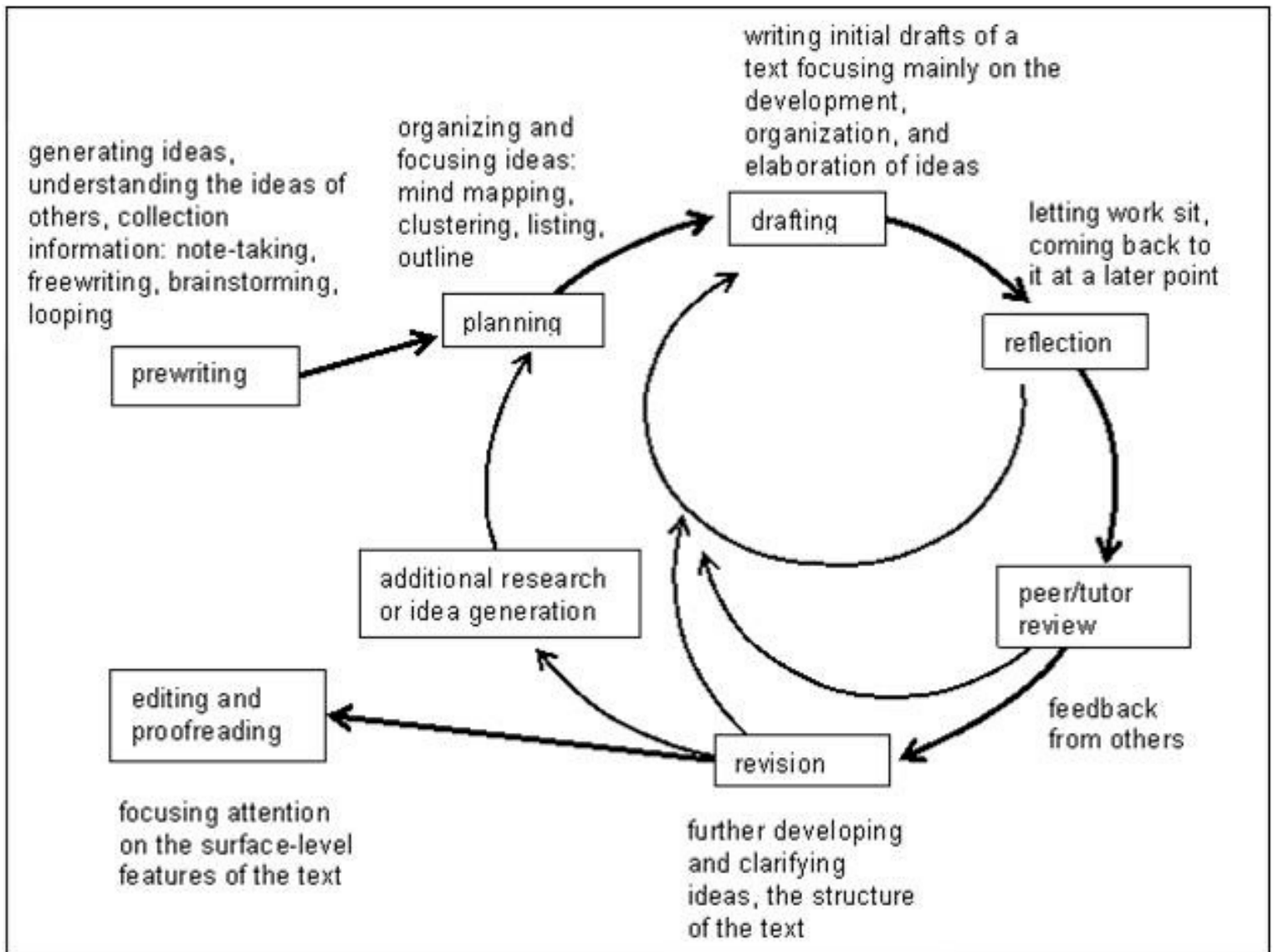
In the first place, people enjoy the companionship of cats. Many cats are affectionate. They will snuggle up and ask to be petted, or scratched under the chin. Who can resist a purring cat? If they're not feeling affectionate, cats are generally quite playful. They love to chase balls and feathers, or just about anything dangling from a string. They especially enjoy playing when their owners are participating in the game. Contrary to popular opinion, cats can be trained. Using rewards and punishments, just like with a dog, a cat can be trained to avoid unwanted behavior or perform tricks. Cats will even fetch!

In the second place, cats are civilized members of the household. Unlike dogs, cats do not bark or make other loud noises. Most cats don't even meow very often. They generally lead a quiet existence. Cats also don't often have "accidents." Mother cats train their kittens to use the litter box, and most cats will use it without fail from that time on. Even stray cats usually understand the concept when shown the box and will use it regularly. Cats do have claws, and owners must make provision for this. A tall scratching post in a favorite cat area of the house will often keep the cat content to leave the furniture alone. As a last resort, of course, cats can be declawed.

Lastly, one of the most attractive features of cats as house pets is their ease of care. Cats do not have to be walked. They get plenty of exercise in the house as they play, and they do their business in the litter box. Cleaning a litter box is a quick, painless procedure. Cats also take care of their own grooming. Bathing a cat is almost never necessary because under ordinary circumstances cats clean themselves. Cats are more particular about personal cleanliness than people are. In addition, cats can be left home alone for a few hours without fear. Unlike some pets, most cats will not destroy the furnishings when left alone. They are content to go about their usual activities until their owners return.

Cats are low maintenance, civilized companions. People who have small living quarters or less time for pet care should appreciate these characteristics of cats. However, many people who have plenty of space and time still opt to have a cat because they love the cat personality. In many ways, cats are the ideal house pet.

Writing Process



WRITING PROCESSES

Different Writing Processes

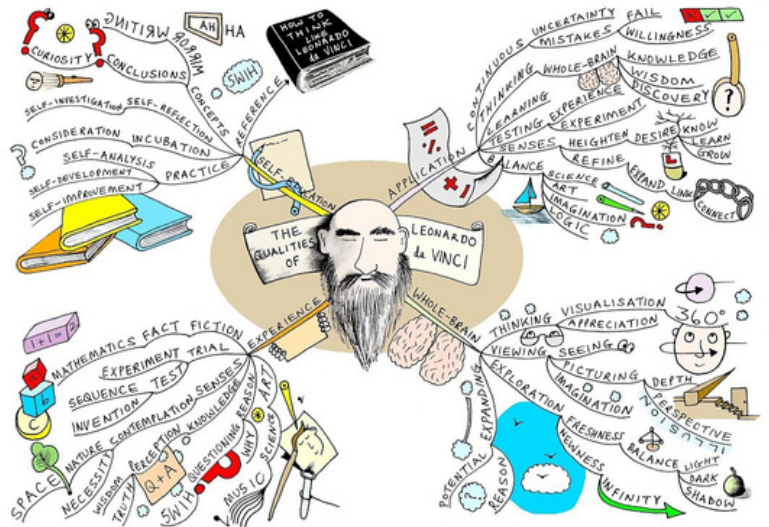
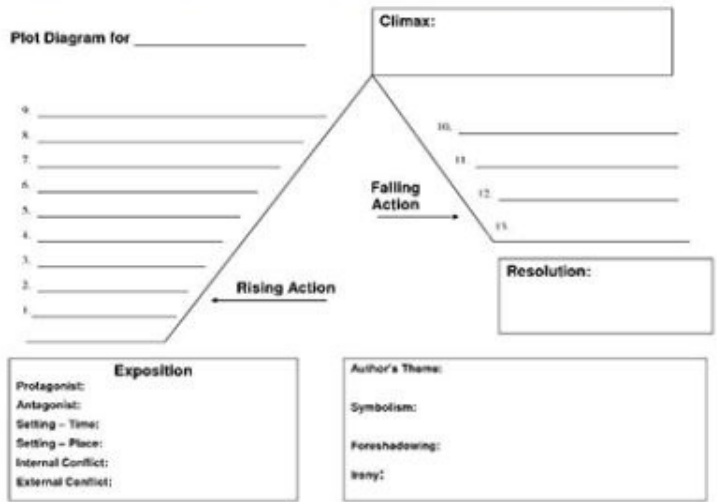
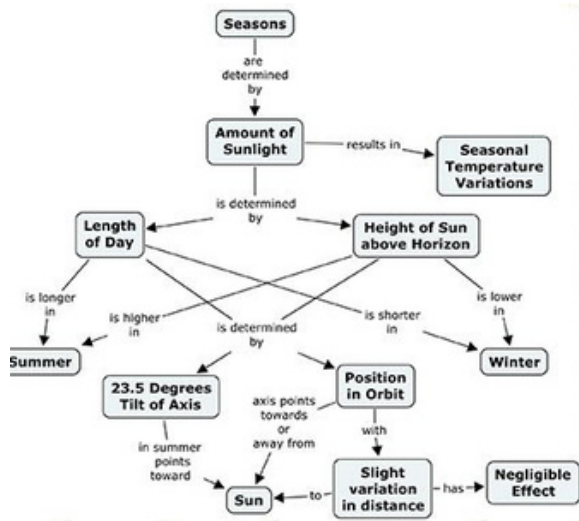
3 Step Writing Process	4 Step Writing Process	5 Step Writing Process	6 Step Writing Process	7 Step Writing Process
Step 1: Planning	Step 1: Pre-writing	Step 1: Brainstorming	Step 1: Pre-writing	Step 1: Planning
Step 2: Writing	Step 2: Writing	Step 2: Preparing/ Research	Step 2: Drafting	Step 2: Drafting
Step 3: Completing	Step 3: Revising	Step 3: Drafting	Step 3: Revising	Step 3: Sharing
	Step 4: Editing	Step 4: Revising	Step 4: Editing	Step 4: Evaluating
		Step 5: Proofreading/ Publishing	Step 5: Publishing	Step 5: Revising
			Step 6: Marketing/ Reflecting	Step 6: Editing
				Step 7: Publishing

METHODS OF GENERATING TOPICS

1. Make a list of emotions (sad, angry, joyful, ecstatic, grieving, heartbroken, fearful, depressed, etc.). What events in your life do you associate with these feelings?
2. Write down Categories: work, church, soccer field, football game, store, concert, restaurant, home, family member's House, driving, etc.). What meaningful events happened at some places?
3. Review your social media feeds (posts and photos): FB, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. for meaningful past events.
4. Review your photo albums, memorabilia, saved cards.
5. Look around your home/garage for ideas. Carefully review the objects in your home and what they might trigger.
6. Talk to your friends and family about impactful events in your life.
7. Consult your diary, journal, etc.
8. Engage in free flow writing about your life.
9. Use story prompts (see link on Wendy's website).

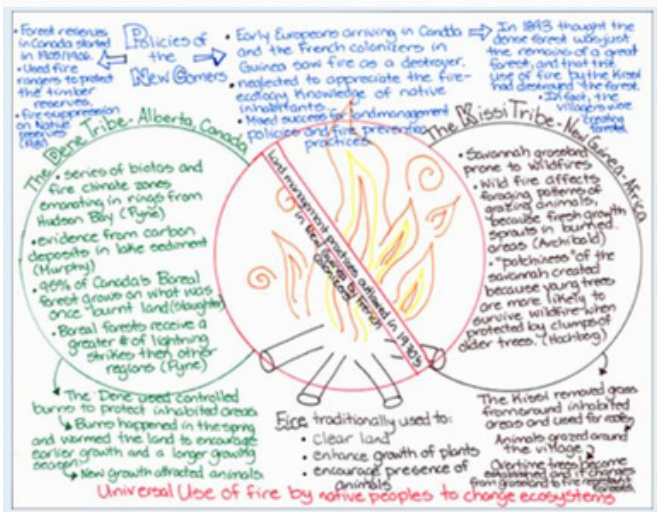
PREWRITING ACTIVITIES

- Freewriting
 - Sketching
 - Brainstorming
 - Listing
 - Mapping
 - Journalist questions: who, what, when, why, where?
 - Dialoguing (talking with others)
 - Interviewing
 - Researching: internet, library, news, interviews
 - Journaling
 - Graphic Organizers
 - Online tools (MindMeister, Bubbl, XMind, Mindomo, other)
 - Reviewing memorabilia, social media, pictures
 - Planning for audience and purpose
 - Outlining (consider) order: chronological, spatial, order of importance, other
-



Brainstorming Strategy #1: Listing

1. Write down every idea you have.
2. Stuck? Set a timer for 10 minutes.
3. List until timer goes off.
4. Look for patterns of thoughts.
5. Cross out useless or irrelevant material.
6. Group the remaining items in categories.
7. Elaborate.



Prewriting (Invention) General Questions

Beyond the strategies outlined in the previous section, these questions might help you begin writing.

Explore the problem — not the topic

1. Who is your reader?
2. What is your purpose?
3. Who are you, the writer? (What image or persona do you want to project?)

Make your goals operational

1. How can you achieve your purpose?
2. Can you make a plan?

Generate some ideas

Brainstorm

- Keep writing
- Don't censor or evaluate
- Keep returning to the problem

Talk to your reader

- What questions would they ask?

Take a rest and let it all percolate.

Summarize your whole idea.

Tell it to someone in three or four sentences.

Diagram your major points somehow.

Make a tree, outline, or whatever helps you to see a schematic representation of what you have. You may discover the need for more material in some places. Write a first draft.

Then, if possible, put it away. Later, read it aloud or to yourself as if you were someone else. Watch especially for the need to clarify or add more information.

You may find yourself jumping back and forth among these various strategies.

You may find that one works better than another. You may find yourself trying several strategies at once. If so, then you are probably doing something right.

THE WRITING PROCESS: INVENTION

WRITING TAKES TIME

Find out when is the assignment due and devise a plan of action. This may seem obvious and irrelevant to the writing process, but it's not. Writing is a process, not merely a product. Even the best professional writers don't just sit down at a computer, write, and call it a day. The quality of your writing will reflect the time and forethought you put into the assignment. Plan ahead for the assignment by doing pre-writing: this will allow you to be more productive and organized when you sit down to write. Also, schedule several blocks of time to devote to your writing; then, you can walk away from it for a while and come back later to make changes and revisions with a fresh mind.

USE THE RHETORICAL ELEMENTS AS A GUIDE TO THINK THROUGH YOUR WRITING

Thinking about your assignment in terms of the rhetorical situation can help guide you in the beginning of the writing process. Topic, audience, genre, style, opportunity, research, the writer, and purpose are just a few elements that make up the rhetorical situation.

Topic and audience are often very intertwined and work to inform each other. Start with a broad view of your topic such as skateboarding, pollution, or the novel *Jane Eyre* and then try to focus or refine your topic into a concise thesis statement by thinking about your audience. Here are some questions you can ask yourself about audience:

- Who is the audience for your writing?
- Do you think your audience is interested in the topic? Why or why not?
- Why should your audience be interested in this topic?
- What does your audience already know about this topic?
- What does your audience need to know about this topic?
- What experiences has your audience had that would influence them on this topic?
- What do you hope the audience will gain from your text?

For example, imagine that your broad topic is dorm food. Who is your audience? You could be writing to current students, prospective students, parents of students, university administrators, or nutrition experts among others. Each of these groups would have different experiences with and interests in the topic of dorm food. While students might be more concerned with the taste of the food or the hours food is available, parents might be more concerned with the price.

You can also think about opportunity as a way to refine or focus your topic by asking yourself what current events make your topic relevant at this moment. For example, you could connect the nutritional value of dorm food to the current debate about the obesity epidemic or you could connect the price value of dorm food to the rising cost of a college education overall.

KEEP IN MIND THE PURPOSE OF THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

Writing can have many different purposes. Here are just a few examples:

- Summarizing: Presenting the main points or essence of another text in a condensed form
- Arguing/Persuading: Expressing a viewpoint on an issue or topic in an effort to convince others that your viewpoint is correct
- Narrating: Telling a story or giving an account of events
- Evaluating: Examining something in order to determine its value or worth based on a set of criteria.
- Analyzing: Breaking a topic down into its component parts in order to examine the relationships between the parts.
- Responding: Writing that is in a direct dialogue with another text.
- Examining/Investigating: Systematically questioning a topic to discover or uncover facts that are not widely known or accepted, in a way that strives to be as neutral and objective as possible.
- Observing: Helping the reader see and understand a person, place, object, image or event that you have directly watched or experienced through detailed sensory descriptions.

ASK YOURSELF WHAT YOUR PURPOSE IS FOR WRITING ABOUT THE SUBJECT.

There are many "correct" things to write about for any subject, but you need to narrow down your choices. For example, your topic might be "dorm food." At this point, you and your potential reader are asking the same question, "So what?" Why should you write about this, and why should anyone read it?

Do you want the reader to pity you because of the intolerable food you have to eat there?

Do you want to analyze large-scale institutional cooking?

Do you want to compare Purdue's dorm food to that served at Indiana University?

ASK YOURSELF HOW YOU ARE GOING TO ACHIEVE THIS PURPOSE.

How, for example, would you achieve your purpose if you wanted to describe some movie as the best you've ever seen? Would you define for yourself a specific means of doing so? Would your comments on the movie go beyond merely telling the reader that you really liked it?

START THE IDEAS FLOWING

Brainstorm. Gather as many good and bad ideas, suggestions, examples, sentences, false starts, etc. as you can. Perhaps some friends can join in. Jot down everything that comes to mind, including material you are sure you will throw out. Be ready to keep adding to the list at odd moments as ideas continue to come to mind.

Talk to your audience, or pretend that you are being interviewed by someone — or by several people, if possible (to give yourself the opportunity of considering a subject from several different points of view). What questions would the other person ask? You might also try to teach the subject to a group or class.

See if you can find a fresh analogy that opens up a new set of ideas. Build your analogy by using the word like. For example, if you are writing about violence on television, is that violence like clowns fighting in a carnival act (that is, we know that no one is really getting hurt)?

ANALYZING THE ESSAY BY PARAGRAPH

Criteria by Paragraphs

Introduction Paragraph

- Hook/Grabber
- Setting Elements (who, what, where, when, weather, time of day, other)
- Possible thesis placement in Introduction
- Thesis is clear, precise, insightful, and meaningful.
- Narrative chosen best supports intended thesis.

Body Paragraphs

- Must stick to and support thesis
- Paragraphs are comprised of action, dialogue, new locations, descriptions (sensory imagery: sight, sounds, tastes, smells, touch), details/specifics, and other rhetorical strategies (analogies, personification, foreshadowing, alliteration, parallelism, variety in syntax, use of punctuation for effect, changes in voice, other)
- Dialogue gets its own paragraph. Paragraphs change with new speakers.
- Possibly a climax. Should be highly developed.
- The body should be rich in description and detail. Allow the reader to truly live in the moment. Show, not tell.
- Use powerful words. Use precise, vivid verbs.
- Include thoughts and feelings.
- In a narrative, paragraphs are not lengthy. They are typically shorter to reveal action, changes in location, people, etc., or provide dialogue.
- Use transitions (next, suddenly, five minutes later, around the corner)
- Provide depth of thought, not the simplistic and expected.
- Organization is logical and effective

Conclusion Paragraph

- Sticks to the thesis.
- Is not too long
- Does not become dis unified with the thesis.
- Does not ramble, repeat, or have a disorganized order.
- Does not include new, previously unsupported/undeveloped points.
- Has a great final line.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER FOR THE NARRATIVE ESSAY

- o Is the thesis **clear and meaningful** to readers? How do they benefit from the truth(s), knowledge, understanding you've gained? Remember: You need to universalize your learning, so your readers *truly benefit* from your experience.
 - o Is the story you've chosen the **best story** to support your thesis?
 - o According to the assignment, is your story a **moment in time** and not drawn out over weeks, months, or years?
 - o Do you **avoid the simplistic**? Have you really done the mental work to develop insights worthy of your readers' time? People will be disappointed with a shallow insight/lesson/point.
 - o **Don't overwhelm** by giving the reader too many lessons. Focus in on a particular point.
 - o Don't simply **recite a story** and then **tack on a lesson** in the conclusion. Throughout the entire narrative, reveal your thoughts and feelings all the while interpreting the events so that they lead to the conclusion. Don't just tell an objective story and then hit the readers with the light bulb moment.
 - o **Focus your description and elaboration on the aspects of the narrative that actually need precision and detail.** Be careful not to focus on aspects that aren't necessary to support your thesis. Instead, think: what does the reader need to see, experience, and understand in order to most fully grasp my point? Cut the rest out!
 - o Does author **show** the reader instead of simply telling, so that the reader can **experience** for him/herself? **See** for him/herself?
 - o Is there **substance**? In other words, are there sufficient details, experiences, thoughts, feelings, examples, and descriptions -- all vivid -- to make the piece powerful and memorable? Will readers really feel like they have lived your experience? Lived that moment?
-
- o Do the descriptions help accomplish the **overall purpose** of the essay and stick to the main idea? Or are many of the descriptions, while nice, irrelevant to the main point? The details and descriptions are only there to directly support the point being made.

- o Is this actually a story with a **beginning, middle, end -- and a climax**? Once you get to the climax, **don't rush past** it. This is usually the transforming moment of the entire story! Be sure to do it justice! Elaborate on your feelings, thoughts, what was going on, what you remember. Let us experience it with you, so we understand why it was so transforming.
 - o Does the **introduction paragraph** contain the necessary setting elements? Is the thesis placement effective? Is there a great **hook/grabber**?
 - o Are the **body paragraphs** well organized? Do they break in logical places? For a narrative essay, are any of the paragraphs too long?
 - o Is **dialogue** given its own paragraph? Does each new speaker get his/her own paragraph?
 - o Is the **conclusion paragraph** too long? Drag on? Contain new points that were not supported earlier? Become disunified with the thesis? Ramble? Is it boring? Weak? Lacks punch? Is the final line outstanding?
 - o Do the descriptions ever become **overdone**? **Too much** of a good thing?
 - o Is the diction **fresh**, not full of clichés?
 - o Does the essay convey the writer's **personal style** and observations through the use of various **rhetorical strategies**? Do you come across as a unique person in the world? Do you reveal your own way of speaking? Thinking? Feeling?
 - o Does the writer let **surface errors** (misspellings, run-on sentences) get in the way of the content?
 - o Is the essay in **correct MLA style**?
 - o Make sure the **title grabs people's attention and is appropriate** to the essay. This might seem creative: *The Lollipop Sure Tasted Good that Day*. But when the reader finds out it's a narrative about the day your grandma died in a snowmobile accident, it may seem really odd.
 - o Have surface errors been corrected? (Fragmented sentences, run on sentences, misspellings, incorrect or missing punctuation, other)
-

ANSWERING QUESTIONS AS A MEANS OF PREWRITING

Answer the following

1. Why do you think this are you able to recall it
2. What emotions did you do you feel now?
3. How do you think this
4. What regrets do you have, if any? How would you change your behavior?
5. How would you be different if this event had never occurred?
6. What did this event teach you about yourself? About others? About life?
7. Can you go beyond your answer to #5? Are there richer, deeper answers?
8. Why is the sharing of this story and your perspective meaningful to your audience?



questions.

event is important to you? Why fairly easily? feel at the time? What emotions

event changed you?

NARRATIVE ESSAY PLAN SHEET

1. What is my essay/memoir about?
2. What is the thesis/point of my essay? What exactly am I trying to say to my readers?
3. Why/how will this thesis/point be meaningful to my readers? Why will they care to read my essay, and why will they be glad they read it? Of what use will my essay be to them?
4. What void (exigency) do I perceive in my readers that my essay will fill? In other words, if readers already know/understand what I am saying, then my essay is not worth their time. However, I think that there is something in my essay that readers currently lack. It is:
5. What is my purpose? What do I hope to achieve? What do I want my readers to know, understand, believe, feel, and/or do as a result of reading my essay?

HELPFUL WRITING TIPS

1. Print out your work and then review it.

Seeing your work in a new context, printed versus on the computer screen, may help you catch errors or sense areas needing revision.

2. Read slowly.

You need to focus. So, slow down!

3. Cover portions of your work as you proofread it.

Get a piece of paper or a book to cover the later portions of your work. This helps you to focus on only one section at a time instead of reading ahead.

4. Read your composition out loud.

When you read your work out loud, you use two areas of your brain. This gives you more opportunity to catch any errors or sense any areas needing revision.

5. Role play.

As you read your work, picture yourself in front of your classmates, coworkers, or audience members. How will they respond to your work? What will they notice?

6. Get a partner and take turns. One reads the work out loud, while the other follows along, looking for errors.

This can be a great technique for catching mistakes. It's fun, too!

7. Read your composition backward, sentence by sentence.

This might seem silly or awkward, but reading your work backward, sentence by sentence, can insure that you focus on one sentence at a time. Typically, when we read top to bottom, we read ahead or don't focus as closely since we know what is coming. Thus, we might not catch errors or revision areas. Try it.

8. Read your work several times, each time focusing on only one specific error area.

Our brains only can perform so many tasks at once. We can't expect it to catch every error simultaneously. Therefore, proofread your work for one or two error areas at a time. Then, go back later and look for another one or two.

9. Read your work and then set it aside for a while before further review.

The brain needs time to think, consider, clarify, assimilate, infer, and engage in its many other functions. So, read over your composition and then set it aside. Give your brain time to ponder. When you come back to your composition with fresh eyes, you'll catch more errors and sense more revision areas.

10. Learn what error areas give you the most trouble.

Each of us has error areas that give us trouble. For some, it may be the possessive apostrophe. For others, subject-verb agreement. Learn what areas cause you difficulty and then do something about it! For example, visit Internet sites devoted to that error area. Purchase a punctuation guide and continue studying. When having your work reviewed, ask the reviewer to look specifically for that error. And, of course, keep a list of your errors handy when proofreading your own work.

11. Keep a list of your commonly misspelled words.

We all have words we misspell, tricky words like to, two, and too. So, create a list of the words you often misspell and a description of how to use them correctly. Then, proofread your work for these errors. You can use a spell checker, but don't count on it to catch every mistake.

12. Have several people review your composition and give you feedback.

One set of eyes is good. Two or more are better. So, give your composition to a few people you trust in order to receive helpful feedback. If you know of a writing lab, go and meet with its reviewers. You also may find reviewers in your class, at your office, on the Internet, or at your local printing shop.

13. Read other materials in between proofreading your paper.

When you keep rereading the same work, your brain might quit looking as closely for mistakes. Instead, read something different in between so your brain will approach your work as a fresh activity.

14. Leave yourself enough time!

Proofreading and copy editing take time. So, plan for these activities, and don't rush them. A polished paper is a wondrous thing!

15. Continue to review grammar and punctuation rules.

These rules aren't easy to remember. So, make a list of the ones that cause you trouble. Purchase a grammar and punctuation book or visit an Internet site occasionally to review the rules. Even keep a journal of your problem areas.

REVISION ACTIVITIES

1. Locate ten words that could be improved. Circle them and replace them with words that are more vivid, concrete, precise, and/or powerful. Consider using [thesaurus.com](https://www.thesaurus.com).
2. Include two metaphors in the essay (a metaphor does not use the words like or as. It is a direct comparison.).
3. Include two similes in the essay (similes use the words like and as).
4. Take one area of description and elaborate on it: make it more precise, detailed, and vivid.
5. Find three items that could be more detailed (not a car but a crimson red '57 Ford Pickup).
6. Include one item of sensory imagery for smell and touch. Make them relevant somehow.
7. Include two-three phrases/clauses/or sentences of repetition.
8. Include two-three phrases/clauses/or sentences of parallelism.
9. Rewrite the final two-three lines so they shine for their syntax (sentence structure).