

Learning something new can be a scary experience. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was learn how to swim. I was always afraid of the water, but I decided that swimming was an important skill that I should learn. I also thought it would be good exercise and help me to become physically stronger. What I didn't realize was that learning to swim would also make me a more confident person.

New situations always make me a bit nervous, and my first swimming lesson was no exception. After I changed into my bathing suit in the locker room, I stood timidly by the side of the pool waiting for the teacher and other students to show up. After a couple of minutes the teacher came over. She smiled and introduced herself, and two more students joined us. Although they were both older than me, they didn't seem to be embarrassed about not knowing how to swim. I began to feel more at ease.

We got into the pool, and the teacher had us put on brightly colored water wings to help us stay afloat. One of the other students, May, had already taken the beginning class once before, so she took a kickboard and went splashing off by herself. The other student, Jerry, and I were told to hold on to the side of the pool and shown how to kick for the breaststroke. One by one, the teacher had us hold on to a kickboard while she pulled it through the water and we kicked. Pretty soon Jerry was off doing this by himself, traveling at a fast clip across the short end of the pool.

Things were not quite that easy for me, but the teacher was very patient. After a few more weeks, when I seemed to have caught on with my legs, she taught me the arm strokes. Now I had two things to concentrate on, my arms and my legs. I felt hopelessly uncoordinated. Sooner than I imagined, however, things began to feel "right" and I was able to swim! It was a wonderful free feeling - like flying, maybe - to be able to shoot across the water.

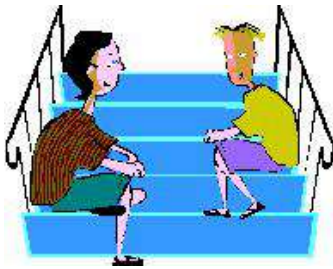
Learning to swim was not easy for me, but in the end my persistence paid off. Not only did I learn how to swim and to conquer my fear of the water, but I also learned something about learning. Now when I am faced with a new situation I am not so nervous. I may feel uncomfortable to begin with, but I know that as I practice being in that situation and as my skills get better, I will feel more and more comfortable. It is a wonderful, free feeling when you achieve a goal you have set for yourself.

1. The sample essay begins with a general statement, "Learning something new can be a scary experience." This statement introduces the subject of the essay, which is a particular learning experience that the author had. The use of "I" in the essay indicates that what is being described is a personal experience.
2. The essay is essentially a story about something that happened. The author gives sufficient details about the people, place, and events so that the reader gets a clear idea of how the author feels about them. In the essay, the author "stood timidly" and the teacher "smiled" and was "patient." These words indicate the author's fears and the sense of security provided by the teacher who helped the author get over her fear.
3. In the final paragraph of the essay, the author reflects on the larger meaning or importance of the experience described. The author concludes that learning to swim has helped her to feel more confident about herself in other new situations. The idea that self-confidence comes from conquering your fears is something that all people can relate to. This is the point of the story.
4. The essay is well-organized. After the introduction, the author describes the experience as it happened in time -- going to the pool the first day, having the first lesson, and the result of the subsequent lessons. The author might have chosen, however, to talk about the things she learned in order of their importance or difficulty.
5. The writing in an essay should be lively and interesting. Try to engage the reader's interest by adding details or personal observations. Sharing

personal thoughts and details invites the reader into author's world and makes the story more personal and more interesting. The sample essay begins with a general statement, "Learning something new can be a scary experience." This statement introduces the subject of the essay, which is a particular learning experience that the author had. The use of "I" in the essay indicates that what is being described is a personal experience.

"Don't tell us that the old lady screamed. Bring her on and let her scream."  
-Samuel Clemens

## Purpose of a Narrative Essay



A narrative essay is a *story* written about a personal experience. Writing a narrative essay provides an opportunity to get to know and understand yourself better. One of the best ways to reveal who you are is to write about how you became aware of something, gained a new way of seeing the world, a new insight. While such awareness can occur for apparently unexplainable reasons, it most often happens when you encounter new ideas or have experiences that change you in some way. During the process of writing a narrative, you will learn ways to articulate personal experience to inform and entertain others. Narratives provide human

interest, spark our curiosity, and draw us close to the storyteller. In addition, narratives can do the following:

- Create a sense of shared history, linking people together.
- Provide entertainment. Most people enjoy a thrilling movie or an intriguing book.
- Provide psychological healing. Reading or listening to the narrative of someone who faced a life crisis similar to one you are experiencing can help you through the crisis. They can also help the writer deal with the crisis.
- Provide insight. Narratives can help you discover values, explore options, and examine motives.

## Characteristics of the Narrative

Narrative essays describe specific experiences that changed how you felt, thought, or acted. The form of a narrative is similar to a story in that it describes how your character is feeling by "showing" through his/her actions, rather than by coming right out and "telling" your readers. However, a good narrative isn't just an entertaining story, but has a point to make, a purpose to convey. In writing a narrative essay, your purpose is not to merely tell an interesting story but to show your readers the importance and influence the experience has had on you. This experience may be used as a springboard for reflection.

A good narrative:

- **involves readers in the story.**  
*It is much more interesting to actually recreate an incident for readers than to simply tell about it.*
- **relates events in sequence.**  
*The creation of specific scenes set at actual times and in actual places. Show, don't tell. Re-create an event by setting it in a specific time and space.*

■ **includes detailed observations of people, places, and events.**

*Do you recall sights, sounds, smells, tactile feelings, and tastes? Use actual or re-created dialogue? Give actual names of people and places.*

■ **presents important changes, contrasts, or conflicts and creates tension.**

*Do you grow from change? Is there a conflict between characters? Is there a contrast between the past and the present?*

■ **is told from a point of view--usually the author's point of view.**

■ **focuses on connection between past events, people, or places and the present.**

*How relevant is the event today? How relevant will it be in your future?*

■ **makes a point, communicates a main idea or dominant impression.**

*Your details, specific scenes, accounts of changes or conflicts, and connections between past and present should point to a single main idea or dominant impression for your paper as a whole. While not stating a flat "moral" of the story, the importance of your memory must be clear to your reader.*

## Planning the Narrative Essay

To plan a narrative, your job is:

- first, select an incident worthy of writing about,
- second, find relevance in that incident (writers might ask themselves what about the incident provided new insights or awareness),
- finally, dredge up details which will make the incident real for readers.

Good stories occur everywhere and can be told about anything. They are as likely to occur in your own neighborhood as in some exotic locale. Potential stories happen daily; what makes potential stories actual stories is putting them into language, recounting them, orally or in writing. Good stories are entertaining, informative, lively, and believable; they will mean something to those who write them as well as to those who read them. Subjects for good essays have no limits. You already have a lifetime of experiences from which to choose, and each experience is a potential story to help explain who you are, what you believe, and how you act today. When beginning, you might want to ask yourself:

- Did you ever have a long-held belief or assumption shattered? Can you trace the change to one event or a series of events?
- Is there a particular experience that you observed that has had a profound influence on your life?
- Is there a person that who has greatly influenced you?
- Is there a decision that you had to make, or a challenge or an obstacle that you faced?
- Was there ever a moment in your life when you decided to reform, to adopt a whole new outlook?
- How would you characterize your attempt? (Successful? Unsuccessful? Laughable? Painful?)

## Assessment 1