**Narrative Writing**

A *narrative* is simply a story, and *narration* involves telling a story. People use narrative in both everyday speech and writing because stories, especially those about personal experiences, provide convincing examples.

Histories, biographies, and autobiographies follow a narrative form, as do personal letters, diaries, and journals. Narration is the dominant writing pattern found in many works of fiction and poetry, and it is an essential part of casual conversation.

**Structuring a Narrative Essay**

Like other essays, narratives have an *introduction*, a *body*, and a *conclusion*. It is not necessary to have a *thesis statement* in a narrative. Although the *thesis* of a narrative essay is often implied, the purpose (or main point) of your narrative should be clear. If a narrative does have a thesis statement, it is usually found in the introduction--it may be either direct or indirect.

**Organizing and Developing a Narrative**

Because a narrative recounts an event or an experience, a writer can simply arrange the details in a *chronological or logical order*. Sometimes, a *flashback* is effective. The writer must decide whether a jump back in the past is useful to his/her narrative or a distraction from the main purpose of the narrative. The writer must keep his/her purpose firmly in mind.

Creating an outline before beginning a narrative, or straightening out details during revision, will help to eliminate any dull, unnecessary or repetitious material. Narratives, like other types of writing, need rich, specific details if they are to be convincing. The process of deciding which details to include or exclude is critical to successful narrative writing.

As in all good writing, the narrative essay makes a point of some sort. However, the essay does not have to contain a moral at the end story or make any weighty revelations about the meaning of life or the human experience. The purpose of the narrative is to tell the story; the writer must allow the reader to come to his/her own conclusions.

**Using Accurate Verb Tenses and Transitions**

*Verb tense* is extremely important in writing that recounts events in a fixed order because tenses indicate temporal (time) relationships--earlier, simultaneous, later. The writer must avoid unwarranted shifts in verb tense that will make a narrative confusing.

*Transitions*--connecting words or phrases--help link events in time, enabling narratives to flow smoothly. Without them, narratives would lack coherence, and readers would be unsure of the correct sequence of events. Transitions can indicate the order in which events occur, and they also signal shifts in time. In narrative writing, the transitions commonly used for these purposes include first, second, next, then, later, at the same time, meanwhile, immediately, soon, before, earlier, after, afterward, now and finally. In addition to these transitions, specific time markers--such as three years later, 1997, after two hours, and on January 3--indicate how much time has passed between events.

**In revising and editing a narrative essay you might ask yourself the following questions:**

1. Is the purpose of the narrative clear? Can the reader understand why I'm telling this story?
2. Is the context (who, when, what, where) of the essay clear?
3. Is the essay organized in a chronological or logical order?
4. Are there enough details? Are there too many? Are the details specific and interesting? If not, which ones need improving?
5. Are the point of view and tense of the narrative accurate?