

Successful College Writing

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PART 3 Patterns of Development

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 227

CHAPTER 11

Narration: Recounting Events

WRITING QUICK START

The photograph on the opposite page shows a tragic scene. Imagine what series of events led up to this tragedy. Who died? What events led up to the person's death? Who are the mourners? How are they related to the deceased? What seems to be happening in the photograph?

Working by yourself or with a classmate, construct a series of events leading up to this tragedy, culminating with the scene shown in the photograph. Write a brief summary of the events you imagined.

WRITING A NARRATIVE

As you imagined the events that led up to the tragic scene, you constructed the beginnings of a narrative. You began to describe a series of events or turning points, and you probably wrote them in the order in which they occurred. In this chapter, you will learn how to write narrative essays as well as how to use narratives in essays that rely on one or more other patterns of development.

What Is Narration?

A narrative relates a series of events, real or imaginary, in an organized sequence. It is a story, but it is *a story that makes a point*. You probably exchange family stories, tell jokes, read biographies or novels, and watch television situation comedies or dramas—all of which are examples of the narrative form. In addition, narratives are an important part of the writing you will do in college and in your career, as the examples in the accompanying box illustrate.

Narratives provide human interest and entertainment, spark our curiosity, and draw us close to the storyteller. In addition, narratives can create a sense of shared history, linking people together, and provide instruction in proper behavior or moral conduct.

The following narrative relates the author's experience with racial profiling. As you read, notice how the narrative makes a point by presenting a series of events that build to a climax.

SCENES FROM COLLEGE AND THE WORKPLACE

- Each student in your *business law* course must attend a court trial and complete the following written assignment: Describe what happened and what the proceedings illustrated about the judicial process.
- In a *sociology* course, your class is scheduled to discuss the nature and types of authority figures in U.S. society. Your instructor begins by asking class members to describe situations in which they found themselves in conflict with an authority figure.
- Your job in *sales* involves frequent business travel, and your company requires you to submit a report for each trip. You are expected to recount the meetings you attended, your contacts with current clients, and new sales leads.

Right Place, Wrong Face

Alton Fitzgerald White

READING

This narrative was first published in the *Nation* in October 1999. Alton Fitzgerald White is an actor, singer, and dancer and has appeared in several Broadway shows. He is the author of *Uncovering the Heart Light* (1999), a collection of poems and short stories.

As the youngest of five girls and two boys growing up in Cincinnati, I was raised to believe that if I worked hard, was a good person, and always told the truth, the world would be my oyster. I was raised to be a gentleman and learned that these qualities would bring me respect.

While one has to earn respect, consideration is something owed to every human being. On Friday, June 16, 1999, when I was wrongfully arrested at my Harlem apartment building, my perception of everything I had learned as a young man was forever changed—not only because I wasn’t given even a second to use the manners my parents taught me, but mostly because the police, whom I’d always naively thought were supposed to serve and protect me, were actually hunting me.

I had planned a pleasant day. The night before was a payday, plus I had received a standing ovation after portraying the starring role of Coalhouse Walker Jr. in the Broadway musical *Ragtime*. It is a role that requires not only talent but also an honest emotional investment of the morals and lessons I learned as a child.

Coalhouse Walker Jr. is a victim (an often misused word, but in this case true) of overt racism. His story is every black man’s nightmare. He is hardworking, successful, talented, charismatic, friendly, and polite. Perfect prey for someone with authority and not even a fraction of those qualities. On that Friday afternoon, I became a real-life Coalhouse Walker. Nothing could have prepared me for it. Not even stories told to me by other black men who had suffered similar injustices.

Friday for me usually means a trip to the bank, errands, the gym, dinner, and then off to the theater. On this particular day, I decided to break my pattern of getting up and running right out of the house. Instead, I took my time, slowed my pace, and splurged by making strawberry pancakes. Before I knew it, it was 2:45; my bank closes at 3:30, leaving me less than 45 minutes to get to midtown Manhattan on the train. I was pressed for time but in a relaxed, blessed state of mind. When I walked through the lobby of my building, I noticed two light-skinned Hispanic men I’d never seen before. Not thinking much of it, I continued on to the vestibule, which is separated from the lobby by a locked door.

As I approached the exit, I saw people in uniforms rushing toward the door. I sped up to open it for them. I thought they might be paramedics, since many of the building’s occupants are elderly. It wasn’t until I had opened the door and greeted them that I recognized that they were police officers. Within seconds, I was told to “hold it”; they had received a call about young Hispanics with guns. I was told to get against the wall. I was searched, stripped of my backpack, put on my knees, handcuffed, and told to be quiet when I tried to ask questions.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 230

With me were three other innocent black men who had been on their way to their U-Haul. They were moving into the apartment beneath mine, and I had just bragged to them about how safe the building was. One of these gentlemen got off his knees, still handcuffed, and unlocked the door for the officers to get into the lobby where the two strangers were standing. Instead of thanking or even acknowledging us, they led us out the door past our neighbors, who were all but begging the police in our defense.

The four of us were put into cars with the two strangers and taken to the precinct station at 165th and Amsterdam. The police automatically linked us, with no questions and no regard for our character or our lives. No consideration was given to where we were going or why. Suppose an ailing relative was waiting upstairs, while I ran out for her medication? Or young children, who'd been told that Daddy was running to the corner store for milk and would be right back? My new neighbors weren't even allowed to lock their apartment or check on the U-Haul.

After we were lined up in the station, the younger of the two Hispanic men was identified as an experienced criminal, and drug residue was found in a pocket of the other. I now realize how naive I was to think that the police would then uncuff me, apologize for their mistake, and let me go. Instead, they continued to search my backpack, questioned me, and put me in jail with the criminals.

The rest of the nearly five-hour ordeal was like a horrible dream. I was handcuffed, strip-searched, taken in and out for questioning. The officers told me that they knew exactly who I was, knew I was in *Ragtime*, and that in fact they already had the men they wanted.

How then could they keep me there, or have brought me there in the first place? I was told it was standard procedure. As if the average law-abiding citizen knows what that is and can dispute it. From what I now know, "standard procedure" is something that every citizen, black and white, needs to learn, and fast.

I felt completely powerless. Why, do you think? Here I was, young, pleasant, and successful, in good physical shape, dressed in clean athletic attire. I was carrying a backpack containing a substantial paycheck and a deposit slip, on my way to the bank. Yet after hours and hours I was sitting at a desk with two officers who not only couldn't tell me why I was there but seemed determined to find something on me, to the point of making me miss my performance.

It was because I am a black man!

I sat in that cell crying silent tears of disappointment and injustice with the realization of how many innocent black men are convicted for no reason. When I was handcuffed, my first instinct had been to pull away out of pure insult and violation as a human being. Thank God I was calm enough to do what they said. When I was thrown in jail with the criminals and strip-searched, I somehow knew to put my pride aside, be quiet, and do exactly what I was told, hating it but coming to terms with the fact that in this situation I was a victim. They had guns!

Before I was finally let go, exhausted, humiliated, embarrassed, and still in shock, I was led to a room and given a pseudo-apology. I was told that I was at the wrong place at the wrong time. My reply? "I was where I live."

Everything I learned growing up in Cincinnati has been shattered. Life will never be the same.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 231

Characteristics of a Narrative

As you can see from “Right Place, Wrong Face,” a narrative does not merely report events; a narrative is *not* a transcript of a conversation or a news report. Instead, it is a story that conveys a particular meaning. It presents actions and details that build toward a climax, the point at which the conflict of the narrative is resolved. Most narratives use dialogue to present portions of conversations that move the story along.

Narratives Make a Point

A narrative makes a point or supports a thesis by telling readers about an event or a series of events. The point may be to describe the significance of the event or events, make an observation, or present new information. Often a writer will state the point directly, using an explicit thesis statement. Other times a writer may leave the main point unstated, using an implied thesis. Either way, the point should always be clear to your readers. The point also determines the details the writer selects and the way they are presented.

The following excerpt from a brief narrative written by a student is based on a photo of a homeless family on a street corner. After imagining the series of events that might have brought the family to homelessness, the student wrote this final paragraph.

Jack and Melissa are kind, patient people who want nothing more than to live in a house or an apartment instead of camping out on a street curb. Unfortunately, their unhappy story and circumstances are not uncommon. Thousands of Americans, through no fault of their own, share their hopeless plight. The homeless can be found on street corners, in parks, and under bridges in the coldest months of winter. Too often, passersby shun them and their need for a helping hand. They either look away, repulsed by the conditions in which the homeless live, and assume they live this way out of choice rather than necessity, or they gaze at them with disapproving looks, walk away, and wonder why such people do not want to work.

Notice that the writer makes a point about the homeless and about people’s attitudes toward them directly. Note, too, how the details support the writer’s point.

Narratives Convey Action and Detail

A narrative presents a *detailed* account of an event or a series of events. In other words, a narrative is like a camera lens that zooms in and makes readers feel as if they can see the details and experience the action.

Writers of narratives can involve readers in several ways—through *dialogue*, with *physical description*, and by *recounting action*. In “Right Place, Wrong Face,” both physical description and the recounting of events help build suspense and make the story come alive. Readers can easily visualize the scene at White’s apartment building and the scene at the police station.

For more on descriptive writing, see Chapter 12.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 232

Narratives Present a Conflict and Create Tension

An effective narrative presents a **conflict**—such as a struggle, question, or problem—and works toward its resolution. The conflict can be between participants or between a participant and some external force, such as a law, value, tradition, or act of nature. **Tension** is the suspense created as the story unfolds and as the reader wonders how the conflict will be resolved. In “Right Place, Wrong Face,” for example, tension is first suggested in the third paragraph with “I had planned a pleasant day,” suggesting that what was planned did not materialize. The tension becomes evident in paragraphs 7 to 14, and the conflict is resolved in paragraph 15, when White is released. The point just before the conflict is resolved is called the **climax**. The main point of the story—how White’s life is changed by the incident of racial profiling—concludes the narrative.

Exercise 11.1

Working alone or with a classmate, complete each of the following statements by setting up a conflict. Then for one of the completed statements, write three to four sentences that build tension through action or dialogue (or both).

1. You are ready to leave the house when . . .
2. You have just turned in your math exam when you realize that . . .
3. You recently moved to a new town when your spouse suddenly becomes seriously ill . . .
4. Your child just told you that . . .
5. Your best friend phones you in the middle of the night to tell you . . .

Narratives Sequence Events

The events in a narrative must be arranged in an order that is easy for readers to follow. A narrative often presents events in chronological order—the order in which they happened. “Right Place, Wrong Face,” for example, uses this straightforward sequence. At other times writers may use the techniques of flashback and foreshadowing to make their point more effectively. A **flashback** returns the reader to events that took place in the past, whereas **foreshadowing** hints at events in the future. Both of these techniques are used frequently in drama, fiction, and film. A soap opera, for instance, might open with a scene showing a woman lying in a hospital bed, flash back to a scene showing the accident that put her there, and then return to the scene in the hospital. When used sparingly, flashback and foreshadowing can build interest and add variety to a narrative, especially a lengthy chronological account.

Narratives Use Dialogue

Just as people reveal much about themselves by what they say and how they say it, dialogue can reveal much about the characters in a narrative. Dialogue is often used to dramatize the action, emphasize the conflict, and reveal the personalities or motives of the key participants in a narrative. Keep in mind that dialogue should resemble everyday speech; it should sound natural, not forced or formal. Consider these examples.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 233

- TOO FORMAL** Maria confided to her grandfather, "I enjoy talking with you. I especially like hearing you tell of your life in Mexico long ago. I wish I could visit there with you."
- NATURAL** Maria confided to her grandfather, "Your stories about Mexico when you were a kid are great. I'd like to go there with you."

Exercise 11.2

For one of the following situations, imagine what the person might say and how he or she would say it. Then write five or six sentences of natural-sounding dialogue. If your dialogue sounds forced or too formal, try saying it out loud into a tape recorder.

1. An assistant manager is trying to explain to a supervisor that an employee offends customers.
2. A man or a woman has just discovered that he or she and a best friend are dating the same person.
3. A babysitter is disciplining an eight-year-old girl for pouring chocolate syrup on her brother's head.

Narratives Are Told from a Particular Point of View

Many narratives use the first-person point of view, in which the key participant speaks directly to the reader ("I first realized the problem when . . ."). Other narratives use the third-person point of view, in which an unknown storyteller describes what happens to the key participants ("The problem began when Saul Overtone . . ."). The first person is used in "Right Place, Wrong Face."

Both the first person and the third person offer distinct advantages. The first person allows you to assume a personal tone and to speak directly to your audience. You can easily express your attitudes and feelings and offer your interpretation and commentary. When you narrate an event that occurred in your own life, for example, the first person is probably your best choice. In "Right Place, Wrong Face" the first person allows White to express his anger, humiliation, and outrage directly.

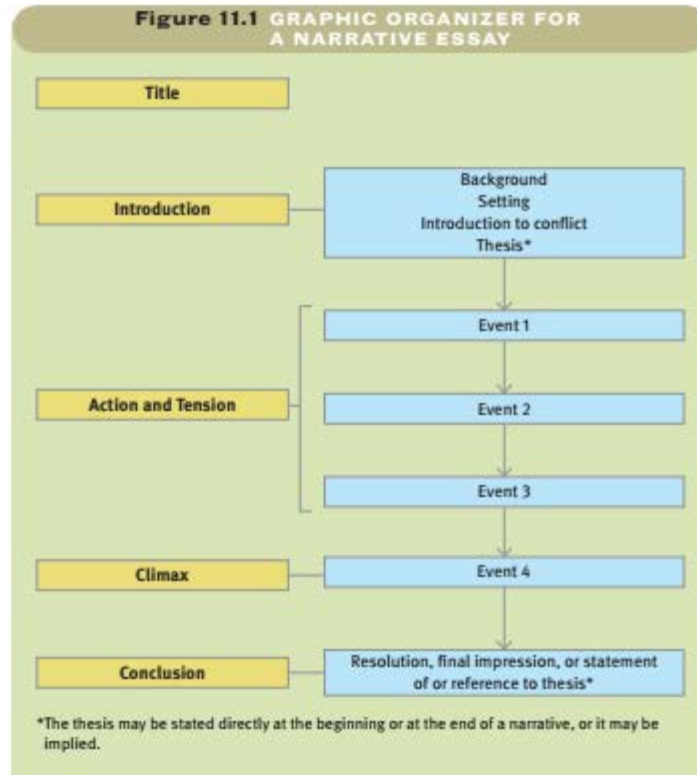
One drawback to using the first person, however, is that you cannot easily convey the inner thoughts of other participants unless they are shared with you. The third person gives the narrator more distance from the action and often provides a broader, more objective perspective.

Exercise 11.3

For each of the following situations, decide which point of view would work best. Discuss with your classmates the advantages and disadvantages of using the first- and third-person points of view for each example.

1. The day you and several friends played a practical joke on another friend
2. An incident of sexual or racial discrimination that happened to you or someone you know
3. An incident at work that a coworker told you about

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 234



Visualizing a Narrative: A Graphic Organizer

Whether or not you are a spatial learner, it is often helpful to see the content and organization of an essay in simplified, visual form. The graphic organizer shown in Figure 11.1 is a visual diagram of the basic structure of a narrative. A graphic organizer can help you structure your writing, analyze a reading, and recall key events as you generate ideas for an essay.

Use Figure 11.1 as a basic model, but keep in mind that narrative essays vary in organization and may lack one or more of the elements included in the model.

The following selection, “The Lady in Red,” is an example of a narrative. Read it first, and then study the graphic organizer for it in Figure 11.2 (on p. 238).

For more on graphic organizers, see Chapter 3, p. 60.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 235

The Lady in Red

Richard LeMieux

READING

Richard LeMieux was a successful businessman who operated his own publishing company and lived a life of comfort and even luxury. After his business failed, however, he was evicted from his home and became homeless, living out of his car with his dog, Willow. LeMieux details his experiences in a book titled *Breakfast at Sally's: One Homeless Man's Inspirational Journey* (2009), from which this excerpt is taken.

It went back to last Thanksgiving Day, 2002. That was the day I learned to beg. 1

I was up in Pousbo. I had used the last of my change to buy Willow a hamburger at the McDonald's drive-thru. My gas tank was almost empty, and my stomach was growling. Desperate for money just to keep moving and get something to eat, I began to consider the only option I seemed to have left: begging. 2

My whole life I had been a people person. As a sportswriter for the *Springfield Sun*, I had seen Woody Hayes motivate players at Ohio State and Sparky Anderson put the spark into Pete Rose. As a sales rep, I had sold hundreds of thousands of dollars of advertising, convincing people they needed to invest in the product I was publishing. I wore the right suits and ties and kept my cordovans shined and did the corporate dance for twenty years. But this, this *begging*, was far more difficult. 3

I had given to others on the street. They had all types of stories: "I need to buy a bus ticket to Spokane so I can go visit my dying mother." "I lost my wallet this morning, and I need five dollars for gas." I had always given, knowing all along that their tales were suspect. So I decided to just straight-up ask for money. No made-up stories. No sick grandmas waiting for my arrival. No lost wallets. 4

I started at the store I had shopped at for many years—Central Market. It was a glitzy, upscale place with its own Starbucks, \$120 bottles of wine, fresh crab, line-caught salmon, and oysters Rockefeller to go. It was a little bit of Palm Springs dropped into Pousbo. The parking lot was full of high-priced cars: two Cadillac Escalades, three Lincoln Navigators, and a bright yellow Hummer. I had spent at least \$200 a week there (\$800 a month, \$9,600 a year, \$192,000 in twenty years), so I rationalized that I could beg there for one day—Thanksgiving Day at that. 5

I was wrong. 6
After watching forty people walk by, I finally asked a lady for help. "Ma'am, I'm down on my luck. Could you help me with a couple of dollars?" I blurted out. 7

"Sorry," she said. "All I have is a credit card," and she moved on. 8
A man in a red Porsche pulled in. I watched him get out of his car, lock the doors from his key-chain remote, and head for the store. "Sir, I hate to bother you. This is the first time I have ever done this, and I'm not very good at it. But I am down on my luck and need help. Could you—" 9

"Get a Goddamned job, you bum!" he interrupted and kept walking. 10

Stung, I wanted to run to the van and leave, but I knew I couldn't go far; I barely had enough gas to leave the parking lot. 11

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 236

I spent the next twenty minutes trying to recover from the verbal blast I had received and could not approach anyone else. But the exclamation point had not yet been slapped in place on my failure at begging. The young manager of the store, maybe twenty-five years old, came out to do the honors. "Sir, sir," he called out to me as he approached. "We have a . . ." He halted mid-sentence. "Don't I know you?" he asked instead.

"Probably," I replied. "I've been shopping here for twenty years." 13

"I thought I'd seen you in the store," he said. "Well," he sighed heavily, "a man complained about you begging in front of the store. You're going to have to move on."

I could tell he didn't want to hear about the \$192,000 I had spent in his store. He just wanted to hear what I was going to spend today. So I said, "Okay." He didn't offer me a sandwich, a loaf of bread, a soy latte, or even a plain old cup of coffee. 15

I had no choice. I had to keep trying. I decided to go across the street to Albertsons. As I walked back to the van, tears filled my eyes. I remembered Thanksgivings of the past. By now, I would be pouring wine for our family and friends, rushing to the door to welcome guests, and taking their coats to be hung in the hall closet. My home would be filled with the smells of turkey and sage dressing. At least twenty people would be there. Children would be jumping on the sofa and racing up and down the hallways and stairs. The football game between the Cowboys and the Packers would be blaring in the background. There would be a buzz. A younger, friskier Willow would stay close to the kitchen, hoping for the first bites of the bird from the oven. 16

But that was yesterday. Today, I drove across the highway to the "down-market" store, nestled in the strip mall between the drugstore and the card shop. I stepped out of the van to try my luck again. It was getting late, and the shoppers were rushing to get home to their festivities. I had little time to succeed. 17

I saw an old friend of mine pull into the parking lot and get out of her car. She headed for the grocery store. I turned my back to her and hid behind a pillar. I waited for her to enter the store, and then I approached a man as he walked toward the entrance. "Sir, I'm down on my luck. Could you help me with a little money for food?" I asked. 18

He walked away muttering, "Jesus Christ, now we've got worthless beggars on the streets of *Poulsbo*." 19

I closed my eyes for a moment against the failure and fatigue, and then I felt a tap on my shoulder. "Sir," a lady was saying. As I opened my eyes and turned around, a lady in a red hat and an old red coat with a big brooch of an angel pinned to her lapel was standing there. She was digging through her purse as she talked. 20

"I overheard your conversation with that man. I hope you don't mind. I—well, I can help you a little bit," she said, holding out some rolled-up bills. Her presence and the offered gift surprised me. I stood there a moment, looking into her eyes. "Here," she said, reaching her hand out again. "Take it." 21

I reached out my hand and took the money from her. "Thank you so much," I said softly. "This is very kind of you." 22

"Thank you. I know what . . ." she began, and then her sentence was interrupted by a cough. She clutched her purse to her chest with one hand and did her best to cover 23

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 237

her mouth with the other. She stiffened and then bent her head toward the pavement as the cough from deep in her chest consumed her. She moved her hand from her mouth to her bosom and just held it there. When the cough subsided, she took a deep breath. She looked up at me with watery eyes. "I've had this darned hacking cough for a month or more now," she said after she recovered. "I can't seem to shake this cold. It's going to be the death of me," she added with a smile. "I'm going back to the doctor after the holiday."

"I hope you get better soon," I said. 24

The lady then moved her purse from her chest and opened it again. "Wait," she said, looking inside her bag and then reaching in. "I might have some change in here too." She dug to the bottom of her purse. She took out a handful of change and handed it to me. I put my hands together and held them out, and she poured the coins into them. "I hope this helps you," she said, gently placing her hand on mine. "Remember me. I'll see you in heaven. Happy Thanksgiving!" She turned and walked away. 25

I watched her disappear into her car before I counted the money she had given me. It was sixty-four dollars and fifty cents. I was stunned! I walked back to the van, counted the money again, and then counted my blessings. 26

I sat there in the drizzle, contemplating what had just happened. A sporadic churchgoer my entire life, I had spent recent months asking God to send his angels to me. But no angels came. Maybe I had to go looking for them. 27

With the glimmer of faith I still had left on that Thanksgiving Day, I said a prayer, thanking God for the visit from the Lady in Red. 28

And now, in the church parking lot, it was time to sleep. I closed the doors of my mind, one by one, and snuggled with Willow. 29

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Harsh Treatment of Outcasts

Both "The Lady in Red" (pp. 235–37) and "Right Place, Wrong Face" (pp. 229–30) describe the harsh treatment of someone who was seen as an outcast—a person who did not deserve respect or courtesy.

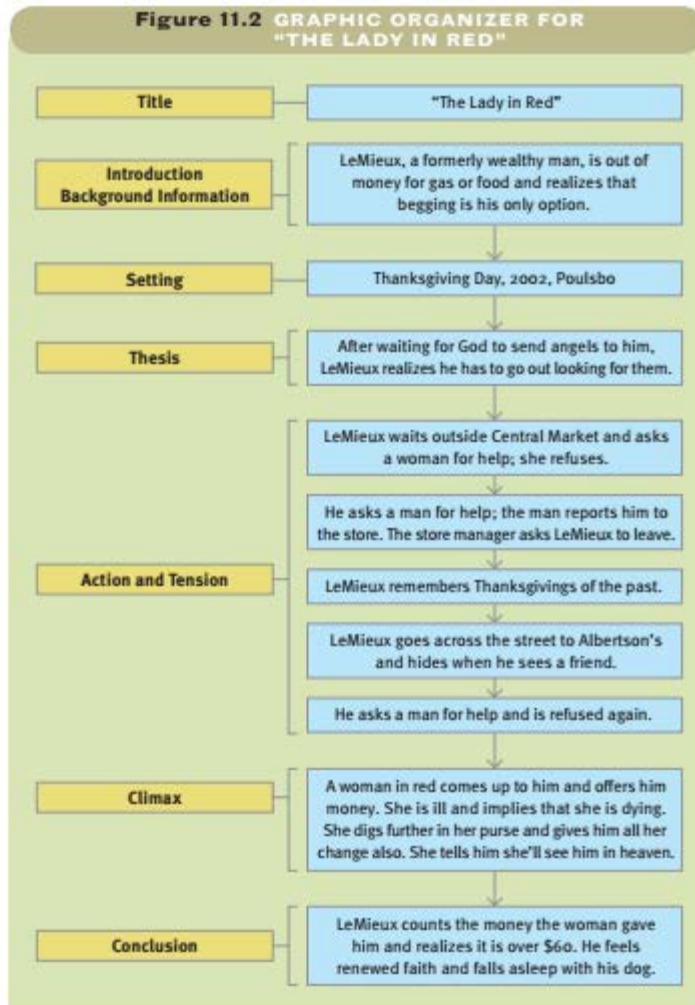
Analyzing the Readings

1. Compare the situations that each man found himself in and the ways that others responded to him. Then consider how each man responded to those who treated him harshly.
2. Compare the social issues that each author addresses in the narrative of his experience.

Essay Idea

Write an essay describing a situation in which you feel you were treated as an outcast. Describe the background to the situation, the treatment you received, and your response.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 238



To draw detailed graphic organizers using a computer, visit www.buffvtdtmarines.com/successfulcollege.

Exercise 11.4

Using the graphic organizers in Figures 11.1 and 11.2 as models, draw a graphic organizer for “Right Place, Wrong Face” (pp. 229–30).

Integrating a Narrative into an Essay

In many of your essays, you will want to use both a narrative and one or more other patterns of development to support your thesis. In the writing you encounter in newspapers, magazines, and textbooks, the patterns of development often mix and overlap. Similarly, although “Right Place, Wrong Face” is primarily a narrative, it also uses cause and effect to explain why White was detained despite evidence that he was a respectable, law-abiding citizen. “The Lady in Red” is a narrative that contains descriptions of people’s reactions to a begging man.

Although most of your college essays will not be primarily narrative, you can use stories—to illustrate a point, clarify an idea, support an argument, or capture readers’ interest—in essays that rely on another pattern of development or on several patterns. Here are a few suggestions for using narration effectively in the essays you write:

For more on description and cause and effect, see Chapters 12 and 18.

1. **Be sure that your story illustrates your point accurately and well.** Don’t include a story just because it’s funny or interesting. It must support your thesis.
2. **Keep the narrative short.** Include only relevant details—facts that are necessary to help your reader understand the events you are describing.
3. **Introduce the story with a transitional sentence or clause that indicates you are about to shift to a narrative.** Otherwise, your readers may wonder, “What’s this story doing here?” Your transition should also make clear the connection between the story and the point it illustrates.
4. **Use descriptive language, dialogue, and action.** These elements make narratives vivid, lively, and interesting in any essay.

In “Alien World: How Treacherous Border Crossing Became a Theme Park” on pages 258–63, Alexander Zaitchik uses description, illustration, and argument as well as narration to develop his ideas.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 240

A GUIDED WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Learning Style Options

The following guide will lead you through the process of writing a narrative essay. Although your essay will be primarily a narrative, you may choose to use one or more other patterns of development as well. Depending on your learning style, you might decide to start at various points and move back and forth within the process. If you are a spatial learner, for example, you might begin by visualizing and sketching the details of your narrative. If you are a social learner, you might prefer to start out by evaluating your audience.

The Assignment

Write a narrative essay about an experience in your life that had a significant effect on you or that changed your views in some important way. Choose your own topic or use one from the list below:

1. An experience that caused you to learn something about yourself
2. An incident that revealed the true character of someone you knew
3. An experience that helped you discover a principle to live by
4. An experience that explains the personal significance of a particular object
5. An incident that has become a family legend, perhaps one that reveals the character of a family member or illustrates a clash of generations or cultures
6. An incident that has allowed you to develop an appreciation or awareness of your ethnic identity

The readers of your campus newspaper are your audience.

As you develop your narrative essay, be sure to consider using one or more of the other patterns of development. You might use description to present details about a family member's appearance, for example, or comparison and contrast to compare your attitudes or ideas with those of a parent or child.

For more on description and comparison and contrast, see Chapters 12 and 15.

Generating Ideas

Use the following steps to help you choose a topic and generate ideas about the experience or incident you decide to write about.

Choosing an Experience or Incident That Leads to a Working Thesis

Be sure that the experience you write about is memorable and vivid and that you are comfortable writing about it. When a draft is nearly complete, no student wants to discover that he or she cannot remember important details about the experience or that it does not fulfill the requirements of the assignment.

The following suggestions will help you choose an experience:

1. You can probably eliminate one or more broad topic choices right away. List those that remain across the top of a piece of paper or on your computer screen—for

For more on formulating a working thesis, see Chapter 6, pp. 125–26.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 241

example, *Learn about Self, A Principle to Live By*, and *Family Legend*. Then brainstorm about significant experiences or incidents in your life, and write each one beneath the appropriate heading.

2. Brainstorm with another student, discussing and describing experiences or incidents that fit one or more of the suggested topics.
3. Flip through a family photo album, or page through a scrapbook, diary, or yearbook. Your search will remind you of people and events from the past.
4. Work backwards. Think of a principle you live by, an object you value, or a family legend. How did it become so?
5. Using freewriting or another prewriting technique, write down any experiences or incidents that come to mind. The memory of one incident will trigger memories of other incidents. Then sort your list to see if any of these experiences or incidents fulfill the assignment.

Experiment and use whatever suggestions prove helpful to you. After you have chosen one, make sure that you can develop it by formulating a working thesis.

Essay in Progress 1

For the assignment given on page 240, use one or more of the preceding suggestions to choose an experience or incident to write about, and formulate a working thesis for your choice.

Considering Your Purpose, Audience, and Point of View

Once you have chosen an experience or incident to write about, the next step is to consider your purpose, audience, and point of view. Recall from Chapter 5 that most essays have one of three possible purposes—to inform, to express thoughts or feelings, or to persuade. Thinking about your audience may help you clarify your purpose and decide what to include in your essay. For this Guided Writing Assignment, your audience consists of readers of your campus newspaper. You should also decide on a point of view. In most cases, you will use the first person to relate a personal experience.

Learning Style Options

For more on prewriting strategies, see Chapter 5.

For more on purpose, audience, and point of view, see Chapter 5, pp. 106–9.

Gathering Details about the Experience or Incident

This step involves recollecting as many details about the experience or incident as possible and recording them on paper or in a computer file. Reenact the story, sketching the scene or scenes in your mind. Identify key actions, describe key participants, and describe your feelings. Here are a few ways to generate ideas:

1. Replay the experience or incident in your mind. If you have a strong visual memory, close your eyes and imagine the incident or experience taking place. Jot down what you see, hear, smell, and feel—colors, dialogue, sounds, odors, and sensations—and how these details make you feel.
2. Write the following headings on a piece of paper, or type them on your computer screen: *Scene*, *Key Actions*, *Key Participants*, *Key Lines of Dialogue*, and *Feelings*. Then list ideas under each heading.

Learning Style Options

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 242

3. Describe the incident or experience to a friend. Have your friend ask you questions as you retell the story. Jot down the details that the retelling and questioning help you recall.
4. Consider different aspects of the incident or experience by asking *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *how*, and *why* questions. Record your answers.

In addition, as you gather details for your narrative, be sure to include the types of details that are essential to an effective narrative:

- **Scene: Choose relevant sensory details.** Include enough detail about the place where the experience occurred to allow your readers to feel as if they are there. Details that appeal to the senses work best. Also try to recall important details that direct your readers' attention to the main points of the narrative, and avoid irrelevant details that distract readers from the main point.
- **Key actions: Choose actions that create tension, build it to a climax, and resolve it.** Be sure to gather details about the conflict of your narrative. Answer the following questions:
Why did the experience or incident occur?
What events led up to it?
How was it resolved?
What were its short- and long-term outcomes?
What is its significance now?
- **Key participants: Concentrate only on the appearance and actions of those people who were directly involved.** People who were present but not part of the incident or experience need not be described in detail or perhaps even included.
- **Key lines of dialogue: Include dialogue that is interesting, revealing, and related to the main point of the story.** To make sure the dialogue sounds natural, read the lines aloud, or ask a friend to do so.
- **Feelings: Record your feelings before, during, and after the experience or incident.** Did you reveal your feelings then? If so, how? How did others react to you? How do you feel about the experience or incident now? What have you learned from it?

For more on sensory details, see Chapter 12, pp. 270–71.

Essay in Progress 2

For the experience or incident you chose in Essay in Progress 1 (p. 241), use one or more of the preceding suggestions to generate details.

Evaluating Your Ideas

Evaluate the ideas you have gathered about your topic before you begin drafting your narrative. You want to make sure you have enough details to describe the experience or incident vividly and meaningfully.

Begin by rereading everything you have written with a critical eye. As you do, add dialogue, descriptions of actions, or striking details as they come to mind. Highlight the most relevant material, and cross out any material that does not directly support your main point. Some students find it helpful to read their notes aloud. If you are working on a computer, highlight usable ideas by making them bold or moving them to a separate page or document for easy access when drafting.

Trying Out Your Ideas on Others

When you are satisfied with the details you have generated about your incident or experience, you are ready to discuss your ideas with others. Working in a group of two or three students, each student should narrate his or her experience and state the main point of the narrative. Then work together to answer the following questions about the narrative.

1. What more do you need to know about the experience or incident?
2. What is your reaction to the story?
3. How do the events of the narrative support or not support the main point?

Essay in Progress 3

Gather your prewriting and any comments you have received from your classmates or instructor, and evaluate the details you have developed so far. Based on your findings, generate additional details. Highlight the most useful details, and omit those that do not support the main point.

Developing Your Thesis

Your thesis should make clear the main point of your narrative. You should already have a working thesis in mind. Now is the time to focus it. For example, a student who brainstormed a list of ideas and decided to write about her family's antique silver platter wrote the following focused thesis statement for her narrative.

For more on thesis statements, see Chapter 6, pp. 125–28.

The silver serving platter, originally owned by my great-grandmother, became our most prized family heirloom after a robbery terrorized our family.

Notice that the thesis identifies the object, introduces the experience that made the object a valuable family possession, and expresses the main point of the narrative.

A thesis statement may be placed at the beginning of a narrative essay. In “Right Place, Wrong Face” (pp. 229–30), for example, the thesis appears near the beginning of the essay. A thesis may also be placed at the end of a narrative, as in “Selling in Minnesota” (pp. 254–56).

Essay in Progress 4

Develop a thesis statement for the narrative you worked on in Essays in Progress 1 to 3. Make sure the thesis expresses the main point of the incident or experience you have chosen to write about.

Once you have a thesis, you may need to do some additional prewriting to collect evidence for the thesis, including dialogue, action, and details. Your prewriting at this stage may involve elaborating on some of the details you've already collected. Be sure your events and details contribute to the tension or suspense of the narrative.

See Chapter 6, pp. 128–33, for more on supporting a thesis with evidence.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 244

For more on drafting an essay, see Chapter 7.

Organizing and Drafting

When you are satisfied with your thesis and your support for it, you are ready to organize your ideas and write your first draft. Use the following suggestions for organizing and drafting your narrative.

Choosing a Narrative Sequence

As noted earlier in the chapter, all of the events of a narrative may follow a chronological order from beginning to end, or some events may be presented as flashbacks or foreshadowing for dramatic effect. Try one of the following strategies to help you determine the best sequence for your narrative:

Learning Style Options

1. Write a brief description of each event on an index card. Be sure to highlight the card that contains the climax. Experiment with various ways of arranging your details by rearranging the cards. When you have chosen a sequence, prepare an outline of your narrative.
2. Draw a graphic organizer of the experience or incident (see p. 234).
3. Use a word-processing program to create a list of the events. Rearrange the events using the cut-and-paste function, experimenting with different sequences.

Essay in Progress 5

Using one or more of the preceding suggestions, plan the order of the events for your narrative essay.

Drafting the Narrative Essay

Now that you've determined your narrative sequence, you are ready to begin drafting your essay. As you write, use the guidelines below to help keep your narrative on track.

For more on writing effective paragraphs, including introductions and conclusions, see Chapter 7.

The Introduction. Your essay's introduction should catch your reader's attention, provide useful background information, and set up the sequence of events. Your introduction may also contain your thesis, if you have decided to place it at the beginning of the essay.

The Story. The story should build tension and follow a clear order of progression. As you draft your narrative, be conscious of your paragraphing, devoting a separate paragraph to each major action or distinct part of the story. Use transitional words and phrases—such as *during*, *after dinner*, and *finally*—to connect events and guide readers along.

In addition, be consistent in your use of verb tense. Most narratives are told in the past tense (“Yolanda discovered the platter . . .”). Fast-paced, short narratives, however, are sometimes related in the present tense (“Yolanda discovers the platter . . .”). Avoid switching between the past and present tenses unless the context of the narrative clearly requires it.

For more on transitions, see Chapter 7, pp. 150–52.

The Ending. Your final paragraph should conclude the essay in a satisfying manner. A summary is usually unnecessary and may detract from the effectiveness of the narrative. Instead, try ending in one of the following ways:

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 245

- **Make a final observation about the experience or incident.** For an essay on part-time jobs in fast-food restaurants, a writer could conclude by writing: "Overall, I learned a lot more about getting along with people than I did about how to prepare fast food."
- **Ask a probing question.** For an essay on adventure travel, a writer could conclude: "Although the visit to Nepal was enlightening for me, do the native people really want or need us there?"
- **Suggest a new but related direction of thought.** For an essay on racial profiling, a writer could conclude by suggesting that police sensitivity training might have changed the outcome of the situation.
- **Refer to the beginning,** as White does in the final paragraph of "Right Place, Wrong Face" (p. 230).
- **Restate the thesis in different words.**

Essay in Progress 6

Using the narrative sequence you developed in Essay in Progress 5 and the preceding guidelines for drafting, write a first draft of your narrative essay.

Analyzing and Revising

If possible, set your draft aside for a day or two before rereading and revising it. As you reread your draft, focus on improving the overall effectiveness of your narrative. Will it interest readers and make them want to know what happens next? Does it make your point clear? To discover weaknesses in your draft, try the following strategies:

1. Reread your paper aloud, or ask a friend to do so as you listen. Hearing your essay read out loud may help you identify parts in need of revision.
2. Write an outline or draw a graphic organizer, or review the one you created earlier. Does your narrative follow the intended sequence?

Learning Style Options

As you analyze your narrative, be on the lookout for dialogue that doesn't support your thesis, events that need further explanation or description, and details that contribute nothing to the overall impression you want to convey. Use Figure 11.3 on pages 246–47 to help you discover the strengths and weaknesses of your narrative. You might also ask a classmate to review your essay. Your reviewer's comments and impressions may reveal strengths and weaknesses that you had overlooked.

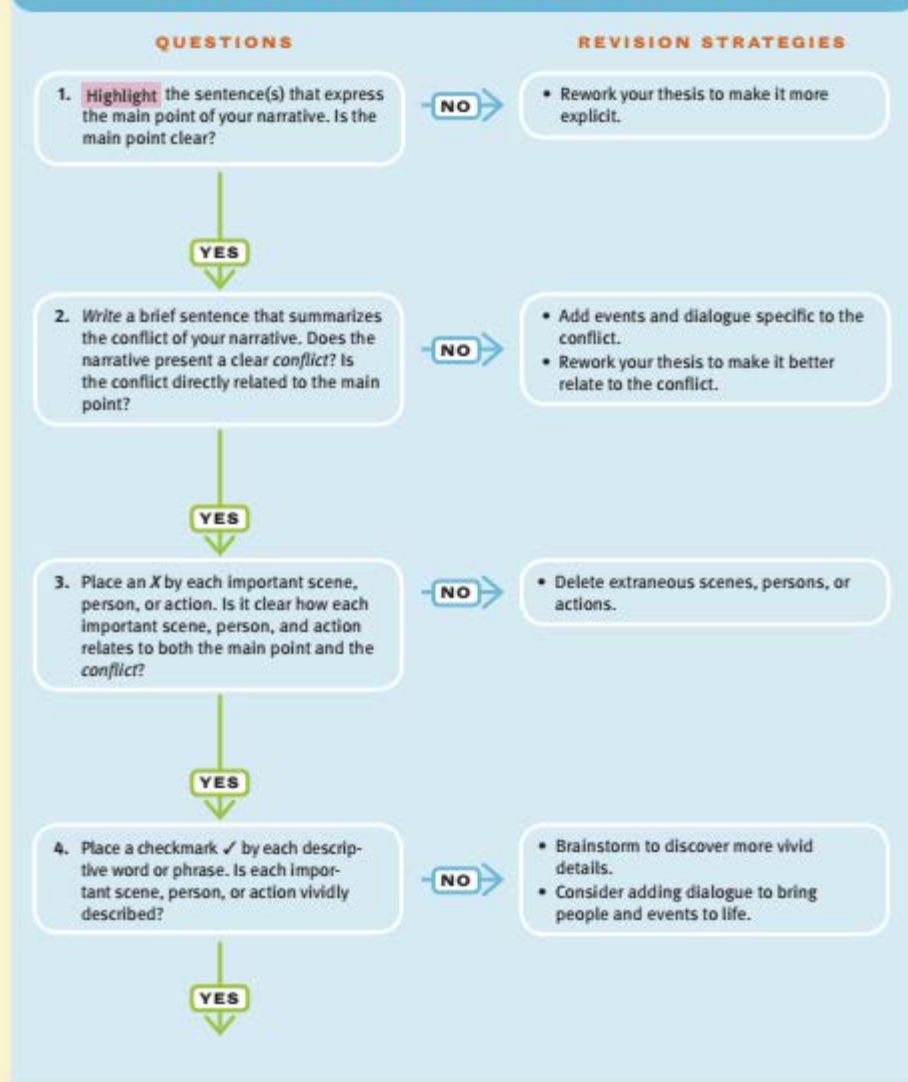
For more on the benefits of peer reviews, see Chapter 9, pp. 246–47.

Essay in Progress 7

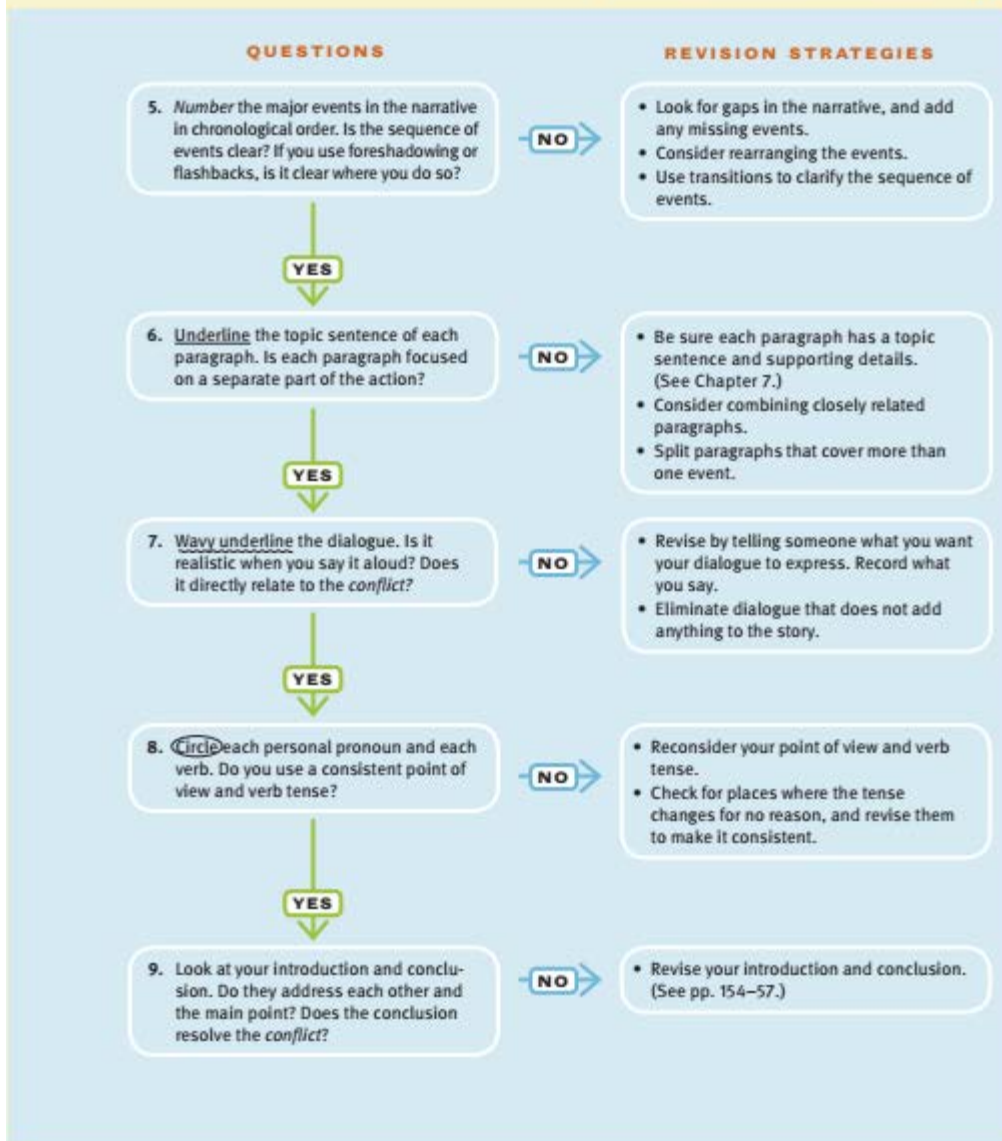
Revise your narrative essay, using Figure 11.3 on pages 246–47 and the suggestions of your classmate to guide you.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 246

Figure 11.3 Flowchart for Revising a Narrative Essay



Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 247



Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 248

For more on keeping an error log, see Chapter 10, pp. 227–22.

For more on varying sentence structure, see Chapter 10, pp. 206–12.

Editing and Proofreading

The last step is to check your revised narrative essay for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics. Be sure to look for the types of errors that you tend to make. (Refer to your error log.)

For narrative essays, pay particular attention to the following kinds of sentence problems.

1. **Make certain that your sentences vary in structure.** A string of sentences that are similar in length and structure is tedious to read.
 - The Ding Darling National Wildlife Preserve, ^x is located on Sanibel Island, Florida. ^x It was established in 1945 as the Sanibel Refuge. Its name was changed in 1967 to honor the man who helped found it.
2. **Be sure to punctuate dialogue correctly.** Use commas to separate each quotation from the phrase that introduces it, unless the quotation is integrated into your sentence. If your sentence ends with a quotation, the period should be inside the quotation marks.
 - The wildlife refuge guide noted, "American crocodiles are an endangered species and must be protected."
 - The wildlife refuge guide noted that, "American crocodiles are an endangered species and must be protected."

Essay in Progress 8

Edit and proofread your narrative essay, remembering to vary sentence patterns and punctuate dialogue correctly. Don't forget to look for the types of errors you tend to make.

READING

Students Write

Mina Raine, an education major, wrote this essay for an assignment given by her first-year writing instructor. She had to describe a situation in which her involvement made a difference or affected others. As you read the essay, notice how Raine's narrative creates conflict and tension and builds to a climax and resolution. Highlight the sections where you think the tension is particularly intense.

Taking Back Control

Mina Raine

Introduction:
Raine gives background about
her relationship with Beth.

My friend Beth is soft spoken but strong in faith and character. She is one of those rare people 1 who can light up a room with her smile or make you feel at ease just by simply being near you. We

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 249

met freshman year at a gathering of mutual friends in the largest dorm on campus. Since then, we've spent our time together among a close-knit circle of friends. **Beth has always seemed, to me, so mature and composed and so in control of herself and her life, so giving, so caring, so nurturing in all her relationships, which is why I was deeply concerned and very much surprised when I began to notice a drastic change in her.**

Thesis statement: Raine gives a rationale for her concern.

First I noticed that Beth was making a habit out of **eating her dinner from a small cereal bowl instead of a plate.** I didn't think much of that, at first. Maybe the dining hall had temporarily run out of plates and a bowl was all she could find. Or maybe it was just one of those funny little habits we all find ourselves adopting, eventually. **(Later** I would learn that the small bowl is a way to monitor and control the amount of food she eats; you can only fit so much food into the shallow dish.)

Transitions help sequence events. Exact details help readers imagine the scene.

A few weeks later, my friends and I noticed a dramatic change in Beth's appearance—**sunken, tired eyes void of their usual sparkle, a smile that seemed forced, and the clothes that once hugged her lovely curves in a subtle and conservative way now hanging off her fragile frame.** This coupled with her strange cereal bowl habit was finally enough to make us realize something was definitely wrong. Of course, we weren't sure yet if Beth really was struggling with an eating disorder, but it was certainly evident that she was not herself, and from her somewhat depressed and rather distracted demeanor, she seemed to be seriously struggling with something.

Tension begins to build.

Then, on one particular evening in the dining hall, my friends and I overheard Beth discussing her new workout regimen with her boyfriend, Steve. She had recently started fitting in evening running sessions between all of her studies and extracurricular activities. Steve had been running on the treadmill daily and carefully monitoring what he ate in an effort to lose the "freshman fifteen" (or twenty) he had gained. Unfortunately, it seemed his new efforts to live a healthy lifestyle had rubbed off on Beth, in an unhealthy way. My friend, who had been at a perfect weight and had been eating properly, was now eating less and exercising more. It was a sure recipe for disaster. I heard Steve talking to Beth about how many miles they had run that evening and how many more they would run the next day. He had her on the same workout schedule he was on, but she wasn't the one who was overweight. As I sat there listening to him influence her in this way, I felt myself getting angry. I didn't know for sure what was wrong with Beth at that point (though I had a pretty good idea), but it was obvious something was wrong. How could he not see that? **The dark circles under Beth's eyes** showed her obvious lack of sleep, and her low energy and lack of focus showed that her body wasn't getting the nutrition it needed.

4

After listening to the unsettling conversation between Beth and Steve about their strict workout routine, my friends and I began discussing the matter among ourselves and deciding on the best way to address the issue with Beth. I spent a few days wondering how best to approach her or if I even should. What if I upset her and she stopped talking to me? What if we were wrong and Beth was fine? Or worse, what if we were right and she pulled away from us? **Then,** Beth solved this dilemma for me: *she came to me.*

5

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 250

Dialogue leads to a climax.	Three weeks after my friend's struggle with food and weight became glaringly obvious, she	6
	knocked on my door. "I need to talk to you," she said, "and I think you already know what it's	
	about." I felt unprepared for this moment. Beth responded in a calm, serious tone to my anxious	
	silence: "First, I feel I owe you an apology for making you worry about me. You're a good friend and	
	I'm sorry." Here she broke down, and it was my turn to try to be stoic.	
Climax	"It's OK. It's nothing you have to apologize for. But are you OK?"	7
Conclusion: Raine returns to the idea in her thesis statement—her knowledge of Beth as someone in control of her life.	"Not really," Beth answered in an unsteady voice. "I have an eating disorder."	8
	What do you say to that? You know it happens, but you never think it will be you or someone	9
	close to you who will be plagued by a nagging, evil voice in the back of her head telling her she's	
	had enough to eat today (even though she's still very hungry) or that despite the fact that she is a	
	size 5 she really shouldn't enjoy a piece of cake for dessert. "Is it bulimia?" I asked Beth. She had	
	regained her composure now, and spoke matter-of-factly.	
	"No, I don't make myself sick. It's not really anorexia either because I do eat. I just don't eat	10
	much. It's more of a control thing. When I eat my meals out of a cereal bowl, I can control the portion	
	size, keep it small, and I'm aware of exactly how much I am eating."	
	"When did this start?" I asked, expecting her to say only a few weeks, maybe a few	11
	months ago.	
	"I've struggled with it most of my life, but I had it mostly under control until around a	12
	year ago."	
	A year! She had been fighting this ugly thing for a year, and we, I, had only just noticed in the	13
	past few weeks? How could that be? Beth later told me that her now ex-boyfriend had made a trivial	
	but insensitive comment about her weight around a year ago. That was what had triggered the disorder	
	to resurface. I was furious with myself and at a loss for words. All I could do was hug her, tell	
	her that I have absolute faith in her and her ability to fight this thing, this disgusting thing that	
	has taken over her body and her life, and cry into the comfort of my hands when she was finally	
	too far down the hall to hear me.	
	When I checked in with Beth a couple days after her disconcerting but unsurprising revelation,	14
	she broke down and gave me an intimate glimpse into the complicated and disturbing battle being	
	fought within her head. She seemed so defeated but aware of this feeling of defeat, which only	
	made her angry at herself. I did my best to console her with the reassuring fact that her awareness	
	of the problem and the need to make some serious changes in her life was already a giant step toward	
	her recovery. I also told her that while I would always be there for her, to support and encourage	
	her, I'm not qualified to truly help her deal with her disorder.	
	"I know," she said, a few silent tears sliding down her pale cheeks, "I've made an appointment	15
	with the counseling office on campus."	
	"I'm so proud of you," I responded as I embraced her.	16
	"I'm hoping you'll come with me, at least for the first visit."	17

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 251

"Of course," I answered. "You're strong and smart. You will beat this. You'll get better. And I'm always here if you need to talk or just need a hug. Just please promise me you'll stop working out until you get back to more normal eating habits. That means no more cereal bowls. Unless, of course, you're eating cereal."

Beth laughed a little at this last comment, which is what I had been hoping for. Even if only for a moment, the Beth I knew shone through in that brief smile and soft chuckle. I knew then that though she'll probably have to work on it every day, Beth will regain control of her body and her life.

Analyzing the Writer's Technique

1. Evaluate the strength of Raine's thesis. How clear and specific is it?
2. What ideas in the essay, if any, do you think should be discussed more fully? Where did you feel more details were needed? Which details—if any—are unnecessary?
3. How does Raine establish conflict and create tension?
4. Where does Raine use foreshadowing? How effective is it?
5. Evaluate the title, introduction, and conclusion of the essay.

Thinking Critically about Narration

1. Describe Raine's tone. Does it change in the course of the essay? If so, how? Does it seem appropriate for the topic?
2. What connotation does the phrase "freshman fifteen" (para. 4) have?
3. Is the last sentence of the essay fact or opinion? How do you know?

Reacting to the Essay

1. Why didn't Raine speak up about the strange behaviors she noticed? Do you think you would have done the same thing?
2. Beth's illness was about her need for control. What other behaviors can you think of that are influenced by this need?
3. Write a journal entry about a friend who suffered through something difficult, describing how you reacted to it.
4. Raine felt helpless in the face of her friend's illness. Write an essay about a time when you felt helpless to solve someone else's problem.

READING A NARRATIVE

The following section provides advice for reading narratives. Two model essays illustrate the characteristics of narrative writing covered in this chapter and provide opportunities to examine, analyze, and react to the writer's ideas. The second essay uses narration as well as description, illustration, and argument.

For more on description, illustration, and argument, see Chapters 12, 13, 19, and 20.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 252

For more on previewing an essay and other reading strategies, see Chapter 3.

Working with Text: Reading Narratives

It is usually a good idea to read a narrative essay several times before you attempt to discuss or write about it. Preview the essay first to get an overview of its content and organization. Then read it through to familiarize yourself with the events and action, noting also who did what, when, where, and how. Finally, reread the narrative, this time concentrating on its meaning.

What to Look For, Highlight, and Annotate

1. Narrative elements. When reading a narrative, it is easy to become immersed in the story and to overlook its importance or significance. Therefore, as you read, look for the answers to the following questions:

- What is the writer's thesis? Is it stated directly or implied?
- What is the role of each participant in the story?
- What does the dialogue reveal about or contribute to the main point?
- What is the conflict?
- How does the writer create tension?
- What is the climax?
- How is the conflict resolved?

Highlight those sections of the essay that reveal or suggest the answers.

2. Sequence of events. Especially for lengthy or complex narratives and for those that flash back and forward among events, it is helpful to draw a graphic organizer or number the sequence of events in the margins. Doing so will help you establish the sequence of key events.

3. Keys to meaning. The following questions will help you evaluate the reading and discover its main point:

- What is the author's purpose in writing this narrative?
- For what audience is it intended?
- What is the lasting value or merit of this essay? What does it tell me about life, people, jobs, or friendships, for example?
- What techniques does the writer use to try to achieve his or her purpose? Is the writer successful?

4. Reactions. As you read, write down your reactions to and feelings about the events, participants, and outcome of the narrative. Include both positive and negative reactions; do not hesitate to challenge participants, their actions, and their motives.

How to Find Ideas to Write About

For more about discovering ideas for a response paper, see Chapter 5.

Since you may be asked to write a response to a narrative, keep an eye out for ideas to write about *as you read*. Pay attention to the issue, struggle, or dilemma at hand. Try to discover what broader issue the essay is concerned with. For ex-

ample, in a story about children who dislike eating vegetables, the larger issue might be food preferences, nutrition, or parental control. Once you've identified the larger issue, you can develop your own ideas about it by relating it to your own experience.

Thinking Critically about Narration

A nonfiction narrative is often one writer's highly personal, subjective account of an event or a series of events. Unless you have reason to believe otherwise, assume that the writer is honest—that he or she does not lie about the experiences or incidents presented in the essay. You should also assume, however, that the writer chooses details selectively—to advance his or her narrative point. Use the questions below to think critically about the narratives you read.

How Objective Is the Writer?

Because a narrative is often highly personal, a critical reader must recognize that the information it contains is probably influenced by the author's values, beliefs, and attitudes. In "Right Place, Wrong Face," for example, the police officers are presented as uncaring and insensitive, but imagine how the officers would describe the same incident. Two writers, then, may present two very different versions of a single incident.

What Is the Author's Tone?

Tone refers to how the author sounds to his or her readers or how he or she feels about the topic. Writers establish tone through word choice, sentence structure, and formality or informality. An author's tone can reflect many emotions—such as anger, joy, or fear. The tone of an essay narrating an event in the American war in Iraq might be serious, frightening, or sad, whereas an essay narrating the activities of a procrastinating, well-meaning friend or relative might be light or humorous. The author's tone affects the reader's attitude toward the topic.

What Does the Author Leave Unspoken or Unreported?

An author usually cannot report all conversations and events related to the narrative; however, the author should report all those that are relevant. Pay attention to what is said and reported but also to what might be left unsaid and unreported. In "Taking Back Control," for example, we might wonder exactly what Raine and her friends said as they discussed Beth's problem.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 254

NARRATIVE ESSAY

As you read the following essay by Barbara Ehrenreich, consider how the writer uses the elements of narrative discussed in this chapter.

READING

Selling in Minnesota

Barbara Ehrenreich

Barbara Ehrenreich is an award-winning political essayist, columnist, and social critic whose works have appeared in such publications as *Time*, *the Nation*, *Harper's*, and *the Atlantic*. She is the author of numerous books, including *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (1997), *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream* (2005), and *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (2009). For *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (2001), from which this selection is adapted, Ehrenreich spent a year doing minimum-wage work to discover the working conditions of low-paying jobs in the United States. As you read it, highlight or annotate each narrative element in the essay.

In my second week [of working at Wal-Mart], two things change. My shift changes from 1
10:00–6:00 to 2:00–11:00, the so-called closing shift, although the store remains
open 24/7. No one tells me this; I find it out by studying the schedules that are posted,
under glass, on the wall outside the break room. Now I have nine hours instead of
eight, and my two fifteen-minute breaks, which seemed almost superfluous on the
10:00–6:00 shift, now become a matter of urgent calculation. Do I take both before
dinner, which is usually about 7:30, leaving an unbroken two-and-a-half-hour stretch
when I'm weariest, between 8:30 and 11:00? Or do I try to go two and a half hours with-
out a break in the afternoon, followed by a nearly three-hour marathon before I can get
away for dinner? Then there's the question of how to make the best use of a fifteen-
minute break when you have three or more urgent, simultaneous needs—to pee, to
drink something, to get outside the neon and into the natural light, and most of all, to
sit down. I save about a minute by engaging in a little time theft and stopping at the
rest room before I punch out for the break. From the time clock it's a seventy-five sec-
ond walk to the store exit; if I stop at the Radio Grill, I could end up wasting a full four
minutes waiting in line, not to mention the fifty-nine cents for a small-sized iced tea.
So if I treat myself to an outing in the tiny fenced-off area beside the store, I get about
nine minutes off my feet.

The other thing that happens is that the post–Memorial Day weekend lull definitely 2
comes to an end. Now there are always a dozen or more shoppers rooting around in
ladies'. New tasks arise, such as bunching up the carts left behind by customers and
steering them to their place in the front of the store every half hour or so. Now I am
picking up not only dropped clothes but all the odd items customers carry off from
foreign departments and decide to leave with us in ladies'—pillows, upholstery hooks,
Pokémon cards, earrings, sunglasses, stuffed animals, even a package of cinnamon

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 255

buns. And always there are the returns, augmented now by the huge volume of items that have been tossed on the floor or carried fecklessly to inappropriate sites. If I pick up misplaced items as quickly as I replace the returns, my cart never empties and things back up dangerously at the fitting room, where Rhoda or her nighttime replacement is likely to hiss: "You've got three carts waiting, Barb. What's the problem?"

Still, for the first half of my shift, I am the very picture of good-natured helpfulness. 3
Amazingly, I get praised by Isabelle, the thin little seventyish lady who seems to be Ellie's adjutant: I am doing "wonderfully," she tells me, and—even better—am "great to work with." But then, somewhere around 6:00 or 7:00, when the desire to sit down becomes a serious craving, a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde transformation sets in. I cannot ignore the fact that it's the customers' sloppiness and idle whims that make me bend and crouch and run. They are the shoppers, I am the antishopper, whose goal is to make it look as if they'd never been in the store. At this point, "aggressive hospitality" gives way to aggressive hostility. Their carts bang into mine, their children run amok.

It's the clothes I relate to, not the customers. And now a funny thing happens to me 4
here on my new shift: I start thinking they're mine, not mine to take home and wear, because I have no such designs on them, just mine to organize and rule over. Same with ladies' wear as a whole. I patrol the perimeter with my cart, darting in to pick up misplaced and fallen items, making everything look spiffy from the outside. I don't fondle the clothes, the way customers do; I slap them into place, commanding them to hang straight, at attention, or lie subdued on the shelves in perfect order. In this frame of mind, the last thing I want to see is a customer riffling around, disturbing the place. In fact, I hate the idea of things being sold—uprooted from their natural homes, whisked off to some closet that's in God-knows-what state of disorder. I want ladies' wear sealed off in a plastic bubble and trucked away to some place of safety, some museum of retail history.

One night I come back bone-tired from my last break and am distressed to find a 5
new person folding T-shirts in the [turtlenecks] area, my [turtlenecks] area. It's already been a vexing evening. Earlier, when I'd returned from dinner, the evening fitting room lady upbraided me for being late—which I actually wasn't—and said that if Howard knew, he probably wouldn't yell at me this time because I'm still pretty new, but if it happened again. . . . And I'd snapped back that I could care less if Howard yelled at me. So I'm a little wary with this intruder in [turtlenecks], and, sure enough, after our minimal introductions, she turns on me.

"Did you put anything away here today?" she demands. 6

"Well, yes, sure." In fact I've put something away everywhere today, as I do on every 7
other day.

"Because this is not in the right place. See the fabric—it's different," and she 8
thrusts the errant item up toward my chest.

True, I can see that this olive-green shirt is slightly ribbed while the others are 9
smooth. "You've got to put them in their right places," she continues. "Are you checking the UPC numbers?"

Of course I am not checking the ten or more digit UPC numbers, which lie just under 10
the bar codes—nobody does. What does she think this is, the National Academy of

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 256

Sciences? I'm not sure what kind of deference, if any, is due here: Is she my supervisor now? But I don't care, she's messing with my stuff. So I say, only without the numerals or the forbidden curse word, that (1) plenty of other people work here during the day, not to mention all the customers coming through, so why is she blaming me? (2) it's after 10:00 and I've got another cart full of returns to go, and wouldn't it make more sense if we both worked on the carts, instead of zoning the goddamn T-shirts?

To which she responds huffily, "I don't *do* returns. My job is to *fold*." 11

I leave that night shaken by my response to the intruder. If she's a supervisor, I 12 could be written up for what I said, but even worse is what I thought. Am I turning mean here, and is that a normal response to the end of a nine-hour shift? There was another outbreak of mental wickedness that night. I'd gone back to the counter by the fitting room to pick up the next cart full of returns and found the guy who answers the phone at the counter at night, a pensive young fellow in a wheelchair, staring into space, looking even sadder than usual. And my uncensored thought was, At least you get to sit down.

This is not me, at least not any version of me I'd like to spend much time with. 13 What I have to face is that "Barb," the name on my ID tag, is not exactly the same person as Barbara. "Barb" is what I was called as a child, and still am by my siblings, and I sense that at some level I'm regressing. Take away the career and the higher education, and maybe what you're left with is this original Barb, the one who might have ended up working at Wal-Mart for real if her father hadn't managed to climb out of the mines. So it's interesting, and more than a little disturbing, to see how Barb turned out—that she's meaner and slyer than I am, more cherishing of grudges, and not quite as smart as I'd hoped.

Examining the Reading

1. Describe the working conditions at Wal-Mart as experienced by the author.
2. What sorts of tasks do the Wal-Mart employees perform? Provide details.
3. How and why does the author's attitude toward her job change as the essay progresses?
4. What details or sections of the essay identify Ehrenreich as a well-educated journalist rather than a low-wage worker?
5. Explain the meaning of each of the following words as it is used in the reading: *superfluous* (para. 1), *fecklessly* (2), *adjutant* (3), *errant* (8), and *regressing* (13). Refer to your dictionary as needed.

Analyzing the Writer's Technique

1. Identify the writer's thesis. Is it implied or directly stated?
2. The writer has to decide how to fit in her various breaks. Why does Ehrenreich include these details? What is she trying to convey about her job?
3. What other patterns of development does the author use? Provide examples of two, and explain how they contribute to the narrative.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 257

Visualizing the Reading

Use the chart below to record several particularly effective examples of each narrative characteristic used by Ehrenreich in "Selling in Minnesota." The first one is done for you.

Narrative Characteristic	Examples (Paragraph Number)
Uses dialogue	"You've got three carts waiting, Barb. What's the problem?" (para. 2)
Includes sensory details	
Conveys action	
Suggests a sequence of events	
Builds tension	

Thinking Critically about Narration

1. Describe the tone of Ehrenreich's essay. Highlight key phrases that reveal her attitude toward working at Wal-Mart.
2. What is the connotation of "hiss" (para. 2)?
3. How are Ehrenreich's behavior and analysis affected by the fact that her job at Wal-Mart is not her permanent job? How might she behave and think differently if she relied on the job for her income? Do you think Wal-Mart workers would agree with Ehrenreich's narration?
4. Does Ehrenreich present an objective or a subjective view of a Wal-Mart worker? Explain your answer.

Reacting to the Reading

1. Compare the author's portrayal of a retail store worker with your experiences as a shopper. Are her descriptions consistent with what you have experienced or observed?
2. Discuss whether this essay will affect the way you treat retail store employees. What adjustments might you make to your behavior in light of the conditions under which they work?
3. Ehrenreich makes a distinction between her two names "Barb" and "Barbara"—suggesting two different parts to her personality. In what ways are you more than one person? Write a journal entry exploring this question.
4. Write an essay in which you narrate an on-the-job experience that reveals how you are treated by your employer or supervisor and suggests your attitude toward the workplace.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 258

NARRATION COMBINED WITH OTHER PATTERNS

For more on reading and writing arguments, see Chapters 19 and 20.

In the following selection, Alexander Zaitchik uses narration as well as description, illustration, and argument.

READING

Alien World

How Treacherous Border Crossing Became a Theme Park

Alexander Zaitchik

Alexander Zaitchik is a freelance journalist and the author of *Glenn Beck and the Triumph of Ignorance* (2010). He has been a staff member of *the exile*, an English-language newspaper published in Russia, and served as an investigative reporting fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, a U.S.-based legal organization that fights against extremist groups and supports racial and ethnic tolerance. He has published articles in the *Prague Post*, the *Prague Pill*, the *International Herald Tribune*, the *New Republic*, and *Reason*, a libertarian magazine in which this essay was originally published in 2009.

It's a little before 10 p.m. when I climb into the back of a pick-up truck full of crouching young Mexicans. We're in the lush Mezquital Valley just outside Ixmiquilpan, a dusty strip town cramped with car part shacks and taqueria¹ stalls a couple hours' drive north of Mexico City. The late-model GMC is scheduled to take its cargo—10 of us—north toward the Sonora-Arizona line. After the drop-off starts a treacherous pre-dawn border trek past armed U.S. patrols and the fanged, baying beasts of the desert wilds. Tonight we escape Mexico. El Norte or bust.

The truck is still idling when a young girl in an L.A. Dodgers jacket loses her nerve. "I'm worried about snakes and coyotes," she says in a quiet voice. "There are rattlers in the mountains. My brother said the little green ones are also poisonous." This is the first I've heard about poisonous snakes since signing up for this adventure.

"The clouds are no good," adds someone else. "We won't be able to see anything."

"Like the snakes," says the girl in the Dodgers jacket, her voice softer than before.

It's just possible to make out the faces of the group in the faint moonlight. These aren't the frightened, soiled migrants captured on green-lit night cams for network news investigations into "America's broken border." Not yet, anyway. These would-be migrants wear Diesel jeans and John Deere mesh caps, nose studs and gelled emo haircuts. Like me, each has paid \$125 for two days of camping and a midnight "border crossing" experience in central Mexico. The staged run, 700 miles from the real U.S. border, covers a bruising adventure course that winds through the valley and is riddled with muddy riverbanks, bristly thwap-you-in-the-face brush, and jagged mountain passes.

The course is also flecked with gritty and realistic dramatic accents. Men in U.S. Border Patrol T-shirts bark insults in broken English through megaphones. Women and children are tossed into Border Patrol vehicles and driven off into the night. M-80s stand in for shotgun fire. Then there are the female screams in the distance, a sound-track of rape.

¹taqueria: Mexican restaurant specializing in tacos.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 259

It all adds up to the world's most elaborate simulation of the Mexican migrant experience. One much safer, and about \$3,000 cheaper, than the real thing.

On my night as a hunted migrant, the *Caminata Nocturna* ("Night Hike") was celebrating its fourth sellout year under the direction of Mexico's leading purveyor of domestic meta-tourism, the Alberto Eco Park in the central Mexican highlands. The park was founded in 2004 by indigenous locals known as the Otomi in an attempt to staunch the flow of their working-age population, 90 percent of which has migrated to the United States over the last two decades. Faced with the extinction of the local community and culture, a few entrepreneurial Otomi decided to tap into the regional boom in culturally aware ecotourism. Their land is remote but nestled within a mountain range blessed with sheer cliffs and clean rivers. The Mexican government paved a road leading into the mountains, and with the help of a few small grants and sponsors, the Otomi built a campground replete with a rappelling cliff, zip lines, and a dock for canoes and kayaks. There is also a large riverside stage, upon which the Otomi perform their music in the local tribal dialect for Mexico's middle class and a smattering of European tourists. Today the camp is thriving. Among the growing list of sponsors is Corona.

The riverside picnics are pleasant enough on a summer's day, but it is the mock border run that is the park's primary draw and claim to fame. As America works on designs for its high-tech virtual border fence, middle-class Mexicans have been flocking to this low-tech virtual border, hungry for a taste of the danger experienced by their desperate compatriots who every year make the treacherous journey north. Tonight 130 of us pack into 12 pick-ups. Many are repeat visitors who have brought friends and relatives. "I heard about it from friends at school," says a teenage girl in my group. "They said it was fun."

Part of the fun, I learn, is staying in character. Sitting in the truck, I ask a kid in an Abercrombie sweatshirt why he came.

"Because there are no jobs in Mexico," he deadpans. "I want to find a better life, to live the American Dream."

The imitation of a pitiful migrant sparks a group laugh. But the chuckling is awkward and short-lived, as if everyone realizes a line has been crossed. The Otomi market the border crossing as an act of solidarity with Mexico's poor, but it can quickly start to feel a lot like what we gringos call slumming. When the truck finally starts moving, Abercrombie admits in perfect English to studying communications at Puebla University. When he visits the United States, which is about once a year, he gets a tourist visa and flies *Mexicana*. "I'm here for kicks," he says.

So is the girl in the Dodgers jacket with the fear of snakes. Her name is Daisy De Vasca, and she is from Lakewood, California, in Mexico visiting her aunt. Yet she swears tonight's snake threat is real. When she again begins describing the poisonous breeds that live in the mountains, I wave her off the subject. Better to talk about the American Dream, which can also bite you in the ass but usually lets you live to tell the tale.

The Otomi know about American dreams and nightmares. Most have made the trip north to work seasonally or settle in the large Otomi communities of Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Many have returned to Mexico, but the majority stay in the U.S., unable or unwilling to make the trip twice. An unknown number have disappeared or

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 260

died along the way, their bloated, hyperthermic corpses returned to their families in state vehicles if they were carrying ID cards, dispatched to anonymous graves if they weren't.

One of those who left and returned is Laura Basuado, a fresh-faced 27-year-old park employee who crossed the border when she was 17. She says the border simulation is designed to offer well-off Mexicans a small but bitter dose of the ordeal endured by migrants. It is her hope that the experience will build solidarity between what she calls "the two Mexicos"—one middle class and thriving, one dirt poor and sinking.

"The Night Walk is not even 1 percent of what it's really like," says Basuado, whose own journey to the U.S. involved a four-day march through the Sonoran desert. "I have never been so terrified in my life as when I went north. I was so sure we would die that I prayed the border police would catch us." Basuado eventually found her way to Minnesota, where she stayed four months before deciding she'd rather be poor and jobless in Mexico than poor and marginally employed in the U.S., living in constant dread of arrest and deportation.

The most painful memory for Basuado is the abuse she suffered at the rough hands of her coyote, or hired guide, known more commonly in Mexico as a *pollero*. These guides are usually part of violent criminal networks and are often indifferent to the safety of their charges once money has changed hands. In recent years *polleros* have become famous villains in the Mexican migration drama. In the interest of realism, they are well represented in the Night Hike. From beginning to end, park employees impersonating *polleros* scream "*Vamos rapido!*" while pushing participants through some of the course's most dangerous terrain.



Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 261

Then there are the screams that come from behind the bushes. During quiet lulls 18
 in the walk, female park employees periodically issue blood-curdling cries that echo
 through the mountains. It is not an overly histrionic touch. Rape has become so en-
 demic to the border crossing experience that women often start taking birth control
 before making the trip, expecting abuse from coyotes or the bandits that travel with
 them. "Even if a woman is traveling with a brother or cousin, they are at the mercy of
 the coyotes for survival," says Walt Staton, spokesperson for No More Deaths, a hu-
 manitarian group that provides assistance to migrants on both sides of the border.

Nobody actually gets raped, robbed, or murdered during the Night Hike, but the 19
 simulation is not for the weak of heart or the pregnant. There are full-speed runs
 down steep unlit paths as sirens wail in pursuit and stretches along raging river
 waters where the mire is almost knee high. In most countries participants would be
 required to sign multiple waivers before getting in the back of the truck. During peri-
 odic breaks, everybody collapses in exhaustion, many tending to bloody knees and
 sprained ankles.

It was during one of these pauses that screeching tires and high-pitched sirens 20
 called our attention to the foot of the hill we were resting on. Down below, a truck
 marked U.S. Border Patrol stopped before a group of migrants.

In one of the night's few dramatic set pieces, actors in camo and Border Patrol 21
 T-shirts throw several young girls into the back of the truck. Before driving away, an of-
 ficer looks up at our group and yells, "Go back to Mexico! We don't want you here!"

Watching the drama unfold, a kid next to me pulls out a Snickers bar and offers me 22
 half. "Pendejos," he mutters. *Assholes.*

When Parque Eco Alberto opened in 2004, curious reporters immediately set upon 23
 the camp with cameras and notepads. The Mexican media came first, followed by a
 trickle of international outlets, including the BBC, which called the border crossing



Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 262

simulation “Migrant Mountain.” Most of the coverage was and remains positive, if sometimes bemused. “The media sees we are trying to build understanding and create jobs, and they support us,” says Eduardo del Plan, a park employee who scripts much of the simulation based on his own multiple trips across the border. “We have become an example of an indigenous community standing on its own feet, trying to stop the bleeding to the north.”

The loudest exception to the chorus of approval is the Spanish language television network Telemundo. The Miami-based channel has accused the Otomi of using the Night Hike as a training course for migrants, akin to the mercenary firm Blackwater’s North Carolina training compound, where it prepares its employees for Iraq. When asked about this charge, del Plan laughs, saying the network purposely misrepresented the entire point of the exercise. “Telemundo is always trying to be sensational,” he says. “They should stick to covering soap operas.”

But the charge of preparing migrants for their journey mirrors one frequently leveled against Mexico City in Washington: that the Mexican government tolerates and even encourages migration north because it is one of the Mexican economy’s three pillars (the others being oil and the *maquiladora*² factories along Mexico’s northern border). Mexicans living in the U.S. send more than \$25 billion in annual remittances to their relatives south of the border. After oil exports, this money constitutes the country’s second largest stream of foreign revenue. “Migration used to be an economic safety valve for Mexico,” says Laura Carlson, director of the Americas Policy Program, a Mexico City think tank. “Now it’s an economic motor. The government has little incentive to crack down, and frankly views border security as a domestic issue for the U.S.”

Community initiatives like the Eco Alberto Park aren’t going to reverse these numbers. The income from the roughly 100 jobs created by the park is dwarfed by the regular bundles of cash sent back by Otomi working construction jobs in Las Vegas. Migrants will continue to go north as long as there is work there, no matter the mounting dangers illustrated by the border simulation. The same is true at border points around the globe where the poor live within walking or swimming distance of a better life. You can see it in Spain’s African enclave of Ceuta, bordering Morocco, where would-be migrants routinely charge guarded double walls topped with razor wire or attempt to swim the 13-mile Strait of Gibraltar.

Ask any struggling Mexican if U.S. plans for a high-tech border fence will stop the flow, and he will tell you the idea is fanciful, that you cannot deter the desperate. “If you build a wall, they will build taller ladders or dig deeper tunnels,” says del Plan. “If the entire border becomes clogged with armed guards, they will take boats, as the Cubans and Haitians do.” Indeed, this shift is already happening. Coast Guard interdictions of Mexican boats off the coast of San Diego are on the rise, as are reports of fatal capsizings.

But none of this directly concerns the kids with whom I pretended to be a migrant. Mexico’s growing middle class has more in common with its American counterpart than with people like the Otomi. Despite the Otomi talk of “one Mexico” and hopes of

²maquiladora: Assembly plants that receive parts from the United States and ship products back to the U.S.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 263

building solidarity with the migrants, the two Mexicos reappear as soon as we return, exhausted and bruised, to the Eco Alberto campsite. At a fire I sip Modelos with a group of university students ruminating on the night's adventure. There is a comparison of light wounds, some laughter over the simulation's low-fi effects. The talk quickly turns to football.

Examining the Reading

1. What activity are Zaitchik and the other people in the narrative engaging in?
2. Why do people participate in the Night Hike?
3. In what ways does the Night Hike simulate real illegal border crossings?
4. What does Zaitchik think of border fences as a deterrent to illegal crossings?
5. Explain the meaning of each of the following words as it is used in the reading: *simulation* (para. 7), *hyperthermic* (14), *histrionic* (18), *mercenary* (24), and *interdictions* (27).

Analyzing the Writer's Technique

1. What is Zaitchik's thesis? Is it stated or implied?
2. Who seems to be Zaitchik's intended audience? How can you tell?
3. Explain how Zaitchik uses description to make his experience vivid and engaging. Cite several examples.
4. What argument does Zaitchik make about illegal immigration?

Thinking Critically about Text and Visuals

1. What tone does the author set in paragraph 1 with the phrase "fanged, baying beasts"?
2. What connotation do the phrases "Diesel jeans" and "gelled emo haircuts" (para. 5) have? What is the author saying about the people who are with him?
3. What evidence other than personal experiences (16 and 17) might the author have used to describe illegal border crossings?
4. In paragraph 27, is the statement by del Plan fact or opinion?
5. The photographs on pages 260 and 261 show people participating in the Night Walk. How do these photographs differ from what you might expect to see in photographs of actual illegal border crossings?
6. What additional insights do the photographs provide that the essay does not?

Reacting to the Reading

1. What do you think Zaitchik learned from the simulated border-crossing?
2. What does Zaitchik suggest is the future of illegal immigration from Mexico? Why does he believe this to be the case?
3. Write a journal entry exploring or explaining your position on immigration.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 264

Applying Your Skills: Additional Essay Assignments

For more on locating and documenting sources, see Part 5.

Write a narrative on one of the topics listed below, using the elements and techniques of narration you learned in this chapter. Depending on the topic you choose, you may need to do library or Internet research to gather enough support for your ideas.

To Express Your Ideas

1. Write a narrative about an incident or experience that you see differently now than you did when it happened.
2. In "Right Place, Wrong Face," White says he always believed that the police "were supposed to serve and protect" him. After the incident he describes in the essay, White feels otherwise. Write a narrative describing an incident involving police officers or law enforcement agents that you may have experienced, observed, or read about. Did the incident change your attitude about police or law enforcement or confirm opinions you already held?

To Inform Your Reader

3. Write an essay informing your reader about the characteristics of a strong (or weak) relationship, the habits of successful (or unsuccessful) students, or the ways of keeping (or losing) a job. Use a narrative to support one or more of your main points.

To Persuade Your Reader

4. "Selling in Minnesota" discusses the working conditions at Wal-Mart, where the author worked in the clothing department. Have you been treated very poorly or particularly well by an employee? Do you think that store employees are polite or rude? Do you have low expectations for them given the nature of the job and the pay? Are improvements or changes needed? Write an essay taking a position on this issue. Support your position using a narrative of your experience with clerks or employees.
5. "Alien World" uses argument to further the author's position on illegal immigration. Write an essay persuading your reader to take a particular stand on an issue of your choosing. Use a narrative to support your position on the issue or tell how you arrived at it.

Highlight (pink) - 11 Narration: Recounting Events > Page 265

Cases Using Narration

6. Write a paper for a sociology course on the advantages of an urban, suburban, or rural lifestyle. Support some of your main points with events and examples from your own experiences.
7. Write a draft of the presentation you will give as the new personnel director of a nursing care facility in charge of training new employees. You plan to hold your first orientation session next week, and you want to emphasize the importance of teamwork and communication by telling related stories from your previous job experiences.