

# CHAPTER 1: NARRATION - STORIES THAT CREATE MEANING

This chapter emphasizes connections between critical thinking and narrative. It maps important skills for reading and creating narratives:



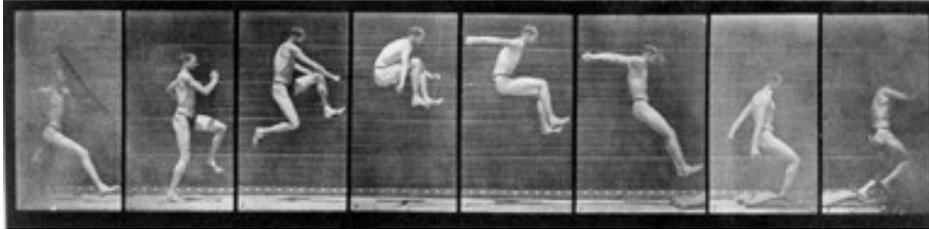
- Identifying key features of narratives
- Recognizing that a narrative's sequences are selected and organized by a narrator who has specific values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases
- Consciously choosing what to include and what to exclude from a narrative
- Using narratives for persuasive purposes

You walk into the kitchen, throw your keys on the table, and say to your mother, "You won't believe what happened." Like a good tennis partner, she returns the conversational ball and asks you what happened. Your answer is dramatic: you were in a hurry to school; a train made you late; you sped; the police stopped you; you could not find your car registration; you sat there and softly hit your head against the steering wheel in frustration; the officer was sympathetic; she let you off with a warning; you went to class; the professor himself was late; your tardiness did not matter. By presenting the events as a story -- as a narrative -- you have made the experience well-organized and understandable. You had other options such as placing the police officer's written warning on the table or bursting into tears, but your choice was to tell a story. Telling stories is probably the most basic tool we have for explaining events, and it is important to know how to recognize narratives and how to create them.

So, what is it that makes a narrative . . . a narrative? The most obvious answer is that narratives create *sequences of events*. The events are organized *chronologically*, and your reader/listener uses the sequence to connect the events into a larger *meaning*.

## KEY FEATURES OF NARRATIVE

At this point, you may be asking a reasonable question: “Why does narrative matter? Why does



narrative matter if I’m a chemist, a nurse, a tool and die maker, a doctor, or a police officer?” That is an exceptionally

good question, and here is a partial answer: many things are actually narratives, but they hide the fact that they are stories. For example, think about a lab report in a chemistry class. The report is really a story about the sequence of events in the lab. If you were given oxygen and hydrogen and the tools for combining them, your report would give the *setting* (the lab, the equipment, the materials), the *action* (combining the elements), the *climax* (the formation of the

### Where in Your world are Narratives?

Narration is the most basic mode for communication. Stories are efficient, effective tools for sharing insights.

#### *Narrative in Daily Life*

- We follow and create narratives when we play video games
- We follow narratives on film and television
- We use narrative conversations to build intimacy and relationships

#### *Narrative at School*

- We use narratives when we write scientific reports
- We use the narratives of syllabi to foresee the future of a class
- We use narrative in college applications to present our achievements over time

#### *Narrative at Work*

- Medical charts are narratives of what is happening to a patient
- Employee reviews tell the story of past accomplishments
- An insurance company uses an accident report to reconstruct the story of a collision

new molecule), the *falling action* (measurements of quantities and ratios), and finally the *resolution* (the identification of the new molecule as H<sub>2</sub>O). The final portion of the report would give the reader the meaning of the whole sequence. Your work as a scientist relies on narration. It is the way that humans tend to present their experience to others.

Here are the key concepts about narration so far:

1. General Features of Narratives
  - a. Emphasize sequence of events and actions
  - b. Organized chronologically
  - c. Offer a meaning for the story
2. Organizational Features
  - a. Setting
  - b. Rising Action
  - c. Climax
  - d. Falling Action
  - e. Resolution

What are key terms that often tell you that a document relies on narration?

first/second/third/etc.	next	previously	then
later	after	before	earlier
afterward	until	while	soon
during	meanwhile	when	thus

These and similar words establish sequences, and most involve sequences in time.

When you tell someone a story, you put things in a sequence, ignore irrelevant materials, and select what is most important to your goal. When the story is all finished, you provide an answer to the “So what?” that your reader asks about the narrative. Because you create the narrative, it is fairly obvious to *you* what is being ignored. (Did you tell your mother that when your professor came in late, he handed you a test with a “D” on it?) Thus, creating a narrative can be fairly straightforward. You are making the choices. On the other hand, when you read a narrative, the choices are much harder to recognize.

## RECOGNIZING NARRATION

We began with a simple definition of narration: a narrative is a story that uses sequence and chronology to connect events in a way that leads to a meaning, a moral, an idea, or a discovery. We have made a list of words that create time-based sequences. Using this first draft of our definition, we can see that “Little Red Riding Hood” is a narrative about a little girl who goes out into the woods, talks to strangers, and nearly dies. It seems to serve as a warning against strangers. The story has a sequence of events that teach a lesson.

A partial list of examples of narratives includes police reports, medical histories, lab reports, novels, short stories, plays, urban legends, television sitcoms, soap operas, history books, genre films (westerns, romances, mysteries), biographies, and autobiographies. We can call these narratives when they use -- as they often do -- sequences of events that use time as a primary organizational strategy, but also use setting, characters, action, and resolution to convey a message.

Not only do narratives use time and sequence, but also they have a *narrator* who is important to the story’s meaning. This narrator is sometimes unnamed and sometimes almost invisible. It is the voice that chooses the events and chooses how to organize them, gives them emphasis, and who offers the final “meaning” to the story. Readers need to be careful not to confuse the narrator and the author. Authors create different types of narrators just as they create different types of characters. These choices are never neutral, and by mapping them, we find out about the narrative’s values and beliefs. We see the narrative’s hidden agendas, its unacknowledged assumptions, and its place in the network of similar ideas.

Narration is a double-edged sword: it puts things into a particular kind of order, but it also excludes some things. When we consciously recognize both the included and the excluded material, we become better readers and better writers. Identifying the gaps in the existing map of a subject requires that we think about the narrator and about what is excluded from the story.

If we are going to *write* well, we have to *read* with a keen eye for how a narrative is being put together. This chapter helps you master two basic skills: 1) writing narratives, and 2) recognizing how narratives are created and how they offer us meaning. Thus, you will sharpen your ability to read narratives so that you can create narratives, and you will sharpen your ability to create narratives so you can read with greater insight and skepticism. It is a two-way street between reading and writing, and the road between them lets you critically explore the world around you.

## IDENTIFYING NARRATORS

Stories are always told by someone. Sometimes, these narrators are truthful; other times, they are unreliable, or ignorant. In some other cases we never directly hear the narrator's voice, but we can figure out the kind of person who would tell such a story. Understanding the narrator is as important as the story itself.

*Persona* is the Greek word for "mask," and it can refer to the large masks that an actor put on when playing a role in a play in ancient Greece. These plays were serious events, and when actors put on the *persona*, they were transformed into the character. They "became" Oedipus or Creon or Antigone or whoever was the character. When your teachers read your work -- or when your employer reads your work -- they put on a reading *persona*. It is much different from the other roles they play in life. You have to write for that *persona*. Here are a few key features of the teacher's Grading *Persona*:

- The grading *persona* takes you at your word, your *written* word. If you write, "Going down the street, the school looked beautiful," the reading *persona* says, "Hey, that's weird. How could a building go down the street? This person is telling me something that



sounds mistaken.” Of course, that very same reader in her/his role as a teacher or employer actually knows what you mean. But in written work, you are assumed to have written exactly what you mean.

- The grading persona already knows the existing map to which you are responding or making an addition. On the other hand, the grading persona expects that you will help them out understanding the existing map to which your paper responds. A writer cannot start in the middle of a discussion. Background information and context matter.

Not only does your instructor have a persona, but you must have an appropriate writing persona as well. Narratives are especially dependent on the ability to create appropriate narrators who understand their relationship to the reader.

#### *Putting Narration to Work*

Here is a real email (slightly altered to protect the guilty) that embodies ideas about the writer’s relationship to the reader:

Miss. R\_\_:

I missed class on Friday cuz my favorite cousin was here from Georgia and we just had to party, you know! Anyhoo, did I miss anything important? I been looking for the book the Yellow wallpaper and can’t find it. Who wrote it anyway?

What does the writer assume about her/his relationship to the reader? How do you know this? Is the assumed relationship appropriate? How could the email be revised once the relationship is understood differently?

## THREE EXAMPLES OF NARRATION

Below are examples of narrations. The examples range from the work of an inexperienced first-term writer to the work of a famous scientist. Each example illustrates key features about narration.

### Example #1

The first example of a narrative was produced by a student in a first term-class. It is an early first draft of what eventually became a much better narrative. As is, it is not an effective narrative. The notes in the margins not only point out what makes it a narrative, but also point out some of the missed opportunities to make it a better example.

<b>Learning to Ride a Bike</b>	
<p>This narrative is about the time I learned to ride a bike. I was seven years old. I got a bike for my birthday. But I didn't know how to ride it. My dad took me outside on the driveway to practice riding. My dad held the back of the bike so I wouldn't fall. We did that for a long time. When we went down the driveway one time, my dad tripped and let go of the bike and I drove into the street. Luckily, there was no cars coming. My dad broke his arm and couldn't teach me anymore how to ride my bike. I went to the hospital with him and my mom and the nurse gave me a piece of candy. My dad said his arm hurt real bad, and they put a cast on it. He let me sign it when we got home. And that's the story of how I rode my new bike.</p>	<p>The first sentence is about the paper, not about riding a bike. It only repeats the information in the title.</p> <p>The use of "I" creates a narrator, and the narrator provides a setting and rising action (his father running behind the bicycle). There is a climax (the father falls as the narrator rides away). The story's falling action (the trip to the hospital) concludes with a resolution (the candy, signing the cast). The writer organizes the story in a time-based sequence. It is accurate to call this a narrative although it lacks a key element: an answer to the reader's question about why the writer tells the story.</p>

*What does this example tell us about narration?*

There is nothing "wrong" with what the student wrote. It is a narrative, and it shows familiarity with basic concepts about narration (time, sequence, setting, action, resolution). How is it different from what an experienced writer would produce? First, the writer uses very short sentences that need to have stronger connections (transitions) between them. The story carries the reader forward in a jolting, jerky narrative ride that needs to be smoothed out. If this is a problem that affects your writing, you should go to the handbook in the back

and look up “transitions.” There is practical advice on how to create strong ones. You might also review the pages about “types of sentences” in the Sentences chapter because they create transitions.

This narrative *attempts* to solve problems, but it does so in awkward ways. It can be improved by using transitions, and by dealing with the “So what?” that readers will ask.

This writer is not really sure who s/he is writing for. Is it the teacher? The class? Someone else? There is a good possibility that the student needs to think about the audience. If the audience is the teacher, then the student needs to ask, “The teacher in the role of what?” Is the paper for the teacher in her/his role as the person who is in front of the class, helping understand assignments and concepts? Or is it the teacher in her/his role as a father, mother, aunt, uncle, motorcycle racer, quilter, or whatever else s/he does? Or -- and this is the better question -- is it *the teacher in her/his role as a paper grader?*

You will help yourself if you think a bit more about this role played by your teacher.

**Example #2:**

Like the first example, the one below was produced by a student in a first-term class. The writer seems to know useful techniques for building transitions: repetitions, repetitions with difference, intervening sentences that comment on previous information. Pay attention to how the writer creates a smoother flow of time and events in this example. At the end, the story explicitly names the reason for having told the story.

## How To Be a Model Citizen

**When** I was **in third grade**, my friend Tom and I really liked to play with Play-Doh modeling clay. It came in so many bright colors, and we made animals to create our own zoo; we pretended we were on a safari hunting lions and tigers with our Play-Doh rifles, and we crafted the dream cars we intended to have when we were older. Like every other kid, we really liked the smell of Play-Doh, that distinctive, slightly sweet bread dough scent it has. But for us, that was only a small part of the pleasure of Play-Doh. That is, **until** my sister got the Play-Doh Meal Makin' Kitchen Playset for her birthday. It had molds for making all different kinds of food; it also came with a little plastic stove, a toaster, and a pizza pan. However, the best part was the recipe book. It told us how to mix certain colors to make the food look realistic, and suggested shapes **we could make** in addition to the molds of chicken legs and ham to create a whole meal. In my mind, **I can still see** the plastic frying pan that we filled with real-looking fried eggs, the vivid yellow yolk resting on the whites, and four pieces of tasty bacon on the side. **We added** two slices of golden brown toast, with red Play-Doh standing in for raspberry jelly. **The more we played**, the more creative we got. We made a pizza with everything, a hamburger and French fries, and even used the molds to bake an elaborate birthday cake decorated with every color in the spectrum. **After a while**, I started to get hungry, and I know Tom did too, because he asked me, "**Do you think we could really eat** this stuff? It smells pretty good to me." I wasn't really sure, but it seemed like it was **worth a try**, especially since **we had been looking at food all morning**. But I still had some reservations about it, so I said, "**Let's see** if Jake will eat it! If he likes it, it'll be okay for us to try." Jake was my basset hound, and he would eat anything. He always seemed to be hungry; even right after eating his dog food, he would be at the dinner table, begging for something off my plate. So I called him over, and **after** a brief discussion on the merits of bacon over steak, we offered him the pan of bacon and eggs, complete with toast. **As we expected**, he swallowed the whole thing in two gulps. He looked a little surprised, probably because of the unfamiliar taste, and walked into the kitchen to get a drink of water. He drank quite a lot of water, in fact, and **headed toward** the living room, where he sat down and started making wheezing noises like I had never heard. Tom and I looked at each other with alarm, **but before we could decide what to do next**, Jake threw up noisily, spewing a gruesome rainbow across the living room carpet. There was no chance that my mom would not find out about this, so after Tom left, I found her in the laundry room and sheepishly confessed my crime. **Jake spent the night at the veterinarian's office, I was grounded for the weekend, and Tom and I learned a valuable lesson – just because something smells good and looks appetizing, it doesn't necessarily mean it's a good idea to eat it.**

Notice the bolded words that create a sequence of events: when, after, and before. The writer connects the set of events with transitional events that connect to create a long story. The story has all the usual elements: characters, a narrator, rising action, a climax, falling action, and a resolution. The lack of paragraphs makes it difficult to recognize the story's sequential structure. Note also that the story leads to a "moral" or a more general insight (blue print). This narrative is tightly organized and represents all the key features of narration.

*What does this example tell us about narration?*

The student provides the kind of linked details that create the narrative flow. They suggest that this student reads more than the first student and has a more automatic sense of what builds a story. S/he also knows how to create what is called “pacing” in the story. For example, after the dog eats the Play-Doh, there is a description within the narrative that focuses on the dog’s “surprised” look, the way he walks around, how he drinks water, and his “wheezing.” The writer slows down the narration in order to create a bit of suspense. The reader gets a few moments to ask, “Hey, what’s going to happen to the dog?” Even though it is a logical question from the moment the dog eats the clay, the writer creates “reading time” where the suspense lingers. The narrative illustrates how a simple event can be shaped into narrative through an understanding of how narration works.

What we have looked at so far pushes you to think about what readers need to understand about your information and about the choices that go into building a narration.

**Example #3:**

The example below uses the work of James, a Brazilian student studying in the United States. James is a whiz at math, a voracious reader, and fluent in English. However, his writing is less natural. The steps he goes through as he writes a letter for a scholarship are the same steps you would use to write a letter.

**Looking for Anomalies, Asking Questions, and Identifying Opportunities**

James begins with an email to a professor who has sent him a list of scholarships available to foreign students:

Dear Professor Doe,

You are a big help to me. I appreciate this list, and I will write the letter right away. I have many questions: 1. Should I try to play down the fact that I am from Brazil? 2. Am I just telling them a list of my grades and my other facts? 3. Will they care about my family and what I did in Brazil that makes me want to be in another culture? I ask these questions because they only ask two general questions to guide the essay: “Career and Educational Goals,” and “Activities, clubs, community service, and other activities that represent your sustained interests.” These do not seem like questions.

Your student, James M\_\_\_\_\_

James' note shows that he wants to map the territory. He asks for information about his readers: do they have biases about foreigners; does the story of his education matter; and do they want a list or a story? Without using the term "mapping the territory," James is doing exactly that. He is asking about whether or not to use narration, and he is trying to figure out what he should put into the narration and what he should leave out of the narration in order to create the meaning he seeks.

James also knows that he has another audience: the professor to whom he sends the email. He addresses the professor formally, writes in complete sentences, and concludes with a closing and his full name. In fact, his email looks more like a letter than most emails. It is a choice that signals the importance of his request. Let's look at the email answer he receives.

Hi James -- Good questions. First, it's a good moment in history to be Brazilian. Everyone recognizes that China, India, and Brazil are the new economic giants in the world economy; thus, your nationality seems an advantage. Of course, you're right to think about it because there are so many unemployed citizens here, and there's a bias against them. Thus, your nationality is a durable fact, and you must treat it as a valuable asset. It's valuable to you, and it ought to be valuable to the college, and to this country. But remember that "ought to be" and "is" mean very different things. In order to remind the committee that you're human, friendly, smart, disciplined, etc., you should probably respond in terms of a narrative (a story). Select key events and achievements that illustrate your commitment to learning. Don't apologize; tell your story as a story about someone who is bringing a new, unexpected richness to the culture.

Here's what I haven't heard from you: what is it that you "are" or "have" that nobody has talked about? You need to show that there's an unrecognized need for whatever it is that you represent, and thus you're valuable. Send me a draft, and I'll try to be helpful.

Yours,  
J. Doe

The professor is more casual than James. There is no formal opening, and he addresses the student by first name. This may seem minor, but it is part of the social code that bespeaks the greater relative power and authority of the professor. Also note that the professor explicitly says that a specific rhetorical mode -- narration -- should govern the letter. The rough draft and the comments from the teacher embody the mapping metaphors we use to think about writing:

### *Using the Purpose and Problem Statement*

James writes yet another email before he goes to work on his letter. It is brief, and it exemplifies that identifying the gaps in the map is a vital step toward effective writing.

Professor --I do not want to be rude or to brag, but if I am from an emerging economy and America is trying to connect to Brazil, wouldn't peoples like me be useful? Can I say this? Do the committee think about such things? May I point out this fact?  
James

James specifically asks about the map that Americans use to think about immigrants, the economy, international relations, and a host of other questions. James has identified a gap in the map, and now it is his job to re-draw that map in a letter.

### *Organizing the Draft With a Prospectus*

James begins to re-draw the map by writing a note that explains what he intends to do and to accomplish. Such a planning note is often called a "prospectus." Here is the email to which he attached the first draft of his letter:

Dear Professor -- I have thought about what to say, but I am still not sure how to say it. I will tell about that I have always been a good student and that my family supports me in this. I will tell about going to English school when I was little and about my good grades in college. I think they need to know that I was an exchange student. Maybe that will be help. I have decided that I must say that all these things help both America and Brazil and that I need a scholarship to stay here.  
James

### *Developing the Prospectus into a Rough Draft*

James is ready to turn his prospectus into a rough draft. He has performed all the essential tasks that lead to a complete document. He has mapped the territory in detail by reviewing everything from the place of immigrants in America to the emerging relationship between Brazil and the United States. He has mapped the probable beliefs of the scholarship committee. After he completed his map of existing knowledge, he identified an un-named gap in it. This gap is the place for his own voice in the worlds of the letter, the college, the country, and the world. That may seem to overstate his insight, but he has re-drawn these maps to see his own place on it. Here is his first draft along with the notes from his professor:

<p>James M _____  2010 Linden  Hometown, MI 48823  (555) 777-7777  <a href="mailto:jamesm@email.zzz">jamesm@email.zzz</a></p>	<p>You recognize that the letter should be formal, and your inside address reflects this (good!). Did you know that a formal letter also includes the address of those to whom you write? Including your email address is a good idea. Perhaps it could be placed at the end, beneath your name and after your telephone number.</p>
<p>Dear Scholarship Committee:</p>	
<p><a href="#">To gain knowledge by successfully interfacing the cultures I have been exposed to</a>, is the motto which guides my life recently. <b>Since</b> I started Elementary School in my home country (Brazil), education was a major concern to me; because of my independence nature, <a href="#">tracing long term achievements was a process that occurred precociously</a>. My interest in the architecture of different cultures was easily identified by people who surrounded my <b>childhood; as a consequence of the social exposure I was under</b>, my parents saw the necessity to introduce me to the international field <a href="#">under practical and affordable ways</a>. Needless to say, my family has been an important player in the guidelines of my education. <b>The first step</b> we took, <a href="#">in order to achieve the goal of international familiarity</a>, was to matriculate me in a private English course, <b>when</b> I was 10 years old.</p> <p>Along with experiences such as entering an Exchange Student Program between Brazil and America, and participating <a href="#">in numerous events that promoted international integration</a>, I developed a <a href="#">sophisticated sense of maturity</a>, and <b>became able</b> to make my own critical decisions regarding following my aspirations. My actual goal is to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering by merging my experiences in the international field with my designs. Such a choice is also based on my educational background in Brazil and <a href="#">my scholastic excel in Mathematics</a>.</p>	<p>I will mark in BLUE the phrases that sound a bit "unnatural."</p> <p>Your opening line establishes a general theme for the story you're about tell, but it sounds a bit stiff . . . perhaps not what a native speaker would use, especially the term "interfacing." Use your usual excellent manner of speaking. I've read the entire letter, and while you want to present your Brazilian nationality as an advantage, you also need to sound comfortable in American culture. I'd also note that you're using a narrative that begins with your early childhood experience, the values of your family, and the development of your goals. The narration helps you define yourself, and the chronological sequence is a useful one. I highlight in bolded text the words that show you're telling a story about the evolution of your interests. You're telling a story. Make the links between events more clear.</p> <p>note: are you using a thesaurus to try and sound more sophisticated? It seems to me that you are, and it's not working. Again, use the vocabulary of your regular speech.</p>

<p>To be part of a selected group of bilingual people seems to have affected my initial choices regarding my academic programs. <a href="#">The fascination to world cultures was camouflaged within a sudden interest to explore areas such as International Business and International Affairs.</a> However, <a href="#">after evaluating experiences with business-related courses that were taken by me, it is clear that the instability of this field is not really appreciative in my point of view.</a> Instead <b>aiming my long term goals</b> towards the Business department, my future decisions are based on gradually achieving short term goals, still maintaining my interest in the relationship Brazil x America, and making good use of my Math and Design skills. Some <b>examples of the short term goals, which I reached so far</b>, are my membership within Phi Theta Kappa (Honor Society of Macomb Community College) and consequent election to the position of Vice-President of Scholarship, and to have my name on Macomb Community College Dean's List.</p>	<p>You begin with a setting that presents the nature of your interests, and then you explain how that changes. Again, it's a sequence, a story of your growth and development. Again, you wisely choose to tell the story of your evolving interests. Perhaps you will read this aloud to me or to a friend. Your spoken English is flawless, and I'd like you to hear how your written English is a bit different from the way you speak. We need to carry over the naturalness of your speech to your writing.</p>
<p>Another peer to <a href="#">my success transcends from my own experiences; this peer is determination.</a> I believe that the cross cultural relations developed by dealing with people from different nationalities, don't simply promote an exchange of social and language skills, but enforces more valuable factors, such as enlarging our range of knowledge and embracing our ambition to win. To have the opportunity to develop my individual knowledge, and assist to <a href="#">the enlargement of knowledge of people from different nationalities</a> is the crucial point of pursuing a self-significant career.</p>	<p>The promise in the previous paragraph to provide examples is another form of narration. The examples are stories. Good.</p>

I strongly aspire to keep taking more steps toward obtaining a credible educational degree in the United States. Hopefully, by obtaining financial assistance from private scholarships, I will be able to expand the opportunity door for an even more enlightened future.

You conclude your letter with an answer to the “So what?” that the readers will ask after reading your narrative. That is good, and it solidifies the sense that you’re using a narrative to communicate. Remember to use a closing, e.g., “Yours truly,” followed by a space for your signature and then your named typed underneath.

The instructor’s notes on James’ letter make some uncomfortable points: James does not sound natural; the story itself is garbled. Because James needs the scholarship, and because he has the ability to hear this criticism as *about the writing, not about him*, he is able to make a major revision.

*Bridging the gap between the rough and the submission drafts*

James intuitively understands that the professor’s responses do not come from a person he knows, but rather from the *grading persona* that the instructor dons to respond to his drafts. James writes several more versions of the letter, and has two friends read it to catch the phrases that do not sound natural. Then he sends his professor what he believes is the final version:

1672 Linden  
Hometown, MI 99999  
(555) 777-777  
Scholarship Committee

Local Community College  
666 Salem Street  
Hometown, MI 99999  
16 June 1904

Dear Scholarship Committee:

I am fortunate to live “between” two cultures. Even as a child in Brazil, I wanted to be independent, and my family encouraged me to find the kind of education that would help me know about other places. My interest in the architecture of different cultures was easily identified by people who surrounded my childhood; as a consequence of this social exposure, my parents saw the necessity to introduce me to the international field in practical and affordable ways. Needless to say, my family has been an important player in the guidelines of my education. The first step we took, in order to achieve the goal of international familiarity, was to enroll me in a private English course, when I was ten years

old. Along with experiences such as entering an Exchange Student Program between Brazil and America in Macomb County, and participating in events that promoted international integration, I developed a strong sense of cultural differences, and became able to make my own critical decisions regarding my aspirations. Now, my actual goal is to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering by merging my experiences as Brazilian-American with my love for mathematics and engineering.

To be part of a selected group of bilingual people seems to have affected my initial choices regarding my academic program. When I began my education, my fascination with world cultures was camouflaged within an interest to explore areas such as International Business and International Affairs. However, after evaluating my experiences with business related courses, it is clear that the field does not fit with my interests. Instead of aiming my long-term goals toward business, my future decisions are based on gradually achieving short-term goals, still maintaining my interest in the relationship between Brazil and America, and making good use of my math and design skills. Some examples of the short term, which I have reached so far, are my membership within Phi Theta Kappa (Honor Society of Macomb Community College) and subsequent election to the position of Vice-President of Scholarship, and to have my name on Macomb Community College Dean's List. As a college student in Brazil, I had 18 credits of "A" work, and here at Macomb, I maintain a 4.0 average. Part of my motivation is the desire to connect two worlds within which I've grown up.

Another part of my success comes from my determination. I believe that the cross cultural experiences developed by dealing with people from different nationalities, don't simply promote an exchange of social and language skills, but also strengthen more valuable factors, such as enlarging our range of knowledge and embracing our ambition to succeed. To have the opportunity to develop my individual knowledge, and assist to the enlargement of knowledge of people from different nationalities is the crucial point of pursuing an education.

I hope to keep taking more steps toward an international life by obtaining a credible educational degree in the United States. Hopefully, by obtaining financial assistance from private scholarships, I will be able to realize this opportunity.

Yours truly,  
James M \_\_\_\_\_  
(555) 777-777  
[jamesM@email.com](mailto:jamesM@email.com)

Here, James has used narration as the strategy for a scholarship application. Some paragraphs are heavily narrative. Others are still list-like and need to be re-written to develop the story of his growth as a student. The subsequent development of this letter required transforming more

of it into a narrative. He used carefully constructed statements of meaning to conclude each narrative section.

### *The Submission Draft*

Surprise! The final draft of James' letter is not included here because its final stage requires only a few basic changes, changes that you are capable of producing. Rather than simply showing you the letter he submitted, we suggest an exercise: select the least successful of James' paragraphs, and re-write it by applying what you have learned about narration. This exercise requires you to read in a particular fashion, and then it requires you to apply your understanding of narration. It will help you write your own letter.

And here is the good news: James was awarded a scholarship for his tuition.

### *Putting Narrative to Work*

So far, you have read narratives and identified their key words, phrases, and writing techniques. You have discovered the existing map of the idea of narration, and it is likely that this map has raised some good questions. At first, narration seemed very simple, but it has become more complicated. Below are questions that students ask about narration to identify the gaps in what has been said about narration. These questions are steps toward a paper because the gaps prod the students to think about what could be said. To practice this kind of thinking, your job is to write a brief paragraph with *your* answer to each question. See the response to question #2 as a model for what you can create.

#### Five Student Questions

1. Does a narrative have to be chronological; can the order be shuffled? I happen to watch films like *Inception*, *Memento*, *Run Lola Run*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Big Fish*, and some of the older TV shows like *Lost*. If the order is cut up, is it still a narrative?
2. So far, we have talked about sequence and about time as key features of a narrative. What are some words that serve as tip-offs that a document is using sequence, time,

and answers to the “So what?” that would make it a narrative? [Note that the answer below is a model, not a real answer written by a student.]

Example: Model Answer	Teacher Response
<p>We already have a list of “time” words used to show sequences, and those are worth reviewing. I’ve also noticed that there’s a strict use of past, present, or future in narration. I think that might be part of creating realistic stories. Maybe it’s part of any writing, but in a narrative, the reader needs to know <i>when</i> the action is taking place. Transitions seem to be part of storytelling. The use of what the handbook calls “transitions” seems to be part of making the story a continuous event rather than a set of separate, one-after-the-other events. So, I suppose continuity is part of narratives. By the way, the picture of the guy jumping now makes sense to me because films are a bunch of separate images that <i>seem</i> to be continuous. Narration might be the same way. It makes me wonder if it’s a more general “thing” than a description such as I’d find in a manual for repairing something. I’m used to having my “so what” as a thesis statement in the first paragraph, and I look for it in a narrative, but now I’m not so sure where it goes. What’s the difference between a thesis and the “So what?” that is answered in a narrative?</p>	<p>Excellent answer because it doesn’t claim to answer everything completely. Note that the answer to the question includes questions about the “So what?” This is good because the discussion question is meant to have you demonstrate what you know from the previous information in the chapter, and to have you ask questions that lead to better writing. This student seems confident enough to use the question for her own benefit. The question about narration as a “more general ‘thing’” is useful.</p>

3. When I see terms like “rising action” and “climax,” I think about the kinds of things a literature class studies. What is the difference between the kind of narrative represented by something like “Little Red Riding Hood” and a history book about the U.S. Civil War or a chemistry lab report?
4. My aunt tells me “urban legends,” like the one about the stolen kidneys. Are these narratives? What is the point of this kind of stuff? Is *any* story with a message (an answer to “So what?”) sufficient? I would like to know what is *not* a narrative?
5. If all narratives are created by someone, why are not you talking about narrators? Or maybe about how authors create narrators who tell stories?

**FLOW CHART FOR WRITING NARRATIONS**

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