

Before Writing

You should, by now, be familiar with the **typical elements of a short story:**

- Characters
- Plot line
- Conflict
- Setting
- Dialogue
- Tone
- Narrator point of view



Writing a narrative is similar to that, for the following exceptions:

- It is only told **from First Person point of view**
- Focuses **on a small moment** in your life
- Is written **as if you were telling it** to someone
- It is not about the story itself but **how it is told**
 - The **telling of a story**
 - It recounts events and **emphasizes** the important parts
 - It focuses on the **skill of engaging storytelling** – not just relaying events

Your Assignment:

1. You will **write a narrative that recounts a real or invented situation** that you personally experienced. It is the retelling of your experience.
2. You will **select one of the following writing prompts** as the basis for your narrative. If you have an idea you'd like to use, please talk it over with me before proceeding.
 - Imagine a scene from the short story "The Sniper" and retell a specific moment of it
 - Select an event from the movie The Four Feathers to retell with detail
 - **Other:** Talk to me before starting your narrative to get permission for your idea.
3. Use **the following checklist to ensure you have included these elements** in your writing:
 - Yourself as the character narrating the event with an engaging voice to build interest
 - Description(s) of the setting: time and location
 - Narration of the events – showing not telling* that includes 5W+H (who, what, when, where, why, and how)
 - Use order of location in explaining experience (top to bottom, front to back, left to right, head to toe) or time order (first, next, then, and so on).
 - Conflict: internal or external
 - Must retell in a logical order and sequence of events
 - Suspense built to the climax
 - Sensory Details: the descriptions of people, places, things, events are vivid and detailed (including sights, sounds, tastes, textures, smells)
 - Length of 1 – 1.5 pages typed single spaced size 11 font
 - A Title other than Narrative Writing (not underlined or in bold as you are not published)

4. You must **follow the writing process and submit all your work** with the final product, including your brainstorming, drafting, evidence of self – editing, and a typed final copy with the rubric.
- Brainstorming
 - Drafting
 - Evidence of Self – Editing
 - Two good copies
 - 1) A typed final copy
 - 2) A typed copy with
 - at least **five examples of Show, Not Tell highlighted** to identify
 - At least 10 – 15 **vivid verbs** underlined and **bolded**.

Because narration is really about relaying the experience you had of that moment, **some elements of the writing are particularly important to consider**. They are the **opening**, the **vivid verbs**, and **showing** instead of telling.

1. **The Opening Hook:** With narration, you really want to catch and hold the reader's attention right from the first line. Ways you can do this are to start with:
- Contradicting an accepted truth
 - Start with a line of dialogue
 - Make a confession
 - Ask a question
 - Use an analogy



Consider the following opening hooks – how effective do you think they are?
(From MrGildeas ssdcougars.org)

- The time had come! I had to face the reality that the relaxing days of summer were over. High school had begun and the back-to-school jitters were there along with the freshmen worries.
- Dangerous, scary, determined, fun and outrageous. These are all terms that describe my expedition when I was lost in Ocean City, New Jersey. We can all relate to a time when we were excited, nervous, or scared, but my experience helped teach me a very valuable lesson. I must confess that I thought I was prepared for the war—that dreaded first day of high school. Pencils, paper, and other battle supplies in abundance, I felt that I couldn't possibly be taken by surprise. I even knew by heart the stories told by veterans, former freshmen themselves. The drills many of us endured on the asphalt field practicing for marching band in front of the South Building had prepared us to be shunned by sophomores and screamed at by exasperated teachers. Dreading our first day in combat, we awaited it, even so, with an enthusiasm that bordered on joy.

Avoid these opening lines:

- The purpose of this narrative is...
- All through the ages mankind has sought to...
- Once upon a time...
- One day I was...
- Thump Thump – there was a noise at the front door.

- As I saw the hollow, volcanic crater called Diamond Head out the plane’s window, I knew that the twelve-hour flight was almost over.
- The most horrific part of the first few weeks of school was seeing nice, exuberant, friendly teachers turn into savage, wild beasts from the jungle. This all happened as the innocence of “this is the first day of school, you are on easy street, free parking, go directly to GO, collect \$200, get out of jail free card” wore off. And boy, did it wear off fast!

Locate Vivid Verbs!

2. **The Vivid Verbs:** When we are writing, sometimes we fall into the rut of using our typical day-to-day language, but that isn’t very original or engaging for a reader. With writing, you want to be more selective or creative with the words you choose. In particular, using strong verbs is an easy way to make writing more interesting.

Example Typical: As the student **walked** across the field, the breeze **blew** the leaves along the grass.

Example Vivid: As the student **ambled** through the park, the breeze **lifted** the leaves on the trees.

Other Examples:

| Typical | Vivid Verb Choices |
|--|---|
| The harder he worked , the more he disliked his job and the customers he served. | The harder he toiled , the more he detested his job and the customers he served. |
| He walked along the path and swayed as he went. | He staggered down the path and wavered as he went. |
| The team’s running back moved fast . | The team’s running back streaked past his opponents and sprinted toward the goal. |

Try it: Come up with **3 new vivid verb choices** you could use in place of the word in bold.

| Overused Verb | Vivid Verb #1 | Vivid Verb #2 | Vivid Verb #3 |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. The killer ran into the woods. | | | |
| 2. Walking into the school, the wind was blowing hard behind us. | | | |
| 3. He jumped into the room and grabbed my new iPhone! | | | |
| 4. He was a new student and had the most awkward posture. | | | |

Websites that include Vivid Verb lists include:

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/wordlist/verbs.shtml>

<http://www.sd47.bc.ca/school/pie/Students/Documents/'Said%20is%20Dead'%20Word%20List.pdf>

3. **Showing, Not Telling:** It is easy to tell a listener or reader about what you see or experience, but it is more creative and engaging to describe aspects of what you see or experience and let the reader paint a picture in their mind as they follow along. You want the listener or reader to use their imagination and bring those characters to life in their mind’s eye.



A. **Example of Tell:** You learn three things about the following character because the writer Tells you.

Clarence Howard was a fat, ungrateful, old man.

B. **Example of Show:** You learn the same three things about the character, but will have a much better mental picture from the way the writer Shows you with their words.

Clarence Howard heaved himself out of the chair. As his feet spread under his apple-like frame and his arthritic knees popped and cracked in objective, he pounded the floor with his cane while cursing that dreadful girl who was late again with his coffee.

(From Grammargirl.com)

C. A good writer will **use both Show and Tell** in their writing.

- **Show** is detailed and longer writing. Too much of that **can slow down the pace of the story.**
- **Tell at times helps the story move along,** allowing you to slow with Show when you want to.

Other Examples:

| Tell | Show |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You are such a jerk,” he said angrily. • Rapping at the door, Elaine made her presence known to the people inside the house. • The lawn was covered with leaves. • I was sitting on the couch holding my guitar. <p>(Dialogue)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Are you sure he escaped?” Annabelle asked anxiously. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You are such a jerk.” Dan slammed the phone book shut and threw it at the couch. The pages ruffled open, the names inside seeming exposed and vulnerable against the stark black leather. Dan got to his feet, moving so fast his chair skidded against the floor and dented the new drywall. • Elaine formed a tight fist with her right hand and pounded on the unforgiving oak. They’d hear her, or she’d break her hand letting them know she’d come to call. • Leaves blew through my yard and piled up against the shrubs and fence. • My eyes were closed, cradling the guitar in my arms like a warm blanket. It felt like I was holding on to something I didn’t want to let go of. • “What do you mean he might have escaped?” Anabelle’s gaze darted to the door, and she chewed the edge of her thumb nail. “He either did or he didn’t. Which is it?” |

Tips: Consider some of the following prompts when trying to replace Tell with Show in your writing:
(From Foremostpress.com/authors/articles/show_not_tell)

- Describe facial expressions
- Describe movements, actions, gestures
- Sensory language: What noises are heard?
- What do you taste? Feel? See? Hear?
- Describe measurements – specific details of shape, size, time, and date
- Describe feelings rather than labeling them
- Use specific details rather than vague ones
- Vary sentence length: short sentences for abrupt and suspenseful moments and long sentences to draw out or lead to suspense.
- Avoid dialogue tags, like: said, demanded, asked, told, questioned

Try it. Explore the following four prompts and **rewrite them to include Showing, Not Telling.**

| Telling Sentence Becomes a Showing Sentence |
|--|
| He walked into class late and caused a scene. |
| Standing in line, I noticed a tall guy with a black hoody on listening to music. |
| I opened the package and was annoyed to find a flat cheeseburger. |
| Halfway down the road, something started banging under the hood! |

The Writing Process: Avoid what Slows you Down

- **When you have a great idea in your head, run with it!** Write it all out and **don't stop at anything that stumps you or gets you off track**, like:
 - Spelling
 - Punctuation checks: where should the commas and apostrophes go?
 - Paragraph breaks
 - Sentence variety or correct sentences (fragments or run ons can be corrected)
 - A different word for variety
 - The best way to begin the story – quote or sentence?
 - A final line / lasting thought
- All of these aspects of writing are important but all relate to the design of writing, not the collecting of ideas. **Get the ideas down first; then you can come back and enhance with edits and spell checks** and such!
- After drafting, go back and look to ways to improve your:
 1. Opening hook
 2. Vivid verb choices
 3. Show, Don't Tell pieces



Rubric for Eye Witness Report Writing Assessment

| | 5 Advanced (80 – 100%) Polished | 4 Comprehensive (70 – 79%) Proficient | 3 Basic (60 – 69%) Competent | 2 Satisfactory (50 – 59%) Clear | 1 Weak (0 – 49%) Ineffective | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| 1. Narrative Writing | Sharp, distinct controlling point or theme with evident awareness of the narrative task. | Clear controlling point or theme with general awareness of the narrative task. | Fair controlling point or theme with general awareness of the narrative task. | Vague evidence of a controlling point or theme with inconsistent awareness of the narrative task. | Little or no evidence of a controlling point or theme with minimal awareness of the narrative task | | |
| 2. Organization / Pace | Skillful narrative pattern with clear and consistently paced sequencing of events, employing a beginning, middle, and an end. Minor interruptions to the sequence may occur. | Narrative pattern with well-paced sequencing of events, employing a beginning, middle, and an end. Interruptions to the sequence may occur. | Narrative pattern with somewhat consistently paced sequencing of events, employing a beginning, middle, and an end. Interruptions to the sequence may occur. | Narrative pattern with generally inconsistently paced sequencing of events that may employ a beginning, middle, and an end. Interruptions to the sequence may interfere with meaning. | Narrative pattern with little or no pacing with sequencing of events. Interruptions to the sequence interfere with meaning. | | |
| 3. Sensory Details | The writer uses examples of sensory details that are skillfully placed and relate to one or more of the senses. | The writer uses examples of sensory details which are well placed and relate to one or more of the senses. | The writer uses examples of sensory details which are adequately placed and relate to one or more of the senses. | The writer uses examples of sensory details which are sometimes inadequately placed and only relate to one of the senses and may interfere with flow of narrative. | The writer uses examples of sensory details which, where placed, interfere with the flow of the narrative. Sensory details only relate to one of the senses. | | |
| 4. Hook – Show – Verbs | Hook | A precise and captivating opening hook effectively engages the reader. | A clear and well-developed opening hook effectively engages the reader. | A fair opening hook attempts to engage the reader. | A underdeveloped opening hook attempts to engage the reader. | An opening hook is either clearly underdeveloped or missing. | |
| | | Showing | The writing includes advanced and clear “showing” of details for the reader to picture in their mind. The showing blends easily into the writing. | The writing includes good examples of “showing” of details for the reader to picture in their mind. The showing blends well into the writing. | The writing includes fair examples of “showing” of details for the reader to picture in their mind. Some attempts are more successful than others and may stand out among the writing. | The writing attempts examples of “showing” of details for the reader to picture in their mind. The attempts are poorly developed and stand out among the writing. | The writing lacks attempts at “showing” or attempts are very poorly developed and are distracting for the reader. |
| | | | Vivid Verbs | Wonderful and complimentary vivid verbs have been selected that clearly accentuate the telling of the narrative. | Well-selected vivid verbs accentuate the telling of the narrative. | Vivid verbs have been selected and blend fairly well into the narrative. Some word choices might seem a bit out of place but are not too distracting. | Some vivid verbs have been integrated into the writing, though the selection may be inappropriate / not suitable in some cases causing some distraction for the reader. |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|--|--|
| 5. Writing Style | Precise control of language, literary devices, and sentence structures that creates a consistent and effective point of view and tone. | Appropriate control of language, literary devices, and sentence structures that creates a consistent point of view and tone. | Fair control of language, literary devices, and sentence structures that creates a consistent point of view and tone. | Limited control of language and sentence structures that creates interference with point of view and tone. | Minimal control of language and sentence structures that creates an inconsistent point of view and tone. |
| 6. Level of Completion | Clear attention to the details of the assignment. All required elements are completed and submitted. | Careful attention to the details of the assignment. Nearly all required elements are completed and submitted. | Attention to the details of the assignment. Most of the required elements are completed and submitted. | Some attention paid to the details of the assignment. Some of the required elements are completed and submitted. | Poor attention paid to the details of the assignment. Many of the required elements are incomplete and/or missing. |

(Rubric Reference: Some elements taken from ssdcougars.org MrGildea)

Submission Checklist:

- Yourself as the character narrating a central theme or event
- Description(s) of the setting: time and location
- Narration of what the character(s) do – showing not telling * including 5W+H
- Use order of location in explaining experience (top to bottom, front to back, left to right, head to toe) or time order (first, next, then, and so on).
- Conflict: internal or external
- Suspense built to the climax
- Internal dialogue
- Sensory Details: the descriptions of people, places, things, events are vivid and detailed
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/ 30 marks

Comments

Examples:

Take Me to Casablanca

My day in Africa was one I'll not soon forget. I toured two major cities of Morocco—land of mystery, enticement, and enchantment. I was expecting belly dancers, snake charmers, and many exotic sights filled with color and intricate decoration. While I did see some of what I expected, the majority of what I saw was totally unexpected and will haunt me forever.

As I boarded the ship that was to take me across the Mediterranean Sea to the northern shores of Morocco, I felt an array of mixed emotions. Mainly, I was excited. After all, I was only 13 and about to become "tricontinental." The previous five days I had spent in sunny Spain, and now I was to travel to Africa for one day. Besides excited, I also felt deeply intrigued and mystified. Moroccans practice the Muslim religion, and Arabic is one of their main languages. This may seem a bit prejudiced, but as I took my seat in the boat, the song "Arabian Nights" was playing over and over in my mind. However, I was dressed very conservatively so as not to offend anybody.

The boat ride took only about 45 minutes. After we had docked and debarked the ship, we were led straight to a bus. My first glimpse of Africa wasn't too exciting, since it was just pretty much like Andalucia, the southern region of Spain. It was a little warmer here, though, being so close to the equator.

We rode for a while and then stopped to have our passports checked in a city owned by Spain. This is when I had my first "real" glimpse of Morocco. There was trash strewn all over alongside the old, cracked pavement of the road. Natives attending to their business stopped for a moment to stare at the tour bus that held so many foreigners. Of course, they could scarcely see us because of the tinted tour bus windows, but their dark eyes seemed to pierce straight through me.

It was at this point that the Moroccan tour guide joined us. He was very short and wore a long white robe. A small maroon hat adorned his head. He spoke to us in a heavy accent that sounded sort of Spanish, warning us not to talk to any Moroccans on the streets because they would try to steal from us. He also warned us not to buy anything from the peddlers on the street, for the same reasons. He told us that the people would flock around us, harassing and trying to take advantage of us. I didn't particularly pay attention, however, because I had heard these speeches when we were warned about the gypsies in Spain, and the gypsies had caused little trouble. I assumed the Moroccans would be the same.

After the guide gave his speech, we drove to Tétouan, one of the major cities of Morocco. I can remember thinking we'd never make it there because the narrow dirt road was built a mere two or three feet from a sheer drop-off. When we finally reached Tétouan about an hour later, I looked excitedly out of my window, hoping to see a city in better condition than that of the Spanish town we had just left. But what I saw shocked me. Huge crowds of people stopped everything they were doing to stare at us. Most of them wore dirty, tattered clothing and were startlingly thin. I couldn't help but stare, despite all our tour guide's warnings. My mom gave me a gentle nudge. I hugged my camera closer to my body and stepped off the bus.

Almost immediately, the native Moroccans began to step closer to our tour group. Their staring eyes burned straight into my mind. I felt like such an intruder because of the way they stared. My first feeling of guilt came when a woman holding a crying baby accidentally brushed up against me. I somehow managed to

apologize, not wanting to offend her in any way. She just looked at me with sad, troubled eyes that seemed to say, "How could you? How could you allow us to live this terrible life in a third-world country?" I instantly felt gratitude for everything I had ever taken for granted.

We were led through the narrow back streets of the main section of town. There were high, white walls of buildings on either side of us. These walls had open doorways that were the entryways to small rooms, which were homes. People appeared in these doorways and stared at us as if we were gods. Emaciated children in dirty scraps of clothing played in the trash and filth in the alleyways. They gazed up at us and smiled. I always smiled back, while I wondered if they knew there were better ways of life in other parts of the world, or whether they learned that as they became older.

Our Moroccan guide led us through small, filthy alleyways that had a distinctive odor that someone said was marijuana. Perhaps these people felt that drugs were their only way of escaping terrible lives.

We were led past a small opening in the walls. We could hear the screaming and crying of a small boy, about three or four years old. His right leg, from the knee down, was gushing blood. My stomach rolled over, and I wished desperately that there were something I could do to help him. A woman wrapped gauze around the wound, but the blood soaked straight through. I felt so rude just walking right past.

A little while later, we were led into a quaint little restaurant. I didn't eat much; walking past all those sights had taken away my appetite. But I will never forget the bathroom in that restaurant. When I paid the woman attendant 100 pesetas (about 70 cents), she led me into a stall. After I had finished, the woman flushed by hand. She then poured some bottled water on my hands and squirted on soap. After I lathered, she rinsed my hands with more bottled water and pointed to the door, signaling that I was to leave.

When everyone had finished eating and had used the bathroom, we got back on the bus for another hour's drive to Tangiers. I honestly didn't think I could take any more.

When we reached Tangiers, the peddlers on the street flocked around us. I told all of them, politely but somewhat guiltily, "No, thank you."

We went straight to an indoor bazaar. There we could bargain all we wanted, but I didn't really want anything. I felt badly giving money to big businesses that didn't need it as much as the people on the streets did.

The rest of the time in Tangiers was basically like our time in Tétouan, except that there were a great many more peddlers. After we came out of one shop, a man approached me with Moroccan hats called fezzes, which he sold for 2000 pesetas, or about 10 dollars.

I said, "No, thank you."

The man replied, "Oh, you buy from in store but don't buy from the street, eh?"

I honestly didn't know what to say, so I just said, "I'm sorry."

His reply was, "I bet."

I just kept on walking, feeling very guilty. But as it turned out, he gave my mom a 1000 peseta discount, so she bought three of the hats.

As I boarded the bus, I felt relieved to be leaving Morocco behind me. But then I looked back at all the people, some of them children, and thought how difficult it must be to have to go through hardships every single day, hardships worse than anything we modern Americans have ever endured. I was leaving Morocco, but these people had no way out.

Even today, the sights and sounds of its cities still haunt me. I suppose those memories always will.

(From thewritesource.com/studentmodels/wi-casablanca)