

CHAPTER 8

Showing and Telling: Description, Narration, and Example



"I was this far away when the mailman threw his bag at me and started running. All I could see were legs and letters . . ."

The essays you write and the stories you tell come alive when you use description, narration, and example. Descriptive techniques help you show your reader what you see, hear, smell, touch, or taste. Narrative techniques help you concisely tell a reader a story that makes a point. Examples supply specific illustrations and instances in many types of writing. Description, narration, and example provide the foundations for many other types of essay writing.

Focus on Showing and Telling: Looking at Description, Narration, and Example

The little gecko pictured here may well be a relative of a more famous gecko featured in commercials. GEICO's clever commercials make an impact using the appealing lizard, an angst-ridden caveman, and guest celebrities who entertainingly help real people explain their insurance needs.



Advertisers know that the way in to consumers' minds, hearts, and pocketbooks is through their effectiveness with description, narration, and example. GEICO commercials use cute animals and clever hooks to sell their products, but they also employ description, narration, and example.

The "caveman" commercials illustrate the use of all three techniques. The descriptive element lies in the use of effective visual images that viewers are likely to remember—a cavemen perfectly at home in modern settings like an airport or a therapist's office. The narrative element rests on his ongoing story: Wherever he goes, he is confronted by GEICO's portrayals of caveman as primitive and stupid, but even his therapist does not understand why he finds these stereotypes so disturbing. And if viewers need an example of why GEICO is a good choice, they need only listen to the slogan, "So easy a caveman could do it."

Reflect on It

Find another commercial on TV or in a magazine that does absolutely nothing to sell the product other than trying to use description, narration, and example. Is the ad effective? Would consumers buy this product? How do description, narration, and example help with the sale of this product?

Description, Narration, and Example in Action

In this chapter, you will have the opportunity to examine and use the techniques of description, narration, and example. To help you become skilled in using these techniques, the text analyzes and explains each one separately. In reality, they are rarely used that way. Instead, authors combine techniques, using the ones that best suit their purpose for writing.

Before looking at description, narration, and example separately, look at how a professional writer uses all three techniques together. The following essay is by Maya Angelou, noted writer, poet, and activist. It is an excerpt from *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, one of Angelou's several autobiographical books.

The essay embodies all three of the writing techniques featured in this chapter. The predominant technique of the essay is **narration**, or storytelling. Notice how the author highlights her narrative with **dialogue**, or conversation, to help the reader understand the characters she describes.

In the second and third paragraphs, Angelou uses **examples**, exact instances or illustrations of a particular type. Notice how these paragraphs provide specific examples of complainers, showing exactly how they behave.

Finally, the author uses **description** to paint a picture so that the reader can visualize the people in her story. Because humans perceive the world through our senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, describing in terms of the five senses is an effective way to make a subject real and concrete to readers.

Complaining

Maya Angelou

When my grandmother was raising me in Stamps, Arkansas, she had a particular routine when people who were known to be whiners entered her store. Whenever she saw a known complainer coming, she would call me from whatever I was doing and say conspiratorially, “Sister, come inside. Come.” Of course I would obey. **1**

My grandmother would ask the customer, “How are you doing today, Brother Thomas?” And the person would reply, “Not so good.” There would be a distinct whine in the voice. “Not so good today, Sister Henderson. You see, it’s this summer. It’s this summer heat. I just hate it. Oh, I hate it so much. It just frazzles me up and frazzles me down. I just hate the heat. It’s almost killing me.” Then my grandmother would stand stoically, her arms folded, and mumble, “Uh-huh, uh-huh.” And she would cut her eyes at me to make certain that I had heard the lamentation. **2**

At another time a whiner would mewl, “I hate plowing. That packed-down dirt ain’t got no reasoning, and mules ain’t got good sense. . . . Sure ain’t. It’s killing me. I can’t ever seem to get done. My feet and my hands stay sore, and I get dirt in my eyes and up my nose. I just can’t stand it.” And my grandmother, again stoically with her arms folded, would say, “Uh-huh, uh-huh,” and then look at me and nod. **3**

As soon as the complainer was out of the store, my grandmother would call me to stand in front of her. And then she would say the same thing she had said at least a thousand times, it seemed to me. “Sister, did you hear what Brother **4**

So-and-So or Sister Much to Do complained about? You heard that?” And I would nod. Mamma would continue, “Sister, there are people who went to sleep all over the world last night, poor and rich and white and black, but they will never wake again. Sister, those who expected to rise did not, their beds became their cooling boards, and their blankets became their winding sheets. And those dead folks would give anything, anything at all for just five minutes of this weather or ten minutes of that plowing that person was grumbling about. So you watch yourself about complaining, Sister. What you’re supposed to do when you don’t like a thing is change it. If you can’t change it, change the way you think about it. Don’t complain.”

THINKING ABOUT THE ESSAY

1. Examples provide specific instances that help a reader understand a more general point. Look at the two specific examples of complainers: Brother Thomas in the second paragraph and an unnamed whiner in the third paragraph. How do those specific examples help you understand what a whiner does in general? In other words, if you were the proverbial visitor from another planet where whining did not exist, how would you describe a whiner after reading about the two whiners in Angelou’s essay?
2. Narration helps essay writers make a point by telling a story. Although the point may become evident as the story unfolds, writers often reinforce the point at the end of the story. Based on the last paragraph, what is the point of Angelou’s story? Which character is used to convey the point?
3. Description helps readers understand an essay in the same way that they understand the world: through sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Look at the words used at the beginning of paragraphs 2 and 3 to describe the voices of the whiners. Then, look at the description of the grandmother’s body language at the end of paragraphs 2 and 3. What do these descriptions show you about the character of the whiners as opposed to the character of the grandmother, Sister Henderson?

Description

“You can’t miss it. It’s the big yellow house on the corner.”

“Officer, he was bald with a tattoo of a turtle on the top of his head.”

“I just asked to borrow a pen, and she gave me a look that would freeze hot coffee on a July day.”

Where would we be without description? It is used every day to communicate the essentials of life and to add the embellishments that keep listeners hanging on every word.

In writing, too, description helps readers understand your point and keeps them waiting for the next detail. Descriptive essays often answer questions such as the ones that follow.

- What is your favorite season of the year?
- What one place, for you, is “heaven on earth”?
- Describe a place that causes (or caused) you to feel uncomfortable or unhappy.

Laying the Groundwork for Descriptive Writing

Visualizing

Look at the photograph of the building with the sign “Cocktails” on the front. Then use your imagination to visualize the interior. Is it large and airy or small and intimate? Is the lighting bright or soft? Are the colors warm or cool? How is it furnished and decorated? How are the people dressed? What music would you hear? What kinds of food and drink are served?



Planning

You have visualized the décor, the people, the music, and the food and/or beverages that you might find inside the building. Decide which three elements you would include in an essay on this topic. What order would you place them in? Why?

Writing

Write a paragraph about one of the elements you have chosen in the “Planning” section. Your challenge in this assignment is to make everything you describe seem so real that the reader can almost see it, hear it, touch it, taste it, and smell it.

Elements of Descriptive Writing

Effective descriptive writing paints a picture for the reader. Just as artists use canvas, brushes, and paints, writers use their tools of the trade to create a more effective picture. Your tools as a writer of descriptive paragraphs and essays include sense impressions, spatial order, and a dominant impression.

Sense Impressions

Every scrap of information we collect about the world around us comes through our five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. It is logical, then, that descriptions painted using sense impressions present a more vivid picture to your reader.

Sight

In writing, descriptive imagery is most often visual. Visual impressions are strong and lasting. Psychological studies confirm that people are more likely to rely on what they see than on what they hear. For example, you would not be fooled by a clerk’s “Thank you” if his facial expression said, “I hate my job.” If it is true that seeing is believing, then creating a visual picture for the reader is particularly important in descriptive writing.

Hearing

Our sense of hearing also gives us information about the world around us. We are warned by the blast of a horn, energized by the driving beat of rock

music, or soothed by the thunder of the ocean. Imagery that appeals to a reader's sense of hearing is an essential dimension of descriptive writing.

Smell

The sense of smell has a powerful connection to memory. The smell of freshly popped popcorn may summon the claustrophobic feel of a dark, crowded movie theater. A whiff of furniture polish can bring back an aunt's stately dining room. Using imagery related to smell can help to complete the picture you create for your reader.

Touch

The sense of touch is a backdrop for all experience. As you sit reading this, you may feel beneath you the hard surface of a wooden chair or the softness of sofa cushions. You may be aware of the chill of air conditioning or the warmth of sunlight, the scratch of a wool sweater or the cottony feel of an old pair of jeans. Imagery that brings out textures and temperatures adds a special touch to the picture you draw for your reader.

Taste

Taste imagery may play a smaller role in your writing unless you are writing about food. However, used sparingly, references to taste add spice to your descriptive writing.

EXERCISE 1 RECOGNIZING WORDS OF THE SENSES

In the following paragraph, underline words and phrases that draw on the senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste.

Rocking-Chair Saturday

Our screened porch is a peaceful place to read and relax on a Saturday afternoon. Sitting in a creaking wooden rocker, I look through the gauzy wire screen into the back yard. From the top of a pine tree, a mockingbird scolds. In the distance, I hear the sleepy drone of a neighbor's mower. A slight breeze wafts the

tempting aroma of grilling hamburgers toward me. Prudence, my calico cat, pads out to join me, stretching out in a warm patch of sun near the screen door. I scoop her warm, furry body into my arms as she rumbles her approval. She settles into my lap, content to sit with me and enjoy the peace of the back porch.

EXERCISE 2 WRITING SENSORY DESCRIPTIONS

Write a phrase that describes each of the following words in sensory terms. Then note whether you are describing the word through sight, hearing, smell, touch, or taste. The first one is done for you.

1. stone

a smooth, heavy stone (touch)

2. milk

3. wrapping paper

4. sunlight

5. glove

6. coin

7. french fries

8. voice

9. leaves

10. bark (tree or dog's, your choice)

Spatial Order

Spatial order helps you to write about anything that takes up space. Use spatial order to present physical objects in a way that makes sense: bottom to top, left to right, background to foreground, or outside to inside. A partial list of words commonly used when referring to space follows.

above	beyond	near	right
ahead	by	next to	south
around	down	north	toward
behind	east	on	under
beside	in	over	underfoot
between	left	overhead	west

EXERCISE 3 RECOGNIZING EFFECTIVE USE OF SPATIAL ORDER

Look at the following short paragraphs. In which paragraph is spatial order used in a more organized way?

Paragraph 1

The singer looked as if he had just stepped out of the 1960s. His hair, twisted into thick dreadlocks, fell almost to his shoulders. On his feet were chunky leather sandals. A small golden ring pierced his left nostril. His hands, clasped around the microphone in front of his chest, were ringed in silver and turquoise. He wore a faded pair of jeans that flared into a wide bell over his ankles. Over his shirt, he wore a soft leather vest that ended at his waist in a beaded fringe. His shirt, open at the neck, revealed a silver and turquoise necklace. He wore a small golden earring on one ear. He looked as though he belonged on a Woodstock poster.

Paragraph 2

The model walking down the runway looked like a movie actress from the 1940s. Her hair curved under just above her shoulders and dipped across one eye as she turned her head. Her eyebrows were arched and penciled, and her lipstick was a deep red. The jacket of her gray pinstriped suit was padded at the shoulders and nipped in at the waist. Her skirt hugged her hips and legs tightly and flared below the knee. She wore dark stockings with seams up the back, and stiletto heels that looked impossible to walk in. She looked as though she had stepped out of an old black-and-white movie.

The paragraph that uses spatial order more effectively is paragraph ____.

Establishing a Dominant Impression

Description is more than just a tangle of unrelated details. In a descriptive essay, every detail should join in conveying a single **dominant impression**. A dominant impression helps to convey your attitude toward the subject and aids in the unity of your description. If you are writing a description of a house that you pass every day, your description should show more than shutters, bricks, and roofing tiles. What is your overall impression of that house? Is it cheerful? Eerie? Prim? Dignified? The word that you choose to describe the house conveys your dominant impression. As you describe the house, each detail should contribute to the dominant impression.

When you write a descriptive paragraph or essay, it is helpful to include the dominant impression in the topic sentence of your paragraph or in the thesis statement of your essay. Stating the dominant impression helps you keep the paragraph or essay on track by reminding you of the impression that each detail should create. It also lets your reader know what to expect.

If you are describing a house that is eerie, include details designed to send chills up the reader's spine: the loose, creaking shutters and the blankly staring windows. If cheerful dandelions bloom in the yard, let them bloom unseen. Details that do not reinforce the dominant impression do not belong in your description.

The topic sentences below illustrate different ways of stating a dominant impression.

Examples

The classroom was uncomfortably warm.

The car was a joy to drive.

The instructor looked more like a homeless person than a college professor.

The office was obviously a place where serious work was done.

EXERCISE 4 SUPPORTING THE DOMINANT IMPRESSION

In each list below, circle the letter of the detail that would not support the dominant impression of the topic sentence.

1. The house on the corner is dignified.
 - a. stately columns on the porch
 - b. well-trimmed bushes lining the driveway
 - c. crumpled beer can on the lawn
 - d. dark green shutters framing curtained windows

2. The kitchen was messy.
 - a. dirty dishes piled in the sink
 - b. cat food spilled on the floor
 - c. overflowing trash can
 - d. shiny coffeepot stored neatly on a shelf
3. Greta seems studious.
 - a. studies in the library every evening
 - b. enjoys playing poker
 - c. makes good grades
 - d. takes good notes in class
4. The garage was a fire hazard.
 - a. oily rags and newspapers stacked three feet high
 - b. space heater with frayed cord plugged into a wall outlet
 - c. rusty mower blades and chainsaw blades thrown into an open box
 - d. boxes of old fireworks, open bags of quick-start charcoal, and dented aerosol cans piled haphazardly on shelves
5. The town seemed prosperous.
 - a. many large new homes
 - b. new school under construction
 - c. boarded-up stores downtown
 - d. large manufacturing plant on outskirts of town

Wordsmith's Corner: Examples of Descriptive Writing

Following are two student examples of descriptive essays. Read each essay and answer the questions that follow.

Descriptive Essay 1

The writer of this essay describes a store's produce department. Notice the imagery appealing to sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.

A Garden of Temptation

Harry's Farmer's Market is more than just a grocery store. It is a storehouse of temptation. At Harry's, a shopper can find breads and pastries, ethnic delights from a variety of countries, and a selection of candies that would unravel the strongest will. But when it comes to temptation, nothing at Harry's can rival the produce section.

The vegetable bins at Harry's are a feast for the senses. Row upon row of green, musty-smelling cabbages temptingly hint of cabbage rolls and coleslaw to come. Beyond the green cabbages are bins of the purple, curly-leafed variety, piled like basketballs in a sporting goods store. Next come potatoes in all shapes and sizes. Large, long Idahos weigh in the hand like a stone and bake up fluffy and dry. The yellow-fleshed Yukon Golds can be sliced into golden medallions and topped with cheese. Farther along the aisle, carrots beckon like slender fingers and plump squash nestle comfortably in neat bins. At the end of the aisle, mountains of waxy purple eggplant lie in lush array. The vegetable bins at Harry's provide a feast for the eyes as well as for the taste buds.

Beyond the vegetables lie the fruits in a patchwork of geographic and seasonal variety. Bananas, pineapples, mangoes, and limes flaunt tropical hues. Their exotic aromas hint of balmy breezes, marimba bands, and sweet summer nights. Across the aisle, the season is fall. Apples, crisp as a New England day, stir the air with the fragrance of autumn. Their red and yellow colors and even their names—Crispin, Pippin, Granny Smith, Ginger Gold—suggest brisk autumn days, the crunch of leaves underfoot, and a cozy hearth. Farther on, yellow grapefruit, bright as the California sun, suggest a return to summer. Beside them, giant navel oranges add a hint of citrus to the air. In this section of Harry's, time and place blend in a fruit-basket turnover.

For customers who can't wait until they are out of the store to sample the delights of Harry's fruits and vegetables, the juice bar offers instant gratification. Thirsty shoppers can drink in the tartness of a California grapefruit or taste the sweetness of freshly squeezed orange juice. For something different, customers can sample apricot juice in hues of rich dusky amber or exotic papaya flavored with coconut milk. Vegetable lovers can sip a cool, pale celery drink, rich red tomato juice, or carrot juice so brightly orange that many shoppers swear their eyesight improves just by looking at it. There's no better way to end a trip through Harry's produce department than by drinking it in.

Grocery shopping can be a chore, but at Harry's, it is more often a delight. A trip through the produce department is a tempting tour through a garden where every vegetable is in season and no fruit is forbidden.

Questions ?

1. What is the dominant impression of the essay?
-

2. The introduction of the essay is
 - a. an anecdote
 - b. broad to narrow
 - c. narrow to broad
 - d. quotation
3. Write the thesis statement on the line below. Are the points listed?

4. Write the topic sentences on the lines that follow.

5. Underline the sense impressions in the essay. Can you find imagery of all five senses? Write five images below that evoke each of the senses.
 - a. sight _____
 - b. hearing _____
 - c. smell _____
 - d. touch _____
 - e. taste _____

Descriptive Essay 2

An unusual museum exhibit inspired this essay. Notice how the writer moves the reader through the exhibit.

Juke Joint

I hear a rising laugh, like notes played on a piano, as I approach the doorway marked “Little Grocery.” By day, the Little Grocery sold milk, bread, cereal, and cigarettes—the stuff of everyday life. At night, under a pungent haze of smoke, the jukebox played “Slip Away” or “Mr. Big Stuff” to the clink of bottles of illegal liquor. But I am not worried about a police raid, for I am in the Tubman African American Museum, looking at artist Willie Little’s re-creation of his father’s North Carolina juke joint. The

setting, the music, and the life-size figures are nostalgic reminders of an earlier era.

As I enter the doorway, I step into a setting from the past. The sawdust-covered floor leads to an old-fashioned glass-topped counter. On the counter, beside a gallon jar of pickled pig's feet, sits an empty bottle labeled "Sun-Drop Golden Cola—As Refreshing as a Cup of Coffee." Behind the glass are old-fashioned bottles of White Rain shampoo and a half-filled box of individually wrapped Moon Pies. A card offers "Mystery Edge Razor Blades, 4 blades 10¢." To the left of the counter, a sawdust trail leads to a large yellow cooler emblazoned with the words "Royal Crown Cola" in red. Above the cooler, a rectangular metal sign advertises "Viceroy Filter Tip Cigarettes—Filtered Smoke with the Finest Flavor." Beside the cooler sits a jukebox.

The old-fashioned jukebox pulses with light and music, taking me back to the sixties. I walk toward it, passing a tall thin figure whose upraised fingers, the color of mahogany, look as though they are holding an invisible harmonica. As I move closer, I can make out the name "Wurlitzer Zodiac" on the front of the jukebox. I look at the selections. If I had a quarter, I could hear "Jimmy Mack" by Martha and the Vandellas, "Mercy, Mercy Me" by Marvin Gaye, or Aretha Franklin's "Respect." A museum employee walks by, opens the jukebox, and presses a button. I hear the machine clicking through the selections, and more music fills the air. "How Sweet It Is to Be Loved by You" is followed by "Midnight Hour" and "Mr. Pitiful," songs that must have once filled the smoky air in "Mr. Charlie's" juke joint.

The artist has also brought the past to life with re-creations of the people who danced, drank, and laughed in his father's juke joint. Beside me, a slim, chocolate-colored figure in jeans dances with outstretched arms, her head a mass of pink curlers. Across from the jukebox, a sad-looking figure of a man with a goiter sits on an old church pew, his hat resting on his knee, his tie undone. Beside him, a female figure, an unlit cigarette clenched between her lips, extends an empty pack of Pall Malls. Her polyester pantsuit is pink and glittery, her blouse a satiny sky blue. Beyond them, a figure labeled "Sara Carroway" holds a parasol above her head. She is wearing soiled Keds, and stockings are knotted under her knobby knees. Despite her shabby attire, her bearing is formal and prim. As I look more closely, I see that her tight, pressed curls are created with round seed pods. In a shadowed corner at the back of the exhibit, two figures embrace. A long-haired figure of a woman in harlequin glasses stands against the wall, her short skirt hiked around her hips. Her lover, a light-skinned, impassioned-looking male figure, stretches

out his hand as if to reach under her skirt. Feeling like an intruder, I back away. As I leave, I notice the male's pants, unbuckled and falling below slim hips.

As I leave the exhibit, I hear again the rising laughter. It comes from a small group of students touring the museum. Yet it seems to me to echo the laughter that once floated above the haze of cigarette smoke in the Little Grocery in the 1960s.

Questions ?

1. Which two senses does the essay emphasize most strongly?

2. Write the thesis statement on the following line. Does it list the points to be discussed in the essay?

3. What is the dominant impression? Is it stated in the thesis and topic sentences?

4. List the topic of each body paragraph.

5. Underline the sense impressions in the essay. Can you find imagery of all five senses?
 - a. sight _____
 - b. hearing _____
 - c. smell _____
 - d. touch _____
 - e. taste _____

TOPICS FOR DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Descriptive Assignment 1: The Cockroach

Journal Entry

You are a cockroach. Within the walls where you live it is dark and cool and safe, and the still air is sterile and dry. Noise and light from outside the wall warn you

that the large creatures that live beyond the wall are still stirring about. You are hungry, and you long to go toward the yellow light where the moist air is fragrant with the smell of food. But you know you must wait. Finally, the noise subsides outside the wall, and the yellow light that filters in through the cracks mutes to a soft, deep gray. All is quiet. Describe what happens next, focusing on your five senses.

Descriptive Assignment 2: Describing a Place

Essay

Write an essay describing a place. It can be a store, office, nightclub, park, beach, street, parking lot, church sanctuary, stadium, or any place of your choosing. In your thesis statement, state the dominant impression in one word, choosing a word from the following list or thinking up your own word. Make sure all details of your description reinforce that dominant impression. *Hint:* Your thesis statement will follow this pattern:

The (place) was/is (dominant impression).

cheerful	colorful	filthy	orderly
cluttered	disgusting	spotless	chaotic
serene	dull	crowded	lonely
bleak	gloomy	eerie	noisy
messy	elegant	exciting	calm
shabby	depressing	impersonal	cozy

Descriptive Assignment 3: Describing a Person

Essay

Write an essay describing a person. It can be someone you know well, such as a friend or relative, or someone you see often but don't really know, such as a library worker or a fellow student. Be sure that you state a dominant impression in your thesis; a few possibilities are listed below. Make sure that all the details in your essay support the dominant impression. Focus on sense impressions, details that can be expressed through sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. Don't simply *say* that someone has bad breath; let your reader *smell* it: "His breath reeked with the sour, sharp odor of cigarettes, unbrushed teeth, and onions he had eaten the night before."

arrogant	easygoing	graceful	neat
dignified	elegant	gruff	unhappy
disorganized	forbidding	messy	upbeat

Descriptive Assignment 4: Vacation in Paradise

Essay

What is your idea of the perfect vacation spot? Describe the spot, including details like the climate and landscape; the hotel, campsite, or cabin you would stay in; and the attractions you would visit.

Descriptive Assignment 5: Essay-Based Topic—A Strong Influence

Essay

Reread Maya Angelou’s essay, “Complaining,” at the beginning of this chapter. Sister Henderson, Angelou’s grandmother, was obviously a strong influence in her life. Write an essay describing an adult who influenced you when you were a child. Focus on the traits of character and personality in your role model that helped to make you the person you are today. Try, as Angelou does, to show the character of the person you describe through the person’s actions and words.

Descriptive Assignment 6: Real-World Topic—Secret Shopper

Essay

Many times, people ask how writing essays will help them in the “real world.” This real-world assignment gives just one example of how descriptive writing might be used outside the classroom.

Stores or restaurants often hire “secret shoppers” who are asked to write reports about their experiences in a particular store or restaurant. The reports focus first on the store or restaurant environment: Is it clean, neat, and inviting? Next come the employees: Are you greeted immediately? Are employees friendly and professional? Next, what about the merchandise or the food? If it is merchandise, is it logically and invitingly arranged? Can you find what you want easily? If the establishment is a restaurant, is the food invitingly presented? Is it hot and fresh? How does it taste?

For this assignment, choose a store or restaurant—it may be the college bookstore or cafeteria if you wish—and pretend you are a secret shopper hired to evaluate the place from a customer’s point of view.

Narration

Narration is the art of storytelling. You know already that every story has a beginning, middle, and end, but there are several other characteristics of a successful story. First, it emphasizes details that are central to the story’s point and downplays those that are not. Next, it is usually told in chronological order. It most often involves a conflict, and it may include dialogue. Finally, it makes a point. Though every good narrative may not have every one of these characteristics, you will find them in stories that delight you. Incorporating them into your own writing helps you delight your own readers.

Narrative essays typically address topics similar to the ones that follow.

- Tell about an experience that changed your life.
- Describe an experience that was frightening or embarrassing when it occurred but is funny now when you look back on it.
- What is the bravest thing you have ever done?

Laying the Groundwork for Narrative Writing

Visualizing

Look at the photograph of the two women. What is happening in this picture? What are the women discussing?



Planning

If you could write about this photograph using only the words spoken by the two women, how would you reveal important information about what had happened beforehand?

Writing

Write a narrative about the moment shown in the picture. Use dialogue to show what the people are saying, and description to show the people who are speaking and their reactions during the conversation. Here's a special challenge: Make sure that in your narrative, the conversation is short—five minutes or so—but that it shows through dialogue what happened before the conversation took place and what might happen afterward.

Techniques for Successful Narration

Emphasize Important Details

In a successful narrative, important details are emphasized, and unimportant ones are de-emphasized or omitted entirely. If you are telling about the time you performed the Heimlich maneuver to save a restaurant patron from choking, you will not go into detail about what was on the menu, how the traffic was on the way to the restaurant, or the quality of the service. You will focus on those few minutes of crisis when you noticed that someone was choking, remembered your training, and went into action. Details of those few minutes—the worried faces of the man’s family, your feeling that time had slowed down, the eyes of the restaurant patrons turning toward you, and the choking man’s desperate, frightened eyes—may all have a place in your narrative as you lead up to the moment when a small chunk of steak flew from the man’s throat and landed on the carpet.

EXERCISE 5 CHOOSING RELEVANT DETAILS

Imagine that you are writing a narrative about being locked out of your house and having to convince a passing police officer that you are not a burglar. Which of the following details would you include in your narrative? Put a checkmark beside details that you would include and an X beside those you would not. Then compare your list with a classmate’s and see how closely you agree.

- 1. That morning, I had corn flakes and milk for breakfast.
- 2. The phone rang just as I was going out the door, so I set my keys on the counter.
- 3. It was a pesky telephone salesperson selling cemetery lots.
- 4. When my car pool arrived, I hung up the phone and hurried out the door.
- 5. The lettuce on the sandwich I ate for lunch was wilted.
- 6. After work, my car pool dropped me off in front of my house.
- 7. I waved goodbye to my car pool and reached into my pocket for my keys.
- 8. I realized I had forgotten them.
- 9. I thought I remembered leaving an upstairs window unlocked.
- 10. I took a ladder from an unlocked storage room just off the carport.
- 11. I covered my neat shirt and tie with an old black sweatshirt I had left in the storage room.

- ____ 12. My house is painted blue.
- ____ 13. I placed the ladder against the house and began to climb.
- ____ 14. There had been a rash of burglaries in my neighborhood.
- ____ 15. My neighbor had just installed a security system.
- ____ 16. I can't imagine what burglar would want his old junk.
- ____ 17. Just as I reached the top of the ladder, I heard a polite but firm voice ask, "Are you the homeowner?"
- ____ 18. I looked down and saw a uniformed officer.
- ____ 19. The officer had a gun.
- ____ 20. My cousin from Duluth is also a police officer.
- ____ 21. Though I was innocent, my hands began to sweat and my heart pounded.
- ____ 22. As I explained what had happened, it sounded false even to me.
- ____ 23. The officer asked if I had any identification.
- ____ 24. Luckily, I was carrying my wallet and my driver's license, which bears my photo and address.
- ____ 25. The picture on my license is unflattering and does not capture my good looks.
- ____ 26. As the officer watched suspiciously, I descended the ladder, then showed her my license.
- ____ 27. She thanked me and explained that she was keeping a close watch because of the recent burglaries.
- ____ 28. Crimes of all types are rising across the United States.
- ____ 29. The officer steadied the ladder for me and made sure I was able to get into my house.
- ____ 30. It felt strange to be a suspect, if only temporarily.

Use Chronological Order

Most stories are best told in the order in which they happen, with background details near the beginning of the narrative. Chronological order helps your story unfold in a way that is logical to your reader.

Center on Conflict

Most successful narratives center around conflict. People overcome difficulties or difficulties overcome people. The conflict may be an inner conflict,

such as the one involved in deciding whether to attend college near home or far away. It may be a conflict with another person. It may be a conflict with an impersonal outside force, such as a declining job market. It may be a conflict with a combination of forces. When the conflict ends, the story ends, too.

Show, Don't Tell

Significant moments in your narrative should be slowed down and observed closely. At these times, you want to show what is happening rather than simply telling about it. Instead of telling your readers that your friend was angry, show his narrowed eyes and let them hear his sharp words. Another way of showing is through dialogue, letting your readers hear the exact words of the people you write about. Use dialogue sparingly and at significant moments for the strongest effect.

Building CONNECTIONS

Descriptive writing skills can also be incorporated into narrative writing. Your narrative becomes even stronger when you present it in terms of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell.

Examples

Telling

When I got up the courage to confront my roommate about using my things without my permission, I could tell that she was really hurt at first. Then she became angry and slammed out of the room. I am not sure things will ever be the same between us.

Showing

I took a deep breath. "Isobel, if you are going to borrow my things, please ask first. The shirt I wanted to wear today is dirty because you wore it and didn't even bother to mention it to me."

Her face fell. "I thought we were friends. You can borrow anything of mine, anytime, no questions asked."

"But I don't," I said. "I try to be considerate, and I want the same from you."

She snatched up her car keys and headed for the door. "Fine!" she yelled. "If that's the way you feel, I'll never ask you for anything."

As the door slammed behind her, I wondered if things would ever be the same between us.

Make a Point

The purpose of the story is its reason for existence, the reason that you find it worth telling. If no change takes place, if nothing significant happens, your reader will say impatiently, “What is the point?” Having a point does not mean that your story needs to have a moral, like an Aesop’s fable. It simply means that you should know why you are telling it. As with any type of essay or paragraph, you should be able to state your point in one sentence: your thesis statement or topic sentence.

Wordsmith’s Corner: Examples of Narrative Writing

Below are two student examples of narrative writing. Read each essay and answer the questions that follow.

Narrative Essay 1

For the writer of this essay, a lesson learned on the first day of class was a painful one that had nothing to do with astronomy.

What I Learned in Astronomy 101

It was the first day of class. I got up early, threw on a pair of jeans, a sweatshirt, and a ball cap with the bill turned backwards and hurried off to my eight A.M. class, Introduction to Astronomy. I have always been interested in astronomy, so I took a seat in the front row. But the lesson I learned that day was not on the syllabus. I discovered how quickly a mean-spirited professor could dampen my desire to learn.

When Dr. Laster walked in and thumped his books on the desk, the classroom was filled, and several students were standing along the walls. The professor looked around the room until his eyes stopped on me. He did not look pleased. “Young man,” he said, “where are your manners?” I looked around and saw female students standing as I sat. Embarrassed, I rose and gestured for one of them to take my seat. “Sit down,” snapped the professor. “I’m sure these ladies can stand for a few more minutes. Do you and these other gentlemen always wear your hats indoors?” I felt a flush creeping slowly up my neck, and as I whipped my cap from my head, I saw stealthy movements as others quickly removed theirs. During the rest of the class, I hid my embarrassment by pretending to read the syllabus and take notes.

By the time class was over, I had decided that one crusty old professor was not going to keep me from taking a class that genuinely interested me. I headed for the bookstore, but the astronomy books were sold out. That's when I had an idea. I would drop by the professor's office to let him know that the bookstore was out of books. That small courtesy, I reasoned, might help me to get back on the right track with him.

When I got to the professor's office, the door was open and he was sitting at his desk reading. I knocked softly on the door frame and said, "Professor Laster? I just came by to let you know that the bookstore is out of astronomy textbooks." Instead of being pleased that I had come by, he looked annoyed. "That's not my problem," he said. "It's the bookstore's problem, and it's your problem. And it does not excuse you from reading the chapter or turning in the assignment." I was speechless. "Will that be all?" said Professor Laster. I wanted to offer an explanation or stand up for myself in some way, but I was so astonished by his hostility that I could not think of a reply. "Yes, sir," I finally stammered, then turned to leave.

I dropped the class that afternoon. I will never know why Dr. Laster behaved as he did. I do know that his petty, arrogant behavior cheated me out of a class I wanted to take and cheated him out of a good student who wanted to learn. All Dr. Laster taught me was to be a bit less trusting, a bit more cynical and, next time, more willing to stand up for myself.

Questions ?

1. Circle the letter of the statement below that best conveys the writer's main point.
 - a. I have always been interested in astronomy, so I took a seat in the front row.
 - b. I discovered how quickly a mean-spirited professor could dampen my desire to learn.
 - c. I wanted to offer an explanation or stand up for myself in some way, but I was so astonished by his hostility that I could not think of a reply.
 - d. I dropped the class that afternoon.
2. Write one sentence of dialogue from the essay that reflects the professor's attitude.

3. Write one sentence from the essay that incorporates description into the narrative.

Narrative Essay 2

The writer of “Running from Trouble” tells of a decision that was easy to make but hard to forget.

Running from Trouble

Several years ago, my boyfriend Paul and I packed up our small orange Datsun and moved to the town where he had answered an ad for an experienced copier technician. Things went fine for a while; then Paul lost his job. My part-time job checking groceries barely brought in enough money for food and gas, and we got behind on our bills. Soon, creditors began harassing us with angry phone calls. Two months later, we made a decision that has haunted me ever since. We decided to run from our debt.

It was a Friday night, and I had just gotten paid. My check came to \$45.82, not enough to make a dent in the electricity bill and one month’s back rent. We sat at the small kitchen table of our furnished apartment with our pitiful store of cash and the remains of a frozen pizza between us. Paul looked at me with dull, discouraged eyes and said, “Why don’t we just leave? We can start fresh.” I nodded numbly, too tired to think or reason out the consequences. I had been raised in a family that paid its debts and met its problems head-on, so there should have been a voice in me somewhere telling me to find another way. But there was no voice, just empty silence. As Paul left to gas up the car, I cleared the dishes from the table and began to pack.

I had our clothes packed and our dishes boxed when I heard the Datsun pull around to the back. I wondered why Paul had gone to the back instead of parking in our space out front, so I went to the kitchen door that looked out on a wooded area behind our apartment. Paul had pulled the Datsun onto the strip of grass that bordered our small concrete patio. In the twilight, he was spray-painting our bright orange car a dull, flat black. My senses suddenly went on alert. I heard the loud rattle of the ball inside the can as Paul shook it. I smelled the sharp odor of the paint on the crisp November air. I saw

the fine mist of paint in the air. In that moment of clarity, I also saw that what we were doing was illegal. We owed money, and we were skipping out. I pictured myself being arrested and fingerprinted. I imagined a future in which Paul and I moved from town to town, staying long enough to get in debt, leaving soon enough to dodge the repo man. Still, I felt detached from the whole process. I turned from the door and continued to pack.

When four aerosol cans of paint had been emptied onto the car, we loaded our possessions into the trunk and the back seat, careful to avoid touching the still-wet paint. As I went back for the last box, I saw a curtain twitch at a back window of the apartment next door. Had our neighbor seen us? I put the box in the car, got in, and closed the door with a soft slam. We pulled out into the night, our headlights off until we were safely past the resident manager's unit and onto the street. We drove through deserted streets and finally joined the ribbon of headlights on the interstate. I felt a sudden wild joy. "We're free!" I shouted to Paul. We exchanged high-fives as we headed toward a new and unencumbered life.

I no longer live with Paul, but I live with our decision every day of my life. It has left a blank spot in my work history and on forms that ask for previous addresses. It is a nagging guilt that plagues me sometimes in the night, a stalking shadow that may still overtake me one day. When I hear of hit-and-run drivers or criminals whose past has caught up with them, I feel a tug of kinship. I, too, know the hunted feeling of running from trouble.

Questions ?

1. Circle the letter of the statement below that best conveys the writer's main point.
 - a. It is a nagging guilt that plagues me sometimes in the night, a stalking shadow that may still overtake me one day.
 - b. In that moment of clarity, I also saw that what we were doing was illegal.
 - c. Two months later, we made a decision that has haunted me ever since.
 - d. "We're free!" I shouted to Paul, and we exchanged high-fives as we headed toward a new and unencumbered life.
2. What conflicts are present in the narrative? Which conflict is most important to the writer?

3. Give an instance of one specific place in the essay where the writer follows the principle, “Show, don’t tell.”

TOPICS FOR NARRATIVE WRITING

Narrative Assignment 1: Wake-up Call

Journal Entry

You wake to the sound of the radio tuned to an unfamiliar station. As you open your eyes, you realize something is wrong. This is not the room you fell asleep in last night. As you reach to change the station on the radio, you freeze, transfixed by the sight of your outstretched arm. This is not the body you fell asleep in. Write the story in a paragraph or journal entry.

Narrative Assignment 2: Treat or Mistreat

Essay

In an essay, write about a time when someone treated you in one of the following ways:

- misjudged you
- gave you praise or credit you did not deserve
- encouraged you
- ridiculed you
- treated you with unexpected kindness
- treated you unfairly

Narrative Assignment 3: A Significant “First”

Essay

Write a narrative essay about a significant “first” in your life. Some possibilities include your first date, first day of school, first day on the job, or first trip away from home without your parents. Make sure that the incident you choose is one that will fit into an essay. It would be hard, for instance, to write a narrative that fully discussed your first marriage or first job (unless it lasted only a day or two!).

Narrative Assignment 4: An Uncommon Encounter

Essay

Imagine that you have the opportunity to meet and converse with anyone, living or dead, for an hour. It may be a famous person, a historical figure you have always admired, or a relative or ancestor you have never met. Write a narrative

describing your imaginary meeting. In describing your encounter, you may want to include details such as what the person says to you, the questions you ask, the person's appearance, and the setting in which the meeting takes place.

Narrative Assignment 5: Essay-Based Assignment—A Teachable Moment

Essay

Review Maya Angelou's essay, "Complaining," at the beginning of this chapter. The author tells a story in which her grandmother, using the people who come into her store as examples, teaches a lesson about life. Situations and incidents that offer an opportunity for one person (usually an adult) to teach an important lesson to another person (usually a child) are called "teachable moments." Write a narrative describing a time in your life when someone caught you at a "teachable moment." Before you write, reread Angelou's narrative carefully. Notice how vividly she describes her grandmother and the complainers who came into the store. Try to present the characters in your narrative, as well as the lesson you learned, in a vivid and memorable way.

Narrative Assignment 6: Real-World Topic—Observation Skills

Essay

Many times, people ask how writing essays will help them in the "real world." This real-world assignment gives just one example of how narrative writing might be used outside the classroom.

People in many professions are required to develop keen powers of observation. Those in security or police work need to be observant and to know what is going on around them. For medical personnel, keen observation of patients can make the difference between life and death. In fact, just about anyone can benefit from observing more about his or her environment.

Your assignment is to go to a place, observe what happens for a set period of time—say, fifteen minutes—and write it up as a narrative, with events described in chronological order.

Part of your job as an observer is not to be caught observing. Go to a place where your pen and paper will not seem out of place—a library, a cafeteria, a coffee shop, a bench on the campus somewhere—and sit down. Be careful not to stare or to make your observation of anyone seem more than casual. You might try opening your book and placing it on the table as if you are doing an assignment—and you are!

Your narrative should give the reader a clear idea of the place you are in as well as the people and activities in the place.

Example

Examples give your reader a specific illustration of an idea. A good example is never a generalization but a crisp and specific picture that shows exactly what the sentence it illustrates means. An example is a shortcut, providing

a vivid and direct way to get your meaning across to your reader. Because examples are used to illustrate a point, they often include narration or description.

Examples can be used in almost any type of essay. However, essays supported by examples alone might be used to answer questions such as the ones that follow.

- What would cause you to end a friendship?
- Discuss some of the ways that an individual can help the environment.
- How has attending college affected your eating habits?

Building CONNECTIONS

You have seen the way brief anecdotes—small narratives—can be used to introduce an essay. Anecdotes can often serve as examples, too. For instance, if you need an example of rude behavior to illustrate an essay, tell a story. Maybe you recently encountered a gum-chewing clerk in a convenience store who talked on a cell phone during your entire transaction, or perhaps a rude driver cut you off in traffic. A supporting anecdote can add life to your example essay.

Laying the Groundwork for Writing Using Examples

Visualizing

Look at the photograph of the “Beach Closed” sign; then use your imagination to generate several examples of dangers that might have closed this beach.

Planning

Plan a paragraph, and choose whether you will give several examples of dangers that could close a beach, devoting a sentence or two to each, or just one example of a danger that might close a beach.

Writing

Write a paragraph that follows the plan you set up. Take one of the examples and write it up in detail, describing all of the circumstances that led to the closing.

**EXERCISE 6 USING EXAMPLES EFFECTIVELY**

To get an idea of how examples help you to get your meaning across, look at the following paragraphs. Which presents a clearer picture?

Paragraph A

A person who visits another country should be prepared for more than just a change in climate and language. Even such a simple thing as taking a drive can result in culture shock if a tourist is not prepared for different driving customs in the country he is visiting. Nothing can prepare a person for some of the strange driving customs of other countries. Not everyone drives the way we do in the United States. Even though road signs are supposed to be international in meaning, driving customs are not. An American visiting another country may put himself in danger or, at the very

least, risk confusion simply by taking a drive. For their own safety and that of others, tourists to other countries should become familiar with driving customs before getting behind the wheel.

Paragraph B

A person who visits another country should be prepared for more than just a change in climate and language. Even such a simple thing as taking a drive can result in culture shock if a tourist is not prepared for the different driving customs in different countries. In Great Britain, for example, a car's steering wheel is on the right side of the car, and people drive on the left-hand side of the road. An American used to driving on the right-hand side may put himself in danger or, at the very least, risk confusion simply by taking a drive. In Cairo, Egypt, drivers navigate the city's streets at night with their lights off. Like bats flying into the dusk, these drivers steer by sound, tooting their horns every few minutes to warn approaching drivers of their presence. Driving with the lights on, it is widely believed, will drain a car's battery whether the car is running or not. Is maneuvering a car down dark streets and highways dangerous without headlights? Perhaps it is. But in that city, it might be even more dangerous to turn headlights on and risk blinding other drivers on the dark, noisy streets. For their safety and that of others, tourists to other countries should become familiar with driving customs before getting behind the wheel.

The paragraph that makes its point more clearly through examples is paragraph _____.

EXERCISE 7 SHORT AND EXTENDED EXAMPLES

As you saw in Chapter 5, a paragraph may be supported by a series of short examples or by one long, extended example. Look at the following paragraphs. Which is supported by a series of examples, and which by an extended example?

Paragraph A

My roommate Charlotte is excessively neat. She makes her bed up military style, with the covers so tight she could bounce a battalion of quarters from the taut surface. If I shower after her, it is as if I am the first one in the bathroom. The shower stall and mirrors are wiped dry. Her wet towel has been whisked into the hamper, and a dry towel, neatly folded, hangs from the towel rack. Her hair dryer hangs neatly on its hook, and her toothbrush stands soldierlike in its holder. Of course, the cap is back on her toothpaste

tube, which is neatly rolled up from the end, not squeezed in the middle. In her closet, skirts and jackets, as fresh as if they had just been brought from the dry cleaner, fall neatly from hangers spaced exactly one inch apart. Her CDs are arranged in alphabetical order, as are the books on her shelves. I admire neatness; I even strive for it. But Charlotte takes neatness a step too far.

Paragraph B

Social service agencies sometimes do more harm than good. A recent story in the local newspaper provides a good example. A young woman went to a hospital's emergency room because of complications from the recent birth of her child. Because she had no one to keep the child, she brought him with her to the emergency room. When a decision was made to admit her to the hospital, she told hospital personnel that she had no family in the United States, and there was no one to take care of her baby. Trying to help her, hospital officials called a state social services agency to get temporary care for the child. When the child's mother was released from the hospital five days later, she was told that she would have to prove she was a fit mother before regaining custody of her child. The woman was angry and did not understand why her fitness as a mother was being questioned. A spokesperson for the social services agency said its personnel were simply following procedure. In this case, the agency did more harm than good, making the woman a victim instead of giving her the help she needed.

The paragraph that is supported by a series of examples is paragraph _____.

The paragraph that is supported by a single extended example is paragraph _____.

Wordsmith's Corner: Examples of Writing Supported by Example

Below are two student essays supported by example. Read each and answer the questions that follow.

Example Essay 1

It's on the dinner plate now, but what was its life like before? The writer of this essay shows the reader through examples.

Cruel Portion

My grandmother was nine years old when her pet chicken, Belle, showed up on the table at Sunday dinner or, to be more precise, *as* Sunday dinner. Grandma did not eat chicken that Sunday or for many Sundays thereafter. These days, most of us have no such intimate contact with our food before we eat it. Chicken comes from the Colonel or from the Shop-Rite down the street. We have lost touch with the way that animals are treated before they reach our plate. All too often, animals raised for food are treated cruelly—like crops instead of creatures.

While chickens in Grandma's time were allowed to flap, squawk, and strut around the chicken yard until that fateful dinner invitation came, today's chickens lead unnatural lives. They are born in hatcheries, raised in cages on special diets, then crated like cantaloupes and trucked to the processing plant. Who has not seen those trucks, with chickens huddled several to a cage, and cage piled upon cage? Feathers fly as the truck ferries its terrified cargo down the highway, and by the time it reaches its destination many chickens are already dead. Why should we worry when the chickens are going to die anyway? We should worry because we have, it seems to me, a minimal ethical responsibility to give any animal we use for food a decent life.

Some farm animals seem to have decent lives, but often we do not see the whole picture. Cattle graze peaceably in fragrant pastures and gather under trees to escape the summer sun. Yet many cattle never see those fragrant pastures. Some dairy cows are kept permanently in stalls, their engorged udders rubbed raw by the milking machine. The white flesh of veal is the flesh of calves that are deliberately weakened and kept in cages their entire short lives, calves that never rise on unsteady legs to follow their mothers through the clover. These animals live their lives behind barn doors, where no one can see their plight.

Finally, consider the lobster, perhaps the worst-treated of all our food. Once caught, it is doomed to spend the rest of its life in a small fish tank in the fluorescent-lit seafood department of a grocery store. Its claws are closed with heavy rubber bands, and it is crowded together with its fellows at the bottom of the tank. Is it fed, I wonder, or does it slowly starve as it waits to be eaten? Peered at by children, ignored by adults until it is finally bought, it ends its miserable life being boiled alive. Isn't there a more humane way to keep it and to cook it?

After the hunt, the Cherokee had a custom of thanking an animal for its sacrifice. They did not forget that it was a fellow creature, that it had the right to walk the earth and roam the forests. We, too, owe a debt to the animals we raise for food. At the very least, we can treat them like creatures and not like crops.

Questions ?

1. Write the thesis statement and each of its topic sentences in the following space.

2. Which body paragraph uses two short examples rather than an extended example?

3. What type of introduction does the essay have?

- a. broad to narrow
- b. anecdote
- c. narrow to broad

4. Write two descriptive details from the essay that appeal to the reader's sense of sight.

Example Essay 2

Who are the heroes of today? One student writer provides three examples.

Quiet Heroes

Movie stars and athletes are often held up as heroes and role models because they lend their names to a cause or visit a child in the hospital, followed, of course, by a convoy of reporters. These “heroes” are showered with media attention and admiration. But in every community, there are also quiet heroes. I know several

of these quiet heroes, ordinary people of all ages who work to make their community a better place.

One of my heroes is Deb, an outgoing grandmother of three who works with Habitat for Humanity. Deb can wield a hammer with the best of them, but it is her talent for feeding people that makes her contribution special. Deb spends the morning chopping, slicing, and mixing in a kitchen filled with delicious aromas. By 11:30, she is on the road to the construction site. In winter, she may bring hot vegetable soup or Brunswick stew. On warm days, lunch may be homemade pimento cheese sandwiches, fruit, and iced tea. But day after day, Deb uses her money, time, and talent to keep the Habitat crew going.

Then there is Pete, an accountant, who uses his clear, expressive voice to share the joys of reading. He is a member of the Rolling Readers, a group that visits elementary schools to interest children in reading. Pete reads every week to a class he has adopted. To keep the children reading over the summer, he gives each child a book furnished by the Rolling Readers program. Pete also shares his love of reading by volunteering for the Radio Reading Service for the blind and print-handicapped. Once a week, he gets up at six A.M. and drives to a small recording studio. He takes the morning paper and selects the articles he will read from each section of the paper, judging from experience when he has enough to fill the hour. Then, he goes into a recording booth and reads, editing out mistakes as he goes along. By reading to others, Pete manages to turn what is usually a solitary activity into a shared joy.

Another hero is Andrea, a high school junior who has organized a “Friendship Brigade” to serve senior citizens. The Friendship Brigade mows lawns, runs errands, and does chores for low-income senior citizens that it has “adopted.” The brigade has also sought business sponsorship to provide for various needs such as wheelchair ramps and smoke detectors. Andrea says that her reward is knowing that she and her friends are helping older people live more independent lives.

To me, a hero is not necessarily a movie star who jets in for a personal appearance accompanied by a hair stylist, a personal trainer, and an appointment secretary. More often, heroes are ordinary people who, without fanfare, work to improve their community and their world.

Questions ?

1. Write the thesis statement and each of its topic sentences below.

2. How many examples of “quiet heroes” does the writer provide? _____
3. What type of introduction does the essay have? Circle the correct answer.
 - a. broad to narrow
 - b. anecdote
 - c. contrast
4. What type of conclusion does the essay have? Circle the correct answer.
 - a. full circle
 - b. recommendation
 - c. prediction

TOPICS FOR WRITING WITH EXAMPLES

Example Assignment 1: Quotation Station

Journal Entry or Essay

Choose one of the following quotations and write a journal entry or essay agreeing or disagreeing with it. Provide specific examples to support your argument.

Quotations

To be loved, be lovable.

—Ovid, *Amores II*

Hope is a good breakfast but a bad supper.

—Francis Bacon, *Apothegms*

If there is anything disagreeable going on, men are sure to get out of it.

—Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

The female of the species is more deadly than the male.

—Rudyard Kipling, “The Female of the Species”

Less is more.

—Robert Browning, “Andrea del Sarto”

When we stop to think, we often miss our opportunity.

—Publius Syrus, *Maxim 185*

It is your concern when the wall next door is on fire.

—Horace, *Epistles, Book I*

One of the greatest pains to human nature is the pain of a new idea.

—Walter Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*

To him who is afraid, everything rustles.

—Sophocles, *Acrisius*, Fragment 58

Example Assignment 2: Is Your Campus Student-Friendly?

Essay

Computer programs are often described in terms of their user friendliness. What about your college campus? Is it a student-friendly place to acquire an education? Support your answer with specific examples that prove your point.

Example Assignment 3: (S)hopping Mad!

Essay

When you shop, what are your pet peeves? Provide extended examples or a series of short examples of the things that make shopping a pain. A few suggestions are provided to get your thoughts flowing.

the customer ahead of you in line who can't find her checkbook, pen, or credit card

the clerk who is too busy with a phone conversation to wait on you

the salesperson who follows you as if she has just seen your picture on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list

the shopping cart sitting in the middle of the parking place where you would like to park

the grocery store shopper who waits until the total has been rung up and then says, "Oh, I have coupons here . . . somewhere"

the clothing store with locked dressing rooms and no one on duty to open them

Example Assignment 4: Essay-Based Assignment—It Takes All Kinds

Essay

In her essay, “Complaining,” featured at the beginning of this chapter, Maya Angelou wrote about one type of person she observed while helping her

grandmother in a store. Write an essay about one type of person that you have observed in a particular situation and would or would not want to be like. Like Angelou, you will be giving multiple examples of a single type. You may have observed this type of person at work, at school, or in a social situation. Reread Angelou's essay to see how she uses language and narrative to make her examples vivid and real.

Some adjectives that describe people's attitudes are listed below to start you off:

optimistic	grumpy
pessimistic	amiable
considerate	timid
rude	brave
efficient	lazy
inefficient	hardworking

Example Assignment 5: Real-World Topic—Safety Measures

Essay

Many times, people ask how writing essays will help them in the "real world." This real-world assignment demonstrates how writing with examples might be used outside the classroom.

You are the director of security for a large mall. Many employees leave after dark, and recently, a female store manager was a victim of a carjacking as she left alone, late at night. You want to remind all employees of the mall, both male and female, of basic safety procedures they can take to stay safe from carjackings and other types of crimes. You want to mention and give examples of such safety measures, which might include using a buddy system, riding to one's car with a security guard, being observant, having keys ready and cell phone dialed to security, and other measures you might think of.

Consider the tone of your message. You do not want employees to be unduly alarmed, but you wish them to be cautious and to watch out for themselves and one another.

Building CONNECTIONS

Methods of development are tools of a writer's trade. Like a carpenter's hammer, saw, and sander, they each do a specific job. Which one should you use? It depends on the job you have to do. Some pieces of writing will require just one method, but most will require you to use more than one of your tools of the trade.

TOPICS FOR COMBINING METHODS OF DEVELOPMENT

Description, narration, and example are methods of showing or telling a reader exactly what you mean. Combining the methods adds even more power to your writing. The assignments that follow ask you to combine two or more of the methods of development discussed in this chapter.

Mixed Methods Assignment 1: Strong at the Broken Places**Essay: Narration and Example**

Popular wisdom holds that adversity makes people stronger, that it is only in hard times that a person's inner strength comes through. Write a narrative and example essay describing how hard times have made you (or someone you know) a stronger person.

You may wish to make the essay primarily a narrative of a difficult time in your life, supported by examples of the way you (or the person you are writing about) became stronger. Alternatively, you may wish to write an example essay showing three different tough situations that made you (or the person you are writing about) stronger. If your essay is primarily an example essay, then at least one of your examples should be an anecdote, a brief story that demonstrates your point.

Mixed Methods Assignment 2: A Day in the Life**News Story: Narration, Description, and Example**

You are a newspaper reporter. Your editor has assigned you to write a human interest story on a day in the life of a person whose life or job is difficult—a homeless person, a single parent, a person with Alzheimer's, a firefighter, a fast-food worker—the choice is yours. Your job in this human interest story is to allow your reader to get to know the person through narration, description, and example. You may write about someone you know or you may simply use your imagination to create a day in the life of a fictional person.

A human interest story is structured differently from an essay. The first paragraph is an introduction that tells who, what, when, and where. Since you are writing about a day in a person's life, the basic structure of your essay will be narrative, but you will also describe the person and give examples of problems that he or she encounters as the day goes on.

A human interest story should be immediate and fresh, so journalists often write them in the present tense.

Consider using an opening like the one that follows.

Crossing the living room, Charlotte McCabe shuffles to the door in her bedroom slippers. Her shoulders are hunched, and her thin white hair is cut short. Clutching her robe around her with one hand, she tries the doorknob with the other. Her daughter looks at me and whispers apologetically, "I have to keep it locked. She

wanders if I don't." Charlotte McCabe is 78 years old, and a day in her life is filled with the confusion and frustration of Alzheimer's disease.

Mixed Methods Assignment 3: Movie Time

Movie Review: Description, Narration, and Example

You are a movie critic. Your assignment is to write a review describing the best or worst movie you have ever seen. You may describe the acting, the music, the plot, or any other aspect of the movie that you particularly like or dislike. At least one of your paragraphs should contain a narrative example (a retelling) of one of the scenes in the movie.