Chapter 7

Descriptive Narration
Moving Through Space and Time

Writing
Writing Descriptive Narration ................. 106
Career-Related Writing: Workplace Reports ........ 114
Finding Patterns in Photos ...................... 115
Practicing Narrative Patterns ..................... 116
Practicing Descriptive Patterns ................... 117
Suggested Topics and Prompts for Writing
Descriptive Narration ............................. 134
Writer’s Guidelines ............................... 140
Practicing the Brandon Guide for Revising and Editing ......................... 142

Integrated Readings
“Dark Day in the Dust Bowl” ....................... 119
“A Doctor’s Dilemma” ............................. 120
“An American in Mexico” ......................... 123
“No Tears for Frankie” ............................. 126
“Yearning for Love” .............................. 128
“The Drag” [with stages] .......................... 131
Reading-Based Writing: “Rituals as Comfort Food for the Soul” (a reaction to “Closets and Keepsakes”). ..................... 132
Career-Related Writing: “Incident Report of the Falling Shoppers” ......................... 133

WHEN TO USE DESCRIPTIVE NARRATION

FOR COLLEGE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Descriptive narratives are commonly written in many different college subject areas:

- In English composition classes you will probably write some paragraphs and essays about your experiences, showing what happened and giving impressions of how things appeared.
- In police science and fire science classes, you may report on scenes and incidents you observed during ride-alongs and visits to stations.
- In classes as varied as sociology, education, ecology, psychology, and music and art appreciation, your reports of what you experienced during field trips and personal visits are likely to be among course requirements.

IN CAREERS AND AT THE WORKPLACE

- At the workplace, you may be called on to write descriptive narratives in incident reports, case studies, employee evaluations, proposals, comparative evaluations of products or services, quality control reports, or testimonials promoting products or services.
Writing Descriptive Narration

As patterns of writing, description and narration are almost always associated. You would almost never describe something without relating it to something else, especially to a story or a narrative. And you would seldom narrate something (tell the story) without including some description. A narrative moves through time; a description usually moves through space. In this chapter the two patterns are linked as descriptive narration. Either one may be emphasized, but the two blend seamlessly. First we will examine their individual principles.

THE NARRATIVE DEFINED

In our everyday lives, we tell stories and invite other people to do so by asking questions such as “What happened at work today?” and “What did you do last weekend?” We are disappointed when the answer is “Nothing much.” We may be equally disappointed when a person does not give us enough details—or maybe gives us too many and spoils the effect. After all, we are interested in people’s stories and in the people who tell them. We like the narrative.

What is the narrative? The narrative is an account of an incident or a series of incidents that make up a complete and significant action. Each narrative has five parts: situation, conflict, struggle, outcome, and meaning.

NARRATIVE PATTERNS

The five narrative patterns are described here as they relate directly to the action. In a broader sense, you might use other terms such as setting, concern, sequence of events, completion, and significance (or recommended response).
Situation

Situation is the background for the action. The situation may be described only briefly, or it may even be implied. ("To celebrate my seventeenth birthday, I went to the Department of Motor Vehicles to take my practical test for my driver's license.")

Conflict

Conflict is friction, such as a problem in the surroundings, with another person, or within the individual. The conflict, which is at the heart of each narrative, produces struggle. ("It was raining and my appointment was the last one of the day. The examiner was a serious, weary-looking man who reminded me of a bad boss I once had, and I was nervous.")

Struggle

Struggle, which need not be physical, is the manner of dealing with conflict. The struggle adds action or engagement and generates the plot. ("After grinding on the ignition because the engine was already on, I had trouble finding the windshield wiper control. Next I forgot to signal until after I had pulled away from the curb. As we crept slowly down the rain-glazed street, the examiner told me to take the emergency brake off. All the while, I listened to his pen scratching on his clipboard. 'Pull over and park,' he said solemnly.")

Outcome

Outcome is the result of the struggle. ("After I parked the car, the examiner told me to relax, and then he talked to me about school. When we continued, somehow I did not make any errors, and I got my license.")

Meaning

Meaning is the significance of the story, which may be deeply philosophical or simple, stated or implied. ("Calmness promotes calmness.")

VERB TENSE

Because most narratives relate experience in time order, the verb tense is likely to be the past ("She walked into the room") rather than the present ("She walks into the room"), although you may use either. An unnecessary change in tense tends to distract or confuse readers.

Two generalizations may be useful as you work with verb tense.

• Most narratives (often summaries) based on literature are written in the present tense.

  Tom Sawyer pretends that painting the fence is a special pleasure. His friends watch him eagerly. He talks and displays his joy. They pay him to do his work.

• Most historical events and personal experiences are written in the past tense.

  The Battle of Gettysburg was the decisive encounter in the Civil War. Although General Lee, the Confederate general in charge of the overall
strategy, was a wise and an experienced man, he made some tactical blunders that led to a devastating victory by the Union forces.

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly.

(Helen Keller, The Story of My Life)

Although Helen Keller chose the conventional past tense for verbs in the last passage, she might have chosen the present tense for a sense of immediacy.

The two main points about tense are the following:

• The generalizations about verb-tense selection (using past for the historical and the personal and using present for fiction) are useful.
• The verb tense in a passage should change only when the shift is needed for clarity and emphasis.

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view shows the writer’s relationship to the material and the subject, and it usually does not change within a passage.

If you are conveying personal experience, the point of view will be first person, which can be either involved (as a participant) or detached (as an observer). The involved perspective uses I more prominently than the detached perspective does.

If you are presenting something from a distance—geographical or historical (for example, telling a story about George Washington)—the point of view will usually be third person, and the participants will be referred to as “he,” “she,” and “they.”

DIALOGUE

Dialogue is used purposefully in narration to characterize, particularize, and support ideas. It shows us how people talk and think, as individuals or as representatives of society. Not every narrative requires dialogue.

Note in the following paragraph that the snatches of dialogue are brief. The language will ring true to Asian immigrants and to those who have been around Asian immigrants. It is starkly realistic yet sympathetically engaging in context so that we are convinced of its authenticity and drawn into the story. As narrator, the author was present when the utterances in this paragraph were made.

My brother was even more fanatical than I about speaking English. He was especially hard on my mother, criticizing her, often cruelly, for her pidgin speech—smatterings of Chinese scattered like chop suey in her conversation. “It’s not ‘What it is,’ Mom,” he’d say in exasperation. “It’s ‘What is it; what is it, what is it!?’” Sometimes Mom might leave out an occasional “the” or “a,” or perhaps a verb of being. He would stop her in mid-sentence: “Say it again, Mom. Say it right.” When he tripped over his own tongue, he’d blame it on her: “See, Mom, it’s all your fault. You set a bad example.”

(Elizabeth Wong, “The Struggle to Be an All-American Girl”)
ORDER

The order will be essentially time, moving from conflict to meaning. Flashbacks within the sequence are used infrequently in college assignments. (See page 113 for a list of transitional words that promote coherence in the progression of time.)

DESCRIPTIVE PATTERNS

Description is the use of words to represent the appearance or nature of something. It is not merely the work of an indifferent camera: Instead, often going beyond sight, it includes details that will convey a good representation. Just what details the writer selects will depend on several factors, especially the type of description and the dominant impression the writer is trying to convey.

Types of Description

Depending on how you wish to treat your subject material, your description is likely to be either objective or subjective.

Effective objective description presents the subject clearly and directly as it exists outside the realm of emotions. If you are explaining the function of the heart, the characteristics of a computer chip, or the renovation of a manufacturing facility, your description will probably feature specific, impersonal details. Most technical and scientific writing is objective in this sense. It is likely to be practical and utilitarian, making little use of speculation or poetic technique and featuring mainly what can be seen.

Effective subjective description is also concerned with clarity and it may be direct, but it conveys a feeling about the subject and sets a mood while making a point. Because most expression involves personal views, even when it explains by analysis, subjective description (often called emotional description) has a broader range of uses than objective description.

Descriptive passages can be a combination of objective and subjective description; only the larger context of the passage will reveal the main intent. The following description of a baseball begins with objective treatment and then moves to subjective.

It weighs just over five ounces and measures between 2.86 and 2.94 inches in diameter. It is made of a composition-cork nucleus encased in two thin layers of rubber, one black and one red, surrounded by 121 yards of tightly wrapped blue-gray wool yarn, 45 yards of white wool yarn, 53 more yards of blue-gray wool yarn, 150 yards of fine cotton yarn, a coat of rubber cement, and a cowhide (formerly horsehide) exterior, which is held together with 216 slightly raised red cotton stitches. Printed certifications, endorsements, and outdoor advertising spherically attest to its authenticity. . . . Feel the ball, turn it over in your hand; hold it across the seam or the other way, with the seam just to the side of your middle finger. Speculation stirs. You want to get outdoors and throw this spare and sensual object to somebody or, at the very least, watch somebody else throw it. The game has begun.

(Roger Angell, “On the Ball”)
The following subjective description, also on the subject of baseball, is designed to move the emotions while informing.

The Babe was a bundle of paradoxes. Somehow one of the most appealing things about him was that he was neither built, nor did he look like, an athlete. He did not even look like a ballplayer. Although he stood six feet two inches and weighed 220 pounds, his body was pear-shaped and even when in tip-top condition he had a bit of a belly. His barrel always seemed too much for his legs, which tapered into a pair of ankles as slender almost as those of a girl. The great head perched upon a pair of round and unathletic shoulders, presented a moon of a face, the feature of which was the flaring nostrils of a nose that was rather like a snout. His voice was deep and hoarse, his speech crude and earthy, his ever-ready laughter a great, rumbling gurgle that arose from the caverns of his middle. He had an eye that was abnormally quick, nerves and muscular reactions to match, a supple wrist, a murderous swing, and a gorgeously truculent, competitive spirit.

(Paul Gallico, "Babe Ruth")

Techniques of Descriptive Writing

As a writer of description, you will need to focus your work to accomplish four specific tasks:

• Emphasize a single point (dominant impression).
• Choose your words with care.
• Establish a perspective from which to describe your subject (point of view).
• Position the details for coherence (order).

Dominant Impression

See if you can find the dominant impression in this description:

Please help me find my dog. He is a mongrel with the head of a poodle and the body of a wolfhound, and his fur is patchy and dingy-gray. He has only three legs, but despite his arthritis, he uses them pretty well to hobble around and scratch his fleas and mange. His one seeing eye is cloudy, so he runs with his head sideways. His ragged, twisted ears enable him to hear loud sounds, which startle his troubled nervous system and cause him to howl pitifully. If you give him a scrap of food, he will gum it up rapidly and try to wag his broken tail. He answers to the name of Lucky.

Of course, the dominant impression, what is being emphasized, is “misery,” or “unlucky,” not “lucky.” The dominant impression emerges from a pattern of details, often involving repetition of one idea with different particulars. Word choice, which is of paramount importance, depends on your purpose in writing and on your audience.

If you are in a restaurant and you say to your companion, “This food is good,” your companion may understand all he or she needs to understand on the subject. After all, your companion can see you sitting there chewing the...
food, smacking your lips, and wiping the donut glaze off your chin. But if you write that sentence and send it to someone, your reader may be puzzled. Although the reader may know you fairly well, he or she may not know the meaning of “good” (to eat? to purchase for others? to sell?) or of “this food” (What kind? Where is it? How is it special? How is it prepared? What qualities does it have?).

To convey your main concern effectively to readers, you will want to give some sensory impressions. These sensory impressions, collectively called imagery, refer to that which can be experienced by the senses—what we can see, smell, taste, hear, and touch. You may use figures of speech to convey these sensory impressions; figures of speech involve comparisons of unlike things that, nevertheless, have something in common.

The imagery in this passage is italicized.

Sitting here in Harold’s Hefty Burgers at midnight, I am convinced that I am eating the ultimate form of food. The buns are feathery soft to the touch but heavy in the hand and soggy inside. As I take a full-mouth, no-nonsense bite, the melted cheese and juices cascade over my fingers and make little oil slicks on the vinyl table below. I chew noisily and happily like a puppy at a food bowl, stopping occasionally to flush down the rich, thick taste of spicy animal fat with a swig from a chilled mug of fizzing root beer that prickles my nose. Over at the grill, the smell of frying onions creeps away stealthily on invisible feet to conquer the neighborhood, turning hundreds of ordinary citizens like me into drooling, stomach growling, fast-food addicts, who trudge in from the night like the walking dead and call out the same order, time after time. “Hefty Burger.” “Hefty Burger.” “Hefty Burger.”

(Dale Scott, “Hefty Burger”)

In reading Scott’s enthusiastic endorsement of the Hefty Burger, the reader will have no trouble understanding the idea that he liked the food. Through imagery, Scott has involved the reader in what he has seen, smelled, heard, tasted, and touched. He has also used figures of speech, including these examples:

Simile: a comparison using like or as
Metaphor: a comparison using word replacement
Personification: an expression giving human characteristics to something not human

Subjective description is likely to make more use of imagery, figurative language, and words rich in associations than is objective description. But just as a fine line cannot always be drawn between the objective and the subjective, a fine line cannot always be drawn between word choice in one and in the other. However, we can say with certainty that whatever the type of description, careful word choice will always be important. Consider the following points about word choice (diction), point of view, and order.
**Word Choice: General and Specific, Abstract and Concrete**

To move from the general to the specific is to move from the whole class or group of items to individual ones; for example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>More Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>food</td>
<td>hamburger</td>
<td>Hefty Burger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mess</td>
<td>grease</td>
<td>oil slicks on the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink</td>
<td>soda</td>
<td>mug of root beer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>odor</td>
<td>smell from grill</td>
<td>smell of frying onions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Words are classified as abstract or concrete, depending on what they refer to. **Abstract words** refer to qualities or ideas: *good, ordinary, ultimate, truth, beauty, maturity, love.* **Concrete words** refer to things or a substance; they have reality: *onions, grease, buns, table, food.* Specific concrete words, sometimes called **concrete particulars,** often support generalizations effectively and convince the reader of the accuracy of the description.

Never try to give all the details in a description. Instead, be selective. Pick only those details that you need to project a dominant impression, always taking into account the knowledge and attitudes of your readers. To reintroduce an idea from the beginning of this section, description is not photographic. If you wish to describe a person, select the traits that will project your intended dominant impression. If you wish to describe a landscape, do not give all the details that you might find in a picture; on the contrary, pick the details that support your intended dominant impression. That extremely important dominant impression is directly linked to your purpose. It is created by the judicious choice and arrangement of images, figurative language, and revealing details.

**Point of View**

Point of view shows the writer’s relationship to the subject, thereby establishing the perspective from which the subject is described. It rarely changes within a passage. Two terms usually associated with fiction writing, *first person* and *third person,* also pertain to descriptive writing.

If you want to convey personal experience, your point of view will be *first person,* which can be either involved (point of view of a participant) or uninvolved (point of view of an observer). The involved perspective uses *I* more prominently than the uninvolved. Student Dale Scott’s paragraph “Hefty Burger” uses first person, involved.

If you want to present something from a detached position, especially from a geographical or historical distance (see “Babe Ruth” and “On the Ball”), your point of view will be *third person,* and you will refer to your subjects by name or by third-person pronouns such as *he, she, him, her, it,* they, and them, without imposing yourself as an *I* person.

**Order**

The point of view you select may indicate or even dictate the order in which you present descriptive details. If you are describing your immediate surroundings while taking a walk (first person, involved), the descriptive account would naturally develop spatially as well as chronologically—in other words, in both space and time.
Some descriptive pieces—for example, the one on Babe Ruth—may follow an idea progression for emphasis and not move primarily through space or time. Whatever appropriate techniques you use will guide your reader and thereby aid coherence.

All four elements—dominant impression, word choice, point of view, and order—work together in a well-written description.

The dominant impression of the paragraph “On the Ball” is of an object remarkably well designed for its purpose. The point of view is third person, and the order of the description moves from the core of the baseball outward.

The paragraph “Babe Ruth” emphasizes the idea of paradox (something that appears to be a contradiction). The details are presented from a detached point of view (third person) and appear in order from physique to overall appearance to behavior. The details show a person who was not built like an athlete and did not look like an athlete yet was one of the most famous athletes of all time. Collectively those details convey the dominant impression of “Ruth, the paradox.”

Scott’s “Hefty Burger” can also be evaluated for all four elements:

- **Dominant impression**: good food (images, figurative language, other diction). The reader experiences the incident as the writer did because of the diction.
- **Word choice**: general or specific; abstract or concrete. The general and abstract have been made clear by use of the specific and the concrete. Of course, not all abstract words need to be tied to the concrete, nor do all general words need to be transformed to the specific. As you describe, use your judgment to decide which words fit your purposes—those needed to enable your audience to understand your ideas and to be persuaded or informed.
- **Point of view**: first person, involved.
- **Order**: chronological (time) for the eating; spatial (space) for the grill and neighborhood.

Transitional Words

Consider using the following transitional words to improve coherence by connecting ideas with ideas, sentences with sentences, and paragraphs with paragraphs.

**FOR DESCRIPTION** (place): above, over, under, below, nearby, near, across, beyond, among, to the right, to the left, in the background, in the foreground, further, beside, opposite, within sight, out of sight

**FOR NARRATION** (time): after, before, later, earlier, initially, soon, recently, next, today, tomorrow, yesterday, now, then, until, currently, when, finally, not long after, immediately, (at) first, (at) last, third, previously, in the meantime, meanwhile

**FOR ALL PATTERNS OF WRITING**: The HOTSHOT CAT words: However, Otherwise, Therefore, Similarly, Hence, On the other hand, Then, Consequently, Also, Thus (See pages 463–464 for additional transitional words.)
At the workplace, numerous reports fit the pattern of narrative writing: trip reports, status reports (from investigation or development of something such as a program or product), or incident reports (one of the most universal types of reports from industry to industry).

In most instances the incident report denotes problems. Something unforeseen has occurred, and it must be documented: an accident, a theft, a disturbance, a dangerous condition, a lost child, an act of vandalism, an equipment failure, or a health emergency other than one caused by an accident. A report on one of these incidents is likely to be written as an important record. It may be the essential information on which law enforcement acts, equipment is replaced, clients are served, safety is assured, security is established, or the physical plant is protected.

These reports are sometimes dictated, but they are more often written by the person most directly related to an incident. Your ability to write an effective report will aid your company and reflect well on you as an intelligent, educated employee. Although the procedure and the form of these incident reports will vary, some principles can be applied to all; these principles follow the basic narrative form.

**Situation:** Identify the kind of problem.

**Conflict:** Indicate when and where the problem occurred.

**Struggle and outcome:** Provide an account of what happened.

**Meaning:** If appropriate, write a recommendation for what could be done to avoid a repetition of such an incident if it is appropriate to do so.

Follow these guidelines in writing an incident report:

- Write in the first person (I), for you are the one who is writing the report.
- Start with the date, time, and your reason for involvement.
- If you use the words of anyone reporting on the incident, enclose them in quotation marks and acknowledge the source of those words.
- Use facts, not opinions.
- Do not step outside your work expertise and become a psychologist, philosopher, physician, or moralist. If you do, should this report make its way to a court case, what you say will be discredited.
- Use past tense; you are writing about something that has already happened.
- Use mostly active voice. For example, write, “Mills made the report,” not “The report was made by Mills.”
- Identify those involved. Drop the titles, such as Mr., Mrs., Dr., and so on. After the first reference to the person in the report, use only the surname or the first initial and the surname.

See pages 133–134 for an example of an incident report.
Imagine that you are working on a final examination. Letter grades will be calculated on a curve. You are trying to convey your understanding of the course content to your instructor. Then you look to your left and see a fellow student (the one in the photo) with a cheat card in the palm of his hand. He is part of your competition. His use of the card may mean the difference between your making a lower or higher grade. You are on a bubble for your grade point average. The final grade may determine whether you can transfer to the university of your choice or not. You look to the front of the room where your instructor sits at his desk, his gaze locked on a stack of bluebook finals he is marking from another class. For a moment you are torn. You have never snitched. You have said publicly you do not believe in snitching. But much is riding on the results of this test. You continue with your work. You finish early. The cheating student is still on task—and still consulting his illegal notes. You use your cell phone camera to take a picture (as shown), in case you need evidence. You are about to submit your test. It is time to do the right thing. But what is the right thing?

Complete the following outline.

Topic Sentence or Thesis: There are occasions when a single event can make people reevaluate a principle they have always upheld, in this case never snitching.

I. Extended example
   A. _______________________________________________________________
   B. _______________________________________________________________

II. Example in relation to personal code of conduct
   A. _______________________________________________________________
   B. _______________________________________________________________

III. Decision (to snitch or not to snitch)
   A. _______________________________________________________________
   B. _______________________________________________________________

If your instructor directs you to do so, write a paragraph or short essay based on this imaginary experience.
Practicing Narrative Patterns

Some narratives are more structured than others, but all have the same basic patterns. The parts, especially conflict and struggle, will vary in extent, depending on the circumstances.

EXERCISE 2 Writing Patterns

Fill in the blanks to complete the pattern for the topic “A Random, Unexpected, and Welcome Act of Kindness” or for another topic of your choice. Add descriptive details as needed.

(Situation) I. ________________________

(Conflict) II. ________________________

(Struggle) III. ________________________

A. ________________________

B. ________________________

C. ________________________

(Or more) ________________________

(Outcome) IV. ________________________

(Meaning) V. ________________________

EXERCISE 3 Writing Patterns

Fill in the blanks to complete the pattern for the topic “Dealing with an Unpleasant Person at Work” or for another topic of your choice. Add descriptive details as needed.

(Situation) I. ________________________

(Conflict) II. ________________________

(Struggle) III. ________________________

A. ________________________

B. ________________________

C. ________________________

(Or more) ________________________

(Outcome) IV. ________________________

(Meaning) V. ________________________
Description, which is almost always used with other patterns, is very important and often neglected. The following exercises feature descriptive writing that supports a dominant impression of colorful action.

**EXERCISE 4  Working with Word Choice**

Improve the following sentences by supplying specific and concrete words. Use images when they serve your purposes.

*Example:* The animal was restless and hungry.  
*The gaunt lion paced about the cage and chewed hungrily on an old shoe.*

1. The fans were happy.  
2. She was in love.  
3. Confusion surrounded him.  
4. The traffic was congested.  
5. The dessert impressed the diner.  
6. The woman liked her date.  
7. The salesman was obnoxious.  
8. The room was cluttered.  
9. His hair was unkempt.  
10. The room smelled bad.

**EXERCISE 5  Completing Descriptive Patterns**

Fill in the blanks. This is a useful procedure for prewriting a descriptive paragraph or essay. Consider using it for your writing assignment in this chapter. Suggested topic: a location on campus, such as a classroom, the cafeteria, the student financial aid office, the stadium, a playing field, a lab, or the parking lot at night.

What is your subject? ________________________
What is the dominant impression? ________________________
What is the situation? (Include some movement or action to provide a narrative framework, even if it is only you walking through an area.) ________________________
What is the order of details? ________________________
What details support the dominant impression? (Use listing or clustering.) ________________________
Listing

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________
4. ____________________________
5. ____________________________

Clustering

Insert your topic in the double bubble and fill in details in the blank single bubbles.

Explain your narrative framework. It need not be complicated.

• Situation ____________________________________________________________
• Conflict ____________________________________________________________
• Struggle ____________________________________________________________
• Outcome ____________________________________________________________
• Meaning ____________________________________________________________

Readings for Critical Thinking, Discussion, and Writing

READING STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES

Underlining and annotating these reading selections will help you answer the questions that follow the selections, discuss the material in class, and prepare for reading-based writing assignments. As you underline and annotate, pay special attention to the author’s writing skills, logic, and message, and consider the relevance of the material to your own experiences and values.

Most selections begin with a Mindset suggestion that can help you create a readiness for connecting with what you are about to read.
Dark Day in the Dust Bowl*

JOHN STEINBECK

In the 1930s, a dust storm descended on the Southwest. The sun disappeared, the chickens went to roost in the middle of the day, a desert invaded the fields, and sand drifted in like snow, in places covering whole houses. Initially, some people, especially those in rural areas, thinking the end of the world was upon them, fled to churches or withdrew into themselves. But then they found the strength to survive, some digging out and digging in, some moving out and moving away. In The Grapes of Wrath, from which this excerpt is taken, John Steinbeck depicts the people in an early stage of confronting this natural disaster.

The people came out of their houses and smelled the hot stinging air and covered their nose from it. And the children came out of their houses, but they did not run or shout as they would have done after a rain. Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, drying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. The men were silent and did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men—to feel whether this time the men would break. The women studied the men's faces secretly, for the corn could go, as long as something else remained. The children stood nearby, drawing figures in the dust with bare toes, and the children sent exploring senses out to see whether men and women would break. The children peeked at the faces of the men and women, and then drew careful lines in the dust with their toes. Horses came to the watering troughs and nuzzled the water to clear the surface dust. After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break. Then they asked, What'll we do? And the men replied, I don't know. But it was all right. The women knew it was all right, and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole. The women went into the houses to their work, and the children began to play, cautiously at first. As the day went forward the sun became less red. It flared down on the dust-blanketed land. The men sat in the doorways of their houses; their hands were busy with sticks and little rocks. The men sat still—thinking—figuring.

*Title by editor.

EXERCISE 6 Discussion and Critical Thinking

1. Notice how each group looks at something. What do the men look at? What do the women look at? What do the children look at?

2. What is more important, finding a solution to the problem or finding courage to face the problem?

3. Explain how this incident could be a pivotal moment for any person here, but especially for the children.
4. Briefly, what are the situation, the conflict, the struggle, the outcome, and the meaning?

Situation:
Conflict:
Struggle:
Outcome:
Meaning:

5. How does descriptive detail heighten the tension? In other words, what is emphasized?

6. What words or phrases suggest the passage of time and give chronological order to this piece?

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**ESSAYS**

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**A Doctor’s Dilemma***

DR. JAMES N. DILLARD

Now in private practice, Dr. Dillard served as an assistant clinical professor at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons for twelve years. He is an active writer and speaker, he is the author of the best-selling book The Chronic Pain Solution, and he has appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Good Morning America, NPR, ABC World News Tonight, and the CBS Evening News.

1. It was a bright, clear February afternoon in Gettysburg. A strong sun and layers of dawn did little to ease the biting cold. Our climb to the crest of Little Roundtop wound past somber monuments, barren trees and polished cannon. From the top, we peered down on the wheat field where men had fallen so close together that one could not see the ground. Rifle balls had whined as thick as bee swarms through the trees, and cannon shots had torn limbs from the young men fighting there. A frozen wind whipped tears from our eyes. My friend Amy huddled close, using me as a wind breaker. Despite the cold, it was hard to leave this place.

2. Driving east out of Gettysburg on a country blacktop, the gray Bronco ahead of us passed through a rural crossroad just as a small pickup truck tried to take a left turn. The Bronco swerved, but slammed into the pickup on the passenger side. We immediately slowed to a crawl as we passed the scene. The Bronco’s driver looked fine, but we couldn’t see the driver of the pickup. I pulled over on the shoulder and got out to investigate.

3. The right side of the truck was smashed in, and the side window was shattered. The driver was partly out of the truck. His head hung forward over the edge of the passenger-side window, the front of his neck crushed on the shattered windowsill. He was unconscious and started to turn a dusky blue. His chest slowly heaved against a blocked windpipe.

A young man ran out of a house at the crossroad. “Get an ambulance out here,” I shouted against the wind. “Tell them a man is dying.”

I looked down again at the driver hanging from a windowsill. There were six empty beer bottles on the floor of the truck. I could smell the beer through the window. I knew I had to move him, to open his airway. I had no idea what neck injuries he had sustained. He could easily end up a quadriplegic. But I thought: he’ll be dead by the time the ambulance gets here if I don’t move him and try to do something to help him.

An image flashed before my mind. I could see the courtroom and the driver of the truck sitting in a wheelchair. I could see his attorney pointing at me and thundering at the jury: “This young doctor with still a year left in his residency training, took it upon himself to play God. He took it upon himself to move this gravely injured man, condemning him forever to this wheelchair. . . .” I imagined the millions of dollars in award money. And all the years of hard work lost. I’d be paying him off for the rest of my life. Amy touched my shoulder, “What are you going to do?”

The automatic response from long hours in the emergency room kicked in. I pulled off my overcoat and rolled up my sleeves. The trick would be to keep enough traction straight up on his head while I moved his torso, so that his probably broken neck and spinal-cord injury wouldn’t be made worse. Amy came around the driver’s side, climbed half in and grabbed his belt and shirt collar. Together we lifted him off the windowsill.

He was still out cold, limp as a rag doll. His throat was crushed and blood from the jugular vein was running down my arms. He still couldn’t breathe. He was deep blue–magenta now, his pulse was rapid and thready. The stench of alcohol turned my stomach, but I positioned his jaw and tried to blow air down into his lungs. It wouldn’t go.

Amy had brought some supplies from my car. I opened an oversize intravenous needle and groped on the man’s neck. My hands were numb, covered with freezing blood and bits of broken glass. Hyoid bone—God, I can’t even feel the thyroid cartilage, it’s gone. . . . OK, the thyroid gland is about there, cricoids rings are here. . . . We’ll go in right here. . . .

It was a lucky first shot. Pink air sprayed through the IV needle. I placed a second needle next to the first. The air began whistling through it. Almost immediately, the driver’s face turned bright red. After a minute, his pulse slowed down and his eyes moved slightly. I stood up, took a step back and looked down. He was going to make it. He was going to live. A siren wailed in the distance. I turned and saw Amy holding my overcoat. I was shivering and my arms were turning white with cold.

The ambulance captain looked around and bellowed, “What the hell. . . . Who did this?” as his team scurried over to the man lying in the truck.

“I did,” I replied. He took down my name and address for his reports. I had just destroyed my career. I would never be able to finish my residency with a massive lawsuit pending. My life was over.

The truck driver was strapped onto a backboard, his neck in a stiff collar. The ambulance crew had controlled the bleeding and started intravenous fluid. He was slowly waking up. As they loaded him into the ambulance, I saw him move his feet. Maybe my future wasn’t lost.

A police sergeant called me from Pennsylvania three weeks later. Six days after successful throat-reconstruction surgery, the driver had signed out, against medical advice from the hospital because he couldn’t get a drink on the ward. He was being arraigned on drunk-driving charges.
A few days later, I went into the office of one of my senior professors to tell the
story. He peered over his half glasses and his eyes narrowed. “Well, you did the
right thing medically of course. But, James, do you know what you put at risk by
doing that?” he said sternly. “What was I supposed to do?” I asked.

“Drive on,” he replied. “There is an army of lawyers out there who would stand
in line to get a case like that. If that driver had turned out to be a quadriplegic, you
might never have practiced medicine again. You were a very lucky young man.”

The day I graduated from medical school, I took an oath to serve the sick and
the injured. I remember truly believing I would be able to do just that. But I have
found out it isn’t so simple. I understand now what a foolish thing I did that day.
Despite my oath, I know what I would do on that cold roadside near Gettysburg
today. I would drive on.

EXERCISE 7 Discussion and Critical Thinking

1. Use phrases or sentences to indicate these parts of this narrative:
   - Situation:
   - Conflict:
   - Struggle:
   - Outcome:
   - Meaning:

2. What is the ethical issue that Dillard discusses, and what is his final position?

3. Pennsylvania, where Gettysburg is located, has this Good Samaritan Law:
   Medical Good Samaritan civil immunity [for Pennsylvania, effective 1978]
   (a) General Rule.—Any physician or any other practitioner of the healing arts
   or any registered nurse, licensed by any state, who happens by chance upon
   the scene of an emergency or who arrives on the scene of an emergency by
   reason of serving on an emergency call panel or similar committee of a county
   medical society or who is called to the scene of an emergency by the police or
   other duly constituted officers of a government unit or who is present when an
   emergency occurs and who, in good faith, renders emergency care at the scene
   of the emergency, shall not be liable for any civil damages as a result of any
   acts or omissions by such physician or practitioner or registered nurse in ren-
   dering the emergency care, except any acts or omissions intentionally designed
to harm or any grossly negligent acts or omissions which result in harm to the
   person receiving emergency care.
(b) Definition.—As used in this section “good faith” shall include, but is not limited to, a reasonable opinion that the immediacy of the situation is such that the rendering of care should not be postponed until the patient is hospitalized.


The incident narrated by Dr. Dillard occurred around 1993. Should Dillard have mentioned this law? Explain its possible relevance if he were aware of it.

4. Does the law allow for any exceptions to complete protection?

5. If Dillard had been unable to hit his targets with the needles and the patient had died, the patient’s family might have filed a lawsuit. If you were on the jury and you accepted Dillard’s account and applied the Good Samaritan Law to the case, would you vote guilty or not guilty to a medical malpractice or wrongful death suit?

6. In giving his account, Dillard seems to pay particular attention to the six empty beer bottles he counted on the floor of the pickup and then to the report that the patient he saved was cited for driving under the influence (DUI). Leaving the hospital against medical recommendations in search of a drink, the patient was perhaps revealing a chronic drinking problem. Does the DUI citation or the possible drinking problem have anything to do with the doctor’s ethical decision? Should it? Explain your answer.

7. Overall are you sympathetic to Dr. Dillard’s final statement that should he encounter this situation again, he would “drive on?” Explain.

8. Apply the idea of an ethical dilemma (dilemma meaning having only two choices and both of them being bad in some respects) to this hypothetical case: A doctor is riding on a bus. Someone has a seizure. The bus driver asks if there is a doctor on board. The doctor does not say anything. The person, who has choked on a peanut, dies before an ambulance arrives. If identified as a doctor, could or should he be prosecuted for not living up to his or her sworn oath?

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An American in Mexico*

ALEX ESPINOZA

Alex Espinoza is a freelance writer and a college professor at the University of California at Fresno. He was born in Tijuana, Mexico, and as a child moved to La Puente, California, where he attended elementary and high school. He has degrees from San Bernardino Community College, the University of California at Riverside, and the University of California at Irvine. This essay was first published in Newsweek.

When my father came to the United States to work as a day laborer many years ago, he intended to move back to the village in Michoacan where my mother and seven of my siblings lived. He wired my mother money, some of which she used to build a house there in El Ojo de Agua on a parcel of land that has been in her family since before the Mexican revolution. But at some point, my mother had enough of waiting for my father’s return. She packed up what little she had and, with her children, traveled to Tijuana to be closer to him and to make visits easier. She stayed in Tijuana for several years—I was born there, the youngest of eleven children. Eventually, we moved to the three-bedroom house outside Los Angeles where I grew up.

My childhood was different from the childhood of most of my siblings. I rode my BMX bike through vacant lots, watched cable, and collected “Star Wars” action figures. They climbed mesquite trees, made handmade dolls from old rags, and stole chicken eggs from a neighbor’s henhouse to sell for candy. They also shared hardships and misfortunes—hunger, long hours of working in the fields at young ages, the loss of two infant sisters.

Their connection to Mexico was close, deep, and also painful, something I simply could not grasp. Growing up, I felt no ties to El Ojo de Agua. I traveled into Mexico with my family as a child a few times, always eager to return to my American life. But as I grew older, I began to want to see the place most of my family called home, the place my siblings had talked about with such complicated feelings. Two years ago, at 33, I finally decided to go. I took my mother along; it had been more than 25 years since she had returned.

We flew into Mexico City, where we stayed for one day—strolling through parks and museums and visiting the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe; there we watched the steady flow of devotees making their pilgrimages to the altar on their knees, their hands clasped in prayer. The next day, we traveled by bus to the city of La Piedad, where my uncle picked us up at the depot.

After many years in the U.S., my uncle had recently returned home to sell agricultural equipment to local farmers. He employed a maid named Chavela, who lived in one of the nearby villages. Chavela told me that her boyfriend had left for the United States about a month before but that weeks had gone by without news of his whereabouts. She said she hoped to save enough money to be able to go and find him. It made me think of the trip my mother took more than three decades earlier, traveling by train to Tijuana with her children to be near my father.

It was threatening to rain the afternoon my uncle drove us out over unpaved roads to the old house. Many of the houses along the main road of the village were empty and dark, with overgrown weeds and broken fences. Now and again, I’d spot one with dim lights illuminating the small windows. Tricycles and toys might be scattered around the front yard, and a column of white smoke threaded out through a hole in the corrugated-metal roof.

Gradually, the houses vanished, giving way to tall cornstalks, and we reached the wooden fence marking the entrance to my grandfather’s property. We drove up a short distance before stopping and getting out. I spotted a reservoir behind some trees, and the water glistened when the clouds broke enough to allow a few beams of sunlight to touch the surface.

The house my mother built was nothing more than four walls made of orange bricks surrounded by thickets of wild shrubs and grass. The windows had no glass, and the front door had been ripped from its hinges. My uncle said that the house was sometimes used as a stable for the livestock that grazed in the hills not far away. There were broken bottles on the dirt floor, and it smelled of urine and manure.

“I lived here,” my mother said to me, as if she couldn’t believe it herself. “Right here.”

This was a place that had, over the years, become mythic in my mind. But it was real. I touched the brick walls, and I saw the trees my siblings had climbed, the field where they had worked. The soft mud gave way underneath my shoes. A clean set of my footprints remained.
I took pictures, and after the film was developed, I sat on the floor of my apartment back in California and took the photos out. I looked at each one and tried piecing them together, assembling a memory. I really wanted to connect to that land the way my brothers and sisters had—to get a better sense of our shared past. I thought I could understand things like sacrifice, the small traces of ourselves we are forced to leave behind. But all that the pictures showed were indistinguishable sections of walls, windows, and dark doorways.

11

EXERCISE 8 Vocabulary Highlights

Write a short definition of each word as it is used in the essay. (Paragraph numbers are given in parentheses.) Be prepared to use these words in sentences.

- parcel (1)
- illuminating (6)
- mesquite (2)
- reservoir (7)
- basilica (4)
- grazed (8)
- devotees (4)
- mythic (10)
- clasped (4)
- indistinguishable (11)

EXERCISE 9 Discussion and Critical Thinking

1. Alex Espinoza was born a Mexican and became an American. Why did he give his essay the title “An American in Mexico”?

2. Paragraph 2 states the differences of his childhood experiences from most of his siblings. What is implied? Does he feel fortunate, does he feel that he has missed something important, or is it some combination of those feelings? Explain.

3. What was his motive for going to El Ojo de Agua?

4. What does he mean by “complicated feelings”?

5. Why does he include an account of his stop in Mexico City in paragraph 4?

6. What does the story of Chavela represent in Espinoza’s essay?

7. In paragraph 10, he says that the place had become mythic in his mind, and now he can touch it. Now that he has visited the setting of the myth, does he believe that he can share the “complicated feelings”?
8. What does he mean by saying, “A clean set of my footprints remained”?

9. Why do the photos he took and later contemplated not help him make the connection he sought?

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**No Tears for Frankie***

**GINA GREENLEE**

Freelance writer Gina Greenlee recalls a bully who tormented her during her childhood, his death, and his funeral, which she attended. This article was first published in the “Lives” section of the New York Times Magazine.

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If you had the opportunity to attend the funeral of the person who had done you the most harm in your whole life and that harm were horrific, would you go? And if you did, as you looked on the corpse, do you think you would be trying to find it in your heart to forgive that person, or might you be mainly interested in verifying the coroner’s report? Ponder that question as you read an account of someone who experienced that situation.

1. I was in the fifth grade when Frankie died. It was 1971. My whole class planned to attend the funeral, since we knew him. My father thought going might give me nightmares, but I insisted. I had never seen a dead person before. Most of all, I wanted to be sure that the little creep would never touch me again.

2. Frankie lived in Lower Manhattan where run-down tenements along Avenues A, B and C were on the verge of becoming the crack houses of the ‘80s. At the time, I lived nearby. Then in 1970 my family moved into an apartment in Coop Village on Grand Street and F.D.R. Drive. It was only three blocks—and a world—away from the projects to a predominantly white middle-class community on the East River. Overnight at school, I became “that black girl who lives in the rich Jew buildings.” Or at least that’s what Frankie and my other African-American classmates thought I was. It became a familiar chant of theirs as I made my way through my old neighborhood to get to school.

3. Frankie and I were in the same grade, but I was 10 and he was 12 because he had been left back twice. He tormented all of the girls in our class. But Frankie relished singling me out—the only black girl in a sea of Jewish girls dotted with Latinas—and he had done so since I first arrived from another school in third grade.

4. He never did any schoolwork. Instead, for the first three periods Frankie’s curriculum was mayhem; by fourth period he was usually in the principal’s office; and by the fifth, he was back in class unremorseful and pumped to do it again. He only got worse in that working-class, urban-blight panacea, the after-school program. It was a nice idea: children whose parents were unavailable at 3 o’clock because they were working stayed after school to study, improve skills and tackle extra-credit projects. I spent those afternoons trying to stay alive.

5. Frankie and his crew would grab my breasts, genitals and buttocks when the teachers weren’t looking. Their hands, quick as filthy street rats, darted across my private parts in assembly line, during dance rehearsals and yard processions. They would leave scrawled notes in my book bag that read, “I’m gonna beat you up after school,” or “I’ll get you in the stairwell.”

6. One spring afternoon, I had made it through another harrowing two hours after school, only to be cornered on the stairs by the whole nasty lot. They taunted me to walk down ahead of them. I managed each step as if it were my first, balancing myself on the chalk-blue shellacked handrail as I peered through the landing divider reminiscent of a wire cage, hoping to see another student, teacher, anyone. Frankie shoved me, and I tumbled one full flight, landing on my knees, my favorite brown plaid dress above my ears, easy pickings for the tiny vultures who cackled obscenities while snatching at my body, punching and kicking me. That day, I understood the depth of Frankie’s perversity.

7. When I told a friend that our classroom emptied out at 3 p.m., leaving me alone with Frankie’s boys, without having to share another detail, she said, “Come to my house after school.” I had enjoyed two afternoons of baking cookies and doll playing when I let slip that my parents thought I was in class. My friend’s mother welcomed me to play at her home anytime as long as my parents knew. “Why were you at Amy’s and not in the after-school program?” my father asked me later that night. I didn’t tell him because I didn’t think he could help me. His interventions would only inspire retaliations and spiral me deeper into the mess.

8. I did try to tell my teachers, but nobody believed me. They chuckled and said, “Frankie just has a crush on you.” That’s what I told my father 15 years after the attacks, when he asked me if I had told my teachers. I guess in their world, 12-year-old boys don’t sexually attack 10-year-old girls. What world did they come from, anyway? What world was I in, and how could I fix it so Frankie would disappear?

9. One morning when my teachers had stepped away from the classroom, Frankie and his boys shoved me into the coat closet and held the door shut while I was alone with Frankie. It was dark. As he kept touching me, I tried to push him away and screamed to be let out. But Frankie’s friends held steadfast until the teachers arrived; then they scrambled to their seats. None of the other kids said a word. But in front of them all, I told Frankie that I hated his guts and hoped he would die.

10. Quite accommodating, he lay in a casket later that year. I didn’t shed a tear. My heart was hardened, though. As usual, Frankie was up to no good—tampering with public property with the boys—when he got himself electrocuted. I was 10, and I was glad.

### EXERCISE 10 Discussion and Critical Thinking

1. Use phrases or sentences to indicate these parts of this narrative:
   - Situation:
   - Conflict:
   - Struggle:
   - Outcome:
   - Meaning:
2. Why didn’t Gina Greenlee shed a tear?

3. Having read this essay, do you think that this event made Greenlee generally a more compassionate or a less compassionate human being? Explain.

4. Is this an essay that only a person who has been bullied dreadfully can understand, or can it be appreciated by anyone? Explain.

5. What would you say to people who would have forgiven Frankie in his casket?

STUDENT PARAGRAPHS, ESSAY, AND REPORT

Yearning for Love
CHANTRA SHASTRI

Having lived in America for five years, Chantra Shastri asks for freedom—freedom to make a choice in marriage, a choice based on love. In the annotation, the first column indicates images for description and the second indicates the parts of the narrative pattern. The topic sentence and concluding sentences are single-underlined; the descriptive phrases are double-underlined.

If your parents know your head and you know your heart, does the heart trump the head? It is your call.

I need not go beyond myself to find examples of love, at least the yearning for love. My home is now America, but I have not left India far behind. There, in ways still cherished by my traditional family, freedom is based on gender, and I am a female. My parents expect women to cook, clean, and nurture. My parents expect me to marry the man of their choice, although my brother will have the freedom to choose his own mate. If I disobey, I will no longer be recognized by my parents. It is easy to give in to such a custom; it is difficult to disobey. My parents have always believed as they do. I cannot change them, nor do I want to, but I wish they would accept my difference in this different country. I think my mother understands. Last week, I saw her crying while she ironed our clothes. When I asked her why she was crying, she wiped the warm tears off her thin, soft cheeks and pretended not to hear me as she sang. Her singing made me sad because I knew why she had cried, and she knew I knew. I seized the opportunity to say, “I don’t want an arranged marriage,” but she sang even louder, singing a song of a distant home. In times such as these, like my father, she too covers her ears with the thick dried mud of tradition. She doesn’t want to hear me. It is easier that way.
EXERCISE 11 Discussion and Critical Thinking

1. Why did Shastri’s mother cry?

2. What chance does Shastri have to make her own choice?

3. What would you advise Shastri to do?

4. How does the specific example of Shastri’s mother crying imply more than it actually says?

When student Mike Kavanagh looked at the assignment to write a paragraph of descriptive narration about something he knew well, he had no trouble in selecting a subject. As a drag racer for sport and prize money, he had built up his car, a 1968 Camaro, to thunder down the track at more than two hundred miles per hour, with all his senses raw to the wind.

His Writing Process Worksheet shows you how his writing evolved from idea to final draft. To conserve space here, the freewriting and the rough draft marked for revision have been omitted. The balance of his worksheet has been lengthened for you to be able to see parts of his work in their entirety.

You will find a full-size blank worksheet at the front of this book and on the CourseMate for Basic Writing Site. It can be photocopied or printed, filled in, and submitted with each assignment if your instructor directs you to do so.

Writing Process Worksheet

**Assignment**

In the space below, write whatever you need to know about your assignment, including information about the topic, audience, pattern of writing, length, whether to include a rough draft or revised drafts, and whether your paper must be typed.

Write a paragraph of descriptive narration about something you have experienced, an event that occurred in a short period of time, maybe a minute or less. Write so that an uninformed audience can understand what you did, how you did it, and how you felt. About 250 to 300 words. Submit this completed worksheet, a rough draft marked for revision, and a typed final draft.

**Stage One**

Freewrite, brainstorm (list), cluster, or take notes as directed by your instructor.
Stage Two  

Organize  

Write a topic sentence or thesis; label the subject and the focus parts.

I climb into the cockpit for my drag.

Write an outline or an outline alternative. For reading-based writing, include references and short quotations with page numbers as support in the outline.

I. Preparation
   A. Take position
   B. Strap in
      1. Straps merge
      2. Buckle

II. Warm up
   A. Fire motor
      1. Feel rumble
      2. Hear blower
      3. Smell nitro
   B. Dry hop tires

III. Drag
   A. Green light
   B. Thrust
   C. Braking
      1. Regular brakes
      2. Parachutes
   D. Success
      1. Scoreboard
      2. Feeling

Stage Three  

Write  

On separate paper, write and then revise your paragraph or essay as many times as necessary for coherence, language (usage, tone, and diction), unity, emphasis, support, and sentences (CLUESS). Read your work aloud to hear and correct any grammatical errors or awkward-sounding sentences.

Edit any problems in fundamentals, such as capitalization, grammar, punctuation, and spelling (CGPS).

Final Draft  

The topic sentence and concluding sentence are single-underlined.
As I climb into the cockpit for my drag, I hear the roar of the crowd and the thundering blasts in the background. Engulfed in an iron cage, I strap myself down. First over the shoulders, then from the waist, and finally from between my legs the straps merge and then buckle at my belly button. This is to ensure my stability in the ironclad, two-hundred-and-thirty-miles-per-hour street rocket. My crew then signals me to fire up the three thousand horsepower motor mounted at my back. With the push of a button, I feel the rumble of the motor, hear the scream of the blower, and smell the distinctive odor of nitro in the air. I then move up to the starting line to dry hop my rear tires for better traction. I quickly thrust the accelerator pedal to the floor. I am shot forward about two hundred feet. Letting off the accelerator pedal and pulling the brake handle allows me to come to a slow stop. A low, continuous thump from the motor echoes through my head as I reverse back to the starting line. As I creep forward, I stage the beast and wait for the lights to change to green. This feels like an eternity. The lights flicker yellow, yellow, yellow, GREEN! I stab the pedal to the floor. I am flung thirteen hundred and twenty feet faster than I can say my name. When I pull the brake and parachute handles simultaneously, I lunge back from the force of the billowing chutes. I climb out of the jungle gym and look up at the scoreboard, which reads 5.26 seconds at 230.57. There is nothing else like rocketing down the track at 230 m.p.h.

EXERCISE 12 Discussion and Critical Thinking

1. Is this paragraph mainly descriptive, mainly narrative, or equally balanced?

2. Annotate in the margin and underline at least one image of sound, sight, touch, and smell.

3. Although you probably have not drag raced competitively, you can get a good sense of what it is like to do so by reading this paragraph. What details and what phrasing convince you that the author is writing from experience?

4. What is the dominant impression?

5. List four words of transition used in the first five sentences.
Rituals as Comfort Food for the Soul

ADAM RENSKY

Student Adam Rensky selected this assignment from a list: “Write a brief reading-based reaction to a reading selection from your textbook. Demonstrate your understanding of the text by analyzing it and relating it to your experience. Include quotations from and references to the text to convey the author's techniques of description and narration, and use MLA style in providing credit for your citations and in listing the work cited [see Chapter 16].”

1 When I was a child, my father and I used to take walks. Our path never varied: South from our house to make a right turn at the second corner, on past my elementary school, then across from the Youth Center where I had Boy Scout meetings, by a middle school I would later attend, and down an oak-lined street before turning back on my home street. We did that more than a hundred times. Recently on a nostalgic day, I drove the route to measure what usually seemed a short distance at the time, but was exactly one and a quarter miles.

Looking back, I now know the walks were as valuable as comfort food, though there was no apparent calculation by my father to make them so. Those were the times when I could say what I wanted to say and ask what I wanted to ask. My father talked about the hardships and fulfillments of growing up in the Hill Country of Texas. I talked about the joys and agonies of a kid growing up right there in the city of Covina, California. Geographical differences, a lot of time, and a lot of cares seemed to blend in stories and questions and answers and peaceful silences, as we walked.

“Closets and Keepsakes” by Willi Coleman carries the same theme, as her memories are brought back by the sight of “a straightening comb” and other relics of the past (101). Her essay is an account of a comforting ritual with her mother. Each week as a child, she sat on the floor, with her head between her mother’s knees, and her mother combed her hair and talked with her. That was Coleman’s special time. It was as satisfying as comfort food, the childhood treat that somehow still evokes soothing memories when life cries out for relief, as it did long ago. She says, “Our sessions together could halt time, still waters, and predict the future” (101). Both mother and child unburdened their feelings, and the occasion occurred each week at the same time, at the same place, and in the same way. Looking back, she knows that hair care was always secondary to talking—to talking freely. She says, “It never crossed my mind to hold back the hurt, fear, or anger” (102). Her mother, who worked weekdays as a housekeeper for those who were often disrespectful, had plenty of her own problems, but she “talked with ease and listened with undivided attention” (101). Those were special, comforting moments between just mother and child. Coleman “moved away from those Saturday hair sessions, as if from a safe harbor” (102).

Much has been said about comfort foods, but the fact is that parent-child rituals—just little repeated activities, such as playing board games, changing oil in the car, gardening, playing catch, or shooting baskets—have provided and, at least in recollection, still can provide special comfort too. For Willi Coleman, comfort was sitting on the floor, getting her hair combed and swapping worries, complaints, and stories. For me, it was that mile and a quarter walk, doing the same kind of thing that Willi Coleman did, for the same reasons. It is later that one puts ever-upgrading labels of meaning on experiences such as those.
Work Cited

CAREER-RELATED WRITING

The content of your writing will, of course, depend on your academic and vocational experiences. If you have a job or have worked for pay, you can write narratives about your experiences. Perhaps you are already in the career field of your choice; if so, you could write about a specific event that has given you insight into that field or a reason for your commitment to it. Or perhaps you have already taken college classes relating to your career choices; then you could write a report—incident, progress, or investigative—about something you have witnessed or read about, using a standard form (such as the one that follows) as you practice a kind of writing you will likely use at the workplace.

Incident Report of the Falling Shoppers

DOUGLAS ROSS

As an optional assignment, student Douglas Ross had the choice of writing a narrative about an event that occurred at work, in particular one that was written up as a report or could have been. One event stood out in Ross’s mind. He had written an incident report about an accident that occurred in his presence when he worked for a regional market chain. The report had been favorably reviewed by a district manager, and Ross was promoted soon after that time to a full-time senior checker. Here, he re-creates what he reported on that day, composing a form similar to the store template for incident reports.

Employee Report
Form 117-Incident

☑ Accident
☐ Reported theft
☐ Disturbance
☐ Dangerous condition
☐ Lost child
☐ Vandalism
☐ Health emergency
☐ Other

Business and Location: [Name and address of business omitted by student request]

Time: July 27, 2009, at 09:33 a.m.

Employee Name: Douglas Ross

Situation

Incident Report: At 09:33 a.m. I was working the cash register at Station 3 when I saw an elderly couple approach my empty customer slot from the nearby newspaper, book, and magazine rack. The woman was walking
Struggle

Conflict

Outcome

Meaning

ahead of the man, who carried a small bag of fruit in one hand and a loaf of fresh bakery bread in the other. A younger woman with a shopping cart full of items had also spotted the open slot and headed that way. The wife started walking faster, turned to her husband, said something I couldn’t hear, and motioned for him to follow her. He increased his pace and followed. Then he staggered and lost his balance and lunged forward, hitting his wife, who had turned away from him. Thrown off balance, she also lunged forward and struck a display of pastries, knocking it down as she fell to her knees. By this time, her husband had fallen, striking his head on the tile floor.

I came to their aid quickly, helping the woman to her feet. The man rolled over and sat there. I said I would call paramedics. The woman asked the man if he were hurt. He said he would be all right. I got on the phone and called Supervisor Kennedy, who was out at the loading dock. He said I should call paramedics anyway, because the man was still sitting on the floor.

While we were waiting for the paramedics, the man took an oblong loop of stiff plastic binding material from his foot and showed it to me. He explained that it had apparently been left by the magazine rack where it had been used to tie a bundle of newspapers. He said he had stepped on one side of it and, when he did, the other side of it popped up like a small hula hoop and caught his other foot as he was about to take another step. Then he fell and hit his wife, who also fell.

The paramedics came and examined the husband and wife, Carl and Ruth Sutton [names changed]. The paramedics asked them about abrasions and pains. They said they needed no further medical care or examination. The paramedics completed a report on the particulars, now attached to this one. Mr. and Mrs. Sutton said they would go to their family doctor.

Supervisor Kennedy took down additional information and gave them his business card. Mrs. Sutton asked me if I had witnessed what happened. I said I saw them fall. She looked at my badge and wrote my name and employee number down in her address book. I gave the loop of plastic binding to Supervisor Kennedy.

**Outcome**

**Recommendation:** When stocking the shelves with any items that are bound, the binding should be carefully disposed of. As a further precaution, it would be a good idea to clip the loops of plastic bindings so that no one could trip over them even if they were left on the floor.

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### Suggested Topics and Prompts for Writing Descriptive Narration

You will find a blank Writing Process Worksheet at the front of this book and on the CourseMate for Basic Writing Site. It can be photocopied or printed out, filled in, and submitted with your assignment if your instructor directs you to do so.
Reading-based writing requires you to read critically, write a reply that shows you understand what you have read, and give credit for ideas you borrow and words you quote. The form can be a summary, a reaction, or a two-part response (with separated summary and reaction).

Documentation, in which you give credit for borrowed ideas and words, can be either formal (MLA style) or informal, as directed by your instructor. All of the forms of reading-based writing as well as documentation are discussed with examples in Chapter 6. Definitions of the three forms follow. Any form can be used for any reading selection in this book.

**Summary**

- The summary is a statement presenting only the main points of what you have read by using different wording without altering the meaning, adding information, or showing bias.
- Summary is the purest form of reading-based writing.

**Reaction**

- In the reaction, the meaning of what you have read will be central to the topic sentence of your paragraph or to the thesis of your essay.
- Although the reaction is not a personal narrative by itself, it may include personal experience to explain elements of the text. For example, if your source is about driving styles, your own experiences as a driver or an observer of drivers could be relevant in your analysis of the text.
- The reaction may incorporate a summary to convey a broad view of what you have read, but your summary should never be the main part of your reaction.

**Two-Part Response**

- The two-part response separates the summary from the reaction.
- This form will give you practice in separating your objective summary in the first part from your more personal evaluation, interpretation, or application in the second part, the reaction.

**READING-BASED WRITING TOPICS**

**“Dark Day in the Dust Bowl”**

1. Write about how the idea of courage, or of attitude, can influence behavior. Refer to the children, the women, and the men. Use quotations and references.

2. Pretend that you were there as a child, and write about what happens from your (first person) point of view; that is, describe how you feel during the story as you react to how the women and men behave. Include the same details about the effects of the dust; if you use the same phrases, though, enclose those phrases in quotation marks. Be sure to do it as you report
from the I perspective, such as “I could see that all the mothers were . . .”
You can refer to what was happening to the children by saying, for example, we “acted,” “watched,” “saw,” “felt,” “started feeling differently,” and so on.
Discuss the behavior of all three parts of the group: the (other) children, the women, and the men.

3. Write about a time when you or your family felt threatened and then drew strength from the courage of a family member or group leader. Explain how that was different from and similar to the narrative written by Steinbeck. Use quotations and references.

“A Doctor’s Dilemma”

4. Write a summary of this essay. Concentrate on the main ideas. Use quotation marks with your quotations.

5. When one confronts a dilemma, one is dealing with a situation that offers two options and both of them are bad in some respects. Write a reaction in which you specify Dillard’s two choices, discuss the merits of each, discuss his choice, and then evaluate his choice from your perspective. Use quotations from and references to the essay and, if you like, from the Good Samaritan Law in Pennsylvania, explaining why it would or would not have protected him against a lawsuit.

6. Write about an experience in which you confronted an ethical dilemma, and explain how it is different from and similar to Dillard’s. One common experience is knowing about something that is wrong but not wanting to be a snitch.

“An American in Mexico”

7. Write a summary of this essay. Concentrate on the main ideas. Use quotation marks with your quotations. Refer directly to the main ideas in Espinoza’s essay.

8. Write a reaction (not the same as just a summary) in which you explain Espinoza’s visit. What is he trying to discover or experience? Why is he so concerned with the “complicated feelings” of his siblings? Does he imply that his journey is similar to the pilgrimage of people at the Basilica in Mexico City? How are the photos different from experience? Why aren’t they the parts to the puzzle he wants to complete?

9. If you have ever had a similar experience—have come from a migrant family but have not experienced the “home country,” with depth—and then traveled there to explore your heritage, then write about an experience and discuss how it was similar to and different from Espinoza’s. This topic can also be applied to those whose families had moved within the United States—perhaps from the country to the city—or to a youngster who goes back to the “hills of . . .” for the summer.
“No Tears for Frankie”

10. Write a reaction paragraph or essay that comments on the author’s behavior and expressed feelings. Use quotations and references. Under the circumstances, would you have expected Greenlee to consider any degree of forgiveness for her deceased tormentor? What if there had been grieving family members in the audience? Although Frankie seemed to be the worst kind of bully, is there anything that might be learned about him—call on your knowledge of bullies—that might make him seem less malicious?

11. Write a paragraph or an essay on what should be said to a person who questions Greenlee’s unwillingness to forgive Frankie as he lay there in his casket. Refer to what she says about what Frankie did and how her life at the time was changed by him, as her “heart was hardened.”

“Yearning for Love”

12. Assume that you are a psychologist or the personal-advice columnist for a large newspaper and Shastri has written her paragraph as a letter to you. Realizing that she has a life ahead of her and her family is asking her to choose between independence and family, what would you suggest that she do? Another possible extension of the issue: What advice would you give Shastri’s parents if they wrote to you and said that most American marriages end in divorce and that they, the parents, could make a better decision for a sound marriage for their daughter, one that is more mature and nonemotional, one that is based on what they knew about both Shastri and the young man they had already selected?

“Rituals as Comfort Food for the Soul”

13. Write a reaction in which you discuss your own repeated comforting experience similar to those experiences discussed by Rensky. Include direct references to and quotations from Rensky’s essay. Use techniques of descriptive narration as you write about your own comfort sessions—a repeated activity that brought you closer to a parent or another adult by providing you with occasions for talking. Consider activities such as cooking, shooting baskets, playing catch, hiking, shopping, playing board games, gardening, washing the car, driving to and from school, and so on.

GENERAL TOPICS

14. Describe and narrate an exciting moment you have experienced or witnessed. It need not be a sporting event, but it can be. For a helpful model on a similar topic, review “The Drag” on page 131.

15. Write a descriptive narration based on a topic sentence such as this: “One experience showed me what ________ [pain, fear, anger, love, sacrifice, dedication, joy, sorrow, shame, pride] was really like.”

16. Write a descriptive narration about a fire, a riot, an automobile accident, a rescue, shoplifting, or some other unusual happening you witnessed.
17. Write a descriptive narration that supports (or opposes) the idea of a familiar saying such as one of the following; this will be a paragraph or an essay about one experience, beginning with a conflict, problem, or need you have.

   a. You never know who a friend is until you need one (desperate situation and a friend to the rescue).
   b. Borrowing (maybe using the credit card too much) is the mother of trouble.
   c. A person who marries, dates, or compromises values for money earns it.
   d. The person who lies down with dogs gets up with fleas (bad company).
   e. Never give advice to a friend or, especially, a relative.
   f. Every person has a price.
   g. You get what you pay for (little cost of an item or service but also little quality).
   h. Haste makes waste (an occasion when you should have taken more time).

Objective Description

Give your topic some kind of narrative framework or purpose beyond simply writing a description. As you develop your purpose, consider the knowledge and attitudes of your readers. You might be describing a lung for a biology instructor, a geode for a geology instructor, a painting for an art instructor, or a comet for an astronomy instructor. Or maybe you could pose as the seller of an object, such as a desk, a table, or a bicycle. Describe one of the following topics:

18. A human organ, such as a heart, liver, lung, or kidney
19. A visible part of your body, such as a toe, a finger, an ear, a nose, or an eye
20. A construction, such as a room, desk, chair, commode, or table
21. A mechanism, such as a bicycle, tricycle, wagon, car, motorcycle, can opener, or stapler

Subjective Description

The narrative framework (something happening) is especially useful in providing order and vitality to descriptive writing. Here are three possibilities for you to consider:

22. Personalize a trip to a supermarket, a stadium, an airport, an unusual house, a mall, the beach, a court, a church, a club, a business, the library, or the police station. Describe a simple conflict in one of those places while emphasizing descriptive details.

23. Pick a high point in any event and describe the most important few seconds. Think how a scene can be captured by a video camera and then give focus by applying the dominant-impression principle, using relevant images of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. The event might be a ball game, graduation ceremony, wedding ceremony, funeral, dance, concert, family gathering, class meeting, rally, riot, robbery, fight, proposal, or meal. Focus on subject material that you can cover effectively in the passage you write.
24. Pick a moment when you were angry, sad, happy, confused, lost, rattled, afraid, courageous, meek, depressed, or elated. Describe how the total context of the situation contributed to your feeling.

**CROSS-CURRICULAR TOPICS**

25. Write a paragraph or an essay of descriptive narration about a visit, an observation, or a field trip to a museum, a concert, an institution, or a workplace.

26. Write about a unit of time in which feverish action occurs. You could select a pivotal moment in history (the assassination of a president, a turning point in a battle, the first encounter between two groups of people), in science (the discovery of a process or product), in music (a composer conducting his or her own musical composition), or in art appreciation (a painter finishing a famous painting). Content from other courses will provide most of the framework; your imagination can provide the details. Be inventive, but base your invention on what you know of individuals and the time period. Consult textbooks. Talk to instructors.

**CAREER-RELATED TOPICS**

27. Adapt the form on page 114 for one of the following topics. For a helpful model on a similar topic, review “Incident Report of the Falling Shoppers” on pages 133–134.

- Write a descriptive narrative account of an encounter between a customer and a salesperson. Explain what went right and what went wrong.
- Write a descriptive narrative of an employee handling a customer’s complaint. Evaluate the procedure.
- Using a workplace form you are familiar with, write an incident report about an event such as an accident, a theft, or a disturbance.

28. Write a descriptive narrative account of a work-related encounter between a manager and a worker and briefly explain the significance of the event.

29. Describe a well-furnished, well-functioning office or other work area. Be specific.

30. Describe a computer-related product; give special attention to the dominant trait that gives the product its reputation.

31. Describe a person groomed and attired for a particular job or interview. Be specific in giving details pertaining to the person and in naming the place or situation. Describe yourself from a detached point of view if you like.
Narration

1. Include these parts so that you will be sure you have a complete narrative:
   - situation
   - conflict
   - struggle
   - outcome
   - meaning

2. Use these techniques or devices as appropriate:
   - images that appeal to the senses (sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch) and other details to advance action
   - dialogue
   - transitional devices (such as next, soon, after, later, then, finally, when, following) to indicate chronological order

3. Give details concerning action.

4. Be consistent with point of view and verb tense.

5. Keep in mind that most narratives written as college assignments will have an expository purpose; that is, they explain a specific idea.

6. Consider working with a short time frame for short writing assignments. The scope would usually be no more than one incident of brief duration for one paragraph. For example, writing about an entire graduation ceremony might be too complicated, but concentrating on the moment when you walked forward to receive the diploma or the moment when the relatives and friends come down on the field could work very well.

Description

In objective description, use direct, practical language appealing mainly to the sense of sight. In subjective description, appeal to the reader’s feelings, especially through the use of figurative language and the use of images of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Use concrete, specific words if appropriate.

Apply these questions to your writing:
   - What is the subject?
   - What is the dominant impression I am trying to convey?
   - What details support the dominant impression?
   - What is the situation?
   - What is the order of the details?
   - What is the point of view? (Is it first or third person? involved or objective?)

Consider giving the description a narrative framework. Include some action. Use the writing process.
Incident Report

1. Identify the kind of problem and the location. This may be part of a form provided by your employer.

2. Indicate when the problem occurred.


4. Write in the first person (I); you are the one who is writing the report.

5. Start with the date, time, and your reason for involvement.

6. Include quotation marks if you use the words of anyone reporting on the incident and give the name of the person whose words you use.

7. Use facts, not opinions.

8. Remain objective. Do not step outside your work expertise and become a psychologist, philosopher, physician, or moralist.

9. Use past tense. You are writing about something that has already happened.

10. Use mostly active-voice verbs. For example, write, “Mills wrote the report,” not “The report was written by Mills.”

11. Identify those involved. Drop the titles, such as Mr., Mrs., Dr., and so on. After the first reference to the person in the report, use only the surname or the first initial and the surname.

12. If appropriate, write a recommendation for what could be done to avoid a repeat of such an incident.

13. Consider using the Writing Process Worksheet and the Brandon Guide for Revising and Editing for completing your assignment and the Revising and Editing Charts inside the front cover after your assignment is returned.
My School Nightmare

ANNA KUANG

(A) My first day in an America school became what I imagined was the worst nightmare of my childhood. (B) At the beginning of my bad dream, my Uncle took me to my classroom and just left. (C) Then my sixth grade teacher talked to me and pointed me to a seat. (D) I pretended I understood what she said. (E) Later, when I saw everyone walk out of the classroom, I followed. (F) I did not realize that the school system in America was different from that in China. (G) In China, the students hardly never change classrooms, the teachers do. (H) Confused, I wondered back to the same classroom again. (I) The teacher looked at my schedule card and led me to another room. (J) Next, I was delivered to another room and once again after that, all the time pretending I knew what was being said. (K) Then noon came. (L) In China, students go home for lunch, so I left to walk to my home, and my nightmare was soon to become worse. (M) As I was leaving the school ground, a security man yelled at me. (N) I didn't know what he was yelling. (O) The principal came out and looked at my schedule card and tried to talk with me. (P) I was frustrated and scared. (Q) I wanted to cry and wake up from the bad dream. (R) My face turned red, and my heart was crying. (S) I hid my tears. (T) Then the principal talked on his cell phone. (U) Almost immediately, a Chinese girl came out of a classroom and talked to me in Chinese. (V) She said we had to stay in school until after the last period and that I should have gone to the office for help when I first arrived. (W) We went to the cafeteria together. (X) At that time, I did not know that she would become my best friend. (Y) I did know, however, she had awakened me from that school nightmare. (Z) During the next three years,
I gradually learned to look back on that scary experience with a bit of amusement, because that same school would provide me with some of the most incredibly awesome memories of my life.

EXERCISE 12 Revise and Edit with the Brandon Guide

Revise with **CLUSS** (pronounce as “clues” for easy memorization). (See pages 26–36 for a concise list and specific explanations of the main features.)

1. **Coherence:** Connect your ideas (pp. 27–29, 462–468). Circle the ten transitional connective words and phrases that indicate time at the beginning of sentences.

2. **Language:** Use words appropriate for your purpose and audience (pp. 29–32, 561). Cross out the phrase *most incredibly awesome* in Sentence G and replace it with a phrase that is more precise and less worn.

3. **Unity:** Stay on your topic (pp. 12–16, 32). Underline the topic sentence and the closing sentence that unify the paragraphs.

4. **Emphasis:** Call attention to your important ideas (pp. 32–33). Draw a box around the word and those with similar meanings (used six times) that emphasize a key idea in the paragraph.

5. **Support:** Back up your controlling ideas with evidence and logic (pp. 17–22, 34–35). In the left margin, annotate this narrative by using these words: situation, conflict, struggle, outcome, meaning.

6. **Sentences:** Write correct, effective sentences with structural variety (pp. 35–36, 453–475). Combine sentences R and S with one of these coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (FANBOYS). Change the punctuation and capitalization as needed. Mark out any parts that are deleted and write in the changes above them.

Edit with **CGPS** (pronounce as “see GPS” for easy memorization).

7. **Capitalization** (pp. 38–39, 551–553): One capitalized word should begin with a lowercase letter. Make a line through the capital letter and insert the lowercase letter above it.

8. **Grammar** (see pp. 39–42, 438–537): One sentence has a double negative. Cross out the negative part and write in the correction above it.
9. **Punctuation** (see pp. 42–43, 537–551): One word group is a comma splice. Change the comma to a correct punctuation mark.

10. **Spelling** (see pp. 43–45, 555–561): One word is misspelled. Cross it out and write in the correct spelling above it.