**Essential Elements of Narrative Essays**

The focus of a narrative essay is the plot, which is told using enough details to build to a climax. Here's how:

* It is usually told chronologically.
* It usually has a purpose, which is usually stated in the opening sentence.
* It may use dialogue.
* It is written with sensory details and vivid descriptions to involve the reader. All these details relate in some way to the main point the writer is making.

All of these elements need to seamlessly combine. A few examples of narrative essays follow. Narrative essays can be quite long, so instead of a full length example of an entire essay, only the beginnings of essays are included:

**Learning Can Be Scary**

*This excerpt about learning new things and new situations is an example of a personal narrative essay that describes learning to swim.*

“Learning something new can be a scary experience. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was learn how to swim. I was always afraid of the water, but I decided that swimming was an important skill that I should learn. I also thought it would be good exercise and help me to become physically stronger. What I didn't realize was that learning to swim would also make me a more confident person.

New situations always make me a bit nervous, and my first swimming lesson was no exception. After I changed into my bathing suit in the locker room, I stood timidly by the side of the pool waiting for the teacher and other students to show up. After a couple of minutes the teacher came over. She smiled and introduced herself, and two more students joined us. Although they were both older than me, they didn't seem to be embarrassed about not knowing how to swim. I began to feel more at ease.”

**The Manager. The Leader.**

*The following excerpt is a narrative essay from a story about a manager who was a great leader.  Notice the intriguing first sentence that captures your attention right away.*

“Jerry was the kind of guy you love to hate. He was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!" He was a unique manager because he had several waiters who had followed him around from restaurant to restaurant. The reason the waiters followed Jerry was because of his attitude. He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Jerry was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.”

**The Climb**

*This excerpt from the climb also captures your attention right away by creating a sense of mystery. The reader announces that he or she has "this fear" and you want to read on to see what that fear is.*

“I have this fear. It causes my legs to shake. I break out in a cold sweat. I start jabbering to anyone who is nearby. As thoughts of certain death run through my mind, the world appears a precious, treasured place. I imagine my own funeral, then shrink back at the implications of where my thoughts are taking me. My stomach feels strange. My palms are clammy. I am terrified of heights. Of course, it’s not really a fear of being in a high place. Rather, it is the view of a long way to fall, of rocks far below me and no firm wall between me and the edge. My sense of security is screamingly absent. There are no guardrails, flimsy though I picture them, or other safety devices. I can rely only on my own surefootedness—or lack thereof.”

**Disney Land**

*The following narrative essay involves a parent musing about taking her kids to Disney Land.*

“It was a hot sunny day, when I finally took my kids to the Disney Land. My son Matthew and my daughter Audra endlessly asked me to show them the dream land of many children with Mickey Mouse and Snow-white walking by and arousing a huge portion of emotions. Somehow these fairy tale creatures can make children happy without such “small” presents as $100 Lego or a Barbie’s house in 6 rooms and garden furniture. Therefore, I thought that Disney Land was a good invention for loving parents.”

**The Sacred Grove of Oshogbo by Jeffrey Tayler**

*The following essay contains descriptive language that helps to paint a vivid picture for the reader of an encounter with a man.*

“As I passed through the gates I heard a squeaky voice. A diminutive middle-aged man came out from behind the trees — the caretaker. He worked a toothbrush-sized stick around in his mouth, digging into the crevices between algae'd stubs of teeth. He was barefoot; he wore a blue batik shirt known as a buba, baggy purple trousers, and an embroidered skullcap. I asked him if he would show me around the shrine. Motioning me to follow, he spat out the results of his stick work and set off down the trail.”

**Playground Memory**

*The first excerpt from, “*[*Playground Memory*](http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=26152)*”, has very good sensory details.*

“Looking back on a childhood filled with events and memories, I find it rather difficult to pick on that leaves me with the fabled “warm and fuzzy feelings.” As the daughter of an Air Force Major, I had the pleasure of traveling across America in many moving trips. I have visited the monstrous trees of the Sequoia National Forest, stood on the edge of the Grand Canyon and have jumped on the beds at Caesar’s Palace in Lake Tahoe. However, I have discovered that when reflecting on my childhood, it is not the trips that come to mind, instead there are details from everyday doings; a deck of cards, a silver bank or an ice cream flavor. One memory that comes to mind belongs to a day of no particular importance. It was late in the fall in Merced, California on the playground of my old elementary school; an overcast day with the wind blowing strong. I stood on the blacktop, pulling my hoodie over my ears. The wind was causing miniature tornados; we called them “dirt devils”, to swarm around me.”

**Christmas Cookies**

*The second of the two narrative essay examples is an excerpt from “*[*Christmas Cookies*](http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=26156)*.”*

“Although I have grown up to be entirely inept at the art of cooking, as to make even the most wretched chef ridicule my sad baking attempts, my childhood would have indicated otherwise; I was always on the countertop next to my mother’s cooking bowl, adding and mixing ingredients that would doubtlessly create a delicious food. When I was younger, cooking came intrinsically with the holiday season, which made that time of year the prime occasion for me to unite with ounces and ounces of satin dark chocolate, various other messy and gooey ingredients, numerous cooking utensils, and the assistance of my mother to cook what would soon be an edible masterpiece. The most memorable of the holiday works of art were our Chocolate Crinkle Cookies, which my mother and I first made when I was about six and are now made annually.”

**Tips on Writing a Narrative Essay**

When writing a narrative essay, remember that you are sharing sensory and emotional details with the reader.

* Your words need to be vivid and colourful to help the reader feel the same feelings that you felt.
* Elements of the story need to support the point you are making and you need to remember to make reference to that point in the first sentence.
* You should make use of conflict and sequence like in any story.
* You may use flashbacks and flash forwards to help the story build to a climax.
* It is usually written in the first person, but third person may also be used.

Remember, a well-written narrative essay tells a story and makes a point.