



The Writing Success Center

Writing Different Kinds of Essays

Taken from "Real Essays" by Susan Anker

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Understand What Narration Is—

Definition: **Narration** is writing that tells a story of an event or experience.

You already use narration when you tell a friend about an odd experience you had, you tell your boss why you were late, or you explain what a movie was about.

Four Basics of Good Narration

- It reveals something of importance to you (your main point).
- It includes all of the major points in your story.
- It uses details to bring the story to life for your audience.
- It presents the events in a clear order, usually according to when they happened.

Major Events and Details in Narration

The support for the main point of your narration is the presentation and explanation of the major events in the story. These major events are your support points and will become the topic sentences for the body paragraphs in your essay.

If you give only the major events, your readers will not be able to experience those events as you did. You must also supply supporting details that bring the experience to life for the readers.

Because narration tells a story, it uses chronological (time) order. Start at the beginning of the story, and describe the events in the sequence in which they occurred.

Time transitions are important in narration because they make the order of events clear to readers. Writers of narrations use these common transitions not only within a paragraph to move from one detail to the next but also between paragraphs to move from one major event to the next.

Common Time Transitions for Narration

after	eventually	meanwhile	soon	during
as	finally	next	then	later
at least	first	now	when	since
before	last	second	while	

Understand What Illustration Is—

Definition: **Illustration** is writing that uses examples to show, explain, or prove a point. Giving examples is the basis of all good writing and speaking. You make a statement, and then you give an example that shows what you mean.

You already use illustration when you give examples to explain what you mean; for example, when you tell a friend why you like or dislike your job, you answer the question “Like What?” or you select incidents from your experience to show that you are qualified for a different job or new responsibilities.

Four Basics of Good Illustration

- It makes a point.
- It gives specific and detailed examples to show, explain, or prove the point.
- It uses examples that the readers will understand.
- It uses enough examples to get the writer’s point across.

Illustrations make explanations clear and general statements powerful. They draw readers into essays by providing specifics that make the point.

For effective illustration, focus on finding examples that show, explain, or prove your thesis. Listing/brainstorming and clustering are particularly useful prewriting techniques for exploring an illustration topic.

An illustration often uses order of importance to organize several examples, saving the most vivid, convincing one for last. Keep your readers in mind as you arrange your examples.

Illustrations often use transitions such as the following to lead from one major example to the next or from one supporting detail to the next.

Common Illustration Transitions

also	finally	for instance	in addition
another	for example	for one thing	one example

Understand What Description Is—

Definition: **Description** is writing that creates a clear and vivid impression of the topic. Description translates your experience of a person, place, or thing into words, often by appealing to the senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.

You use description every day when you describe what someone looks like; when you describe an item you have lost; or when you describe a place you have visited.

Four Basics of Good Description

- It creates a main impression—an overall effect, feeling, or image—about the topic.
- It uses specific sensory images to support the main impression.
- It uses concrete details that appeal to the senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.
- It brings a person, place or physical object to life for the reader.

In a description, you create an impression for your audience through the sensory images and details you present. These details help your audience share your experience and understand your impression of the topic.

Specific Details for Description

Good description uses specific, concrete details to represent the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches that contribute to vivid sensory images and a clear overall impression. You can use prewriting techniques to generate or recall effective details that will help readers to understand your experience.

Sight

Colors
 Shapes
 Sizes
 Patterns
 Brightness

Does it look like anything else?

Sound

Loud/soft
 Piercing/soothing
 Continuous/off-on
 Pleasant/unpleasant (how?)
 Does it sound like anything else?

Smell

Sweet/sour
 Sharp/mild
 Good (like what?)
 Bad (rotten?)
 New (like what?)

Does it smell like anything else?

Taste

Good (What does good taste like?)
 Bad (What does bad taste like?)
 Bitter/sugary
 Metallic
 Burning/spicy
 Does it taste like anything else?

Touch

Hard/soft
 Liquid/solid
 Rough/smooth
 Dry/oily
 Textures
 Does it feel like anything else?

Description may use any of the orders of organization: time, space, or importance, depending on the purpose of the description. If you are describing what someone or something looks like, you might use spatial order. If you are describing a main impression that is more visual, you might use order of importance.

Common Transitions in DescriptionTransition to Show Order of Importance

the most
 more
 even more
 the strongest
 the most intense

Transition to Show SpaceOrder

to the left/right
 in front of/behind
 beyond
 above/underneath

Understand What Process Analysis Is—

Definition: **Process Analysis** either explains how to do something (so your readers can do it) or explains how something works (so your readers can understand it). Both types of process analysis present steps involved in the process.

You already use process analysis when you learn or teach someone how to do something (drive, operate a DVD player, or assemble a bookcase), when you give directions to your home, or when you explain a process to a child, like leaves turning colors.

Four Basics of Good Process Analysis

- It helps readers either perform the steps themselves or understand how something works.
- It presents the essential steps in the process.
- It explains the steps in detail.
- It arranges the steps in a logical order (usually in chronological order).

Process analysis is an important way to help readers either follow or understand a series of steps. It helps empower others, and it gets things done. A clear process analysis presents all the essential steps in a process.

Because process analysis explains how to do something or how something works, it usually uses chronological order. Start with the first step, and then explain each step in order, as it should occur. Add transitional words to your essay to help your readers follow your process analysis as you move from step to step.

Common Transitions in Process Analysis

after	eventually	meanwhile	soon	during
as	finally	next	then	later
at last	first	now	when	since
before	last	second	while	

Understand What Classification Is—

Definition: **Classification** is writing that organizes people or items into categories.

The organizing principle of classification is how you sort the group of people or items, not the categories themselves. For example, you might sort clean laundry using one of the following organizing principles: by ownership (yours, your roommate's, and so on), by where it goes (the bedroom, the bathroom).

You already use classification when you walk into a video store where movies are classified in categories such as comedy, drama, and horror, when you use the college bookstore, where books are classified by discipline (English, biology, economics) and by course number, and when you shop at the drugstore where products are classified by use, such as hair, skin, or dental care.

Four Basics of Good Classification

- It makes sense of a group of people or items by organizing them into categories.
- It has useful categories.
- It uses a single organizing principle.
- It gives examples of the people or items that fit into each category.

A classification essay applies an organizing principle—a method of sorting—to a group. Once you decide on a group to classify and select an organizing principle, your categories provide support points for your essay. Examples of the things or people in each category provide the supporting details that help explain your categories to readers. The following plan is often used to organize a classification essay. Arrange your categories and examples logically, according to your purpose and your readers' expectations. As you write your essay, the following transitions may be helpful:

another

first, second, third, and so on

for instance

another kind

for example

Understand What Definition Is—

Definition: **Definition** is writing that explains what a term means. Having a clear understanding of what a term means can help you avoid confusion and mistakes.

You already use definition when you tell a friend, “That new movie is disgusting,” and she asks, “What do you mean by disgusting?” You then define the word. Similarly, when your child hears the word tornado and asks what it is, you explain what the word means. You also use definition when you train someone new at work and define the company’s names for the procedures everyone follows.

Four Basics of Good Definition

- It tells readers what term is being defined.
- It presents a clear and precise basic definition.
- It includes examples to show what the writer means.
- It uses words and examples that readers will understand.

Definition helps you convey what you mean so that you are understood. It also helps you understand what other people mean. Before you define a term for a reader, you need to understand the meaning yourself. Start by reading the dictionary definition; then try to explain the meaning in your own words. Your definition essay needs to include a good basic definition of the term as you are using it for your reader.

You can depend on a dictionary to discover the definition of words like desk, chair, and paper—which have definite, concrete meanings. The meanings of other words—like love, success, or freedom—depend on a person’s point of view. These words need to be carefully explained, or they could be misunderstood.

When you write a definition essay, your thesis may present your basic definition. It may also tell what larger class or category the word belongs to and what details distinguish it from other words in that class.

Your major support points in a definition are your examples. You develop your examples by adding details and explanations that will show your readers what you mean by a term. The examples in a definition are often organized by order of importance, or the impact you think the examples will have on your readers. Save the most important example for last. The plan for a definition essay might look like this:

Introduction (including thesis)

First example of your meaning

 Specific details that show how that example demonstrates your definition

Second example of your meaning

 Specific details that show how that example demonstrates your definition

Third example of your meaning

Specific details that show how that example demonstrates your definition.

As you write, add transitions to connect one example to the next. Some common transitions for definition are:

another	for example	first, second, third, and so on
another kind	for instance	

Understand What Comparison and Contrast Are—

Definition: **Comparison** is writing that shows the similarities among subjects—people, ideas, situations, or items; **Contrast** shows the differences. In conversation, we often use the word compare to mean either compare or contrast, but as you work through this chapter, the terms will be separated.

Four basics of Good Comparison and Contrast

- It uses subjects that have enough in common to be usefully compared and contrasted.
- It serves a purpose—either to help readers make a decision or understand the subjects.
- It presents several important, parallel points of comparison and contrast.
- It arranges points in a logical organization.

You already use comparison and contrast to help make decisions, for example comparing and contrasting features of several DVD players, two job offers, or two courses you might want to take.

Once you have selected comparable subjects, you need to find points of comparison—parallel or matched points that will show how subjects are similar or different. Supporting details then explain these support points for each subject. For example, the student who wrote the thesis *The ages of twenty and forty are both enjoyable, but they represent very different stages in life*, might go on to list several points of contrast between twenty and forty, for example appearance, place in life, and perspective. For each point of comparison, you would then come up with details to explain the differences:

Age Twenty

Appearance

smooth skin
trendy haircut
rounded features

Place in Life

just starting out
single, no children
living at home

Perspective

self-centered
choices to make
uncertainty

Age Forty

some wrinkles
classic style
well-defined features

established
married with children
own home

more thoughtful
many choices made
wisdom

A **point-by-point** organization first presents one point of comparison or contrast between the two subjects with examples of each and then moves to the next point of comparison or contrast. A **whole-to-whole** organization first presents all the points of comparison or contrast for one subject and then all the points for the second subject.

After you have developed points of comparison and supporting details, you need to decide how to present them in your essay. Choose either point-by-point or whole-to-whole, whichever will serve your purpose better. Choose one and stick with it throughout the essay; otherwise you will confuse your readers.

The two organizations are:

Point-by-point

Thesis statement
Topic sentence, point 1
Subject 1

Whole-to-whole

Thesis statement
Topic sentence, subject 1
Point 1

Subject 2	Point 2
Topic sentence, point 2	Point 3
Subject 1	Topic sentence, subject 2
Subject 2	Point 1
Topic sentence, point 3	Point 2
Subject 1	Point 3
Subject 2	Concluding statement
Concluding statement	

Although the whole-to-whole organization looks as if it might be shorter, the organization has little effect on the length. Select the organization that will be clearest and easiest for readers to follow. Arrange the points and details in a sequence that suits what you have to say—chronological order, space order, order of importance, or any logical order.

As you write, add transitions to lead from point to point and subject to subject.

Common Transitions in Comparison/Contrast

Common Comparison Transitions

one similarity

another similarity

similarly

like

both

Common Contrast Transitions

one difference

another difference

in contrast

now/then

unlike

while

Understand What Cause and Effect Are—

Definition: A **cause** is what makes an event happen. An **effect** is what happens as a result of an event.

Four Basics of Good Cause and Effect

- It clearly distinguishes between a cause and an effect.
- It discusses real causes, not just something that happened before another event.
- It discusses real effects, not just something that happened after another event.
- It gives clear and detailed examples of causes, effects, or both.

You already use cause and effect to understand things such as try to figure out what caused your partner to get angry, explain to a child why she shouldn't eat too fast, or think about what will happen if you change jobs.

Analyzing causes and effects goes beyond asking "What happened?" to also ask "Why?" and "How?"

Situation: On a hot summer day, you leave a video you need to return on the front seat of your car while you are at work. When you come out of work, you find the video has melted.

Cause: The cause of the video melting was leaving it all day in a hot car.

Effect: The effect of leaving the video in a hot car all day was that it melted.

When writing about causes, be careful that you don't say something caused an event or situation just because it happened beforehand. When writing about effects, do not confuse something that happens after something else with the effect.

In a cause/effect essay, the causes and effects that you explain are the supporting points. They demonstrate the main point stated in your thesis. For example, the student who wrote the thesis *Irresponsible behavior caused my car accident* goes on to write about the following causes and explanation:

Cause: Driving too fast

It was rainy and slippery

Going too fast to control car

Couldn't stop

Cause: Talking on my cell phone

Not paying close attention

Hit a curve while laughing

Didn't react fast enough

Cause: Drinking

Not focused

Slowed reaction time

Each cause (or effect) is developed by supporting details that explain exactly how the situation happened.

Cause/effect essays are usually organized by order of importance, saving the most important or intense cause or effect for last in order to create a strong impression on the readers. The plan for a cause/effect essay generally looks like this.:

Introduction (including thesis)

First cause or effect

Explanation of cause or effect

Second cause or effect

Explanation of cause or effect

Most important cause or effect

Explanation of cause or effect

Conclusion

As you write your essay, add transitions to show how each cause or effect relates to your main point. Here are some common transitions that are used in cause/effect writing:

one cause, reason, effect, result

another

also

first, second, third, and so on

as a result

because

Understand What Argument Is—

Definition: **Argument** is writing that takes a position on an issue and offers reasons and supporting evidence to persuade someone else to accept, or at least consider, the

position. Argument is also used to convince someone to take an action (or not to take an action).

Four Basics of Good Argument

- It takes a strong and definite position on an issue or advises a particular action.
- It gives good reasons and supporting evidence to defend the position or recommended action.
- It considers opposing views.
- It has enthusiasm and energy from start to finish.

Whenever you have tried to convince someone to do or avoid doing something, you have used an argument, for example persuading a parent that something you want to buy is worth it, persuading a friend to help you move, or persuading your professor to let you revise a paper another time.

Knowing how to argue is critical. We use argument every day as a way to persuade someone to lend us something or to do something for us. We present an argument to persuade someone to give us a job, not to give us a parking ticket, to buy something we are selling, or to give us more time. And we argue when something important is at stake, like keeping a job or protecting our rights. To argue effectively, we need to do more than just say what we want or believe; we need to give solid reasons and evidence.

Argument is a method you use to persuade people to see things your way, or at least to understand your position. Argument helps you to take action in problem situations, rather than standing by, silent and frustrated. Although knowing how to argue won't eliminate all such situations, it will help you to defend your position.

The topic of an argument is the issue you are writing about. In order for something to be an issue, it has to be something that people have different opinions about. A good argument starts with a strong and definite position on an issue. As a writer, you need to be very clear about what your position is so that you can take a stand and defend that position with energy.

When you are free to choose an issue to write about, choose something you care about or are interested in. But even when you are assigned an issue, you still need to defend it powerfully by finding some aspect of it that you care about.

When supporting your position, **reasons** are the points that support your position—points that must be backed up with evidence. **Evidence** consists of the facts (accurate information that can be verified), statistics (numerical facts based on

research), examples (stories and experiences that directly support your position), and expert opinions (the testimony of someone who is considered knowledgeable) that support your reasons. Note: just because a person's opinion appears on a web site does not mean that he or she has any expertise. Find out about the person's credentials before using his or her words as expert opinion.

When you write your thesis, you state your position on the issue. The rest of your essay should be devoted to supporting that position. Part of supporting your own position, however, is acknowledging the opposing position and presenting some evidence. If, for example, you are arguing in favor of lowering the drinking age in your state to eighteen, you should not ignore the position that it should be kept at age twenty-one. If you don't say something about the other position, you are leaving your argument unprotected. To defend your own position, you need to acknowledge the opposing view and address it by showing some weakness in it or another way of looking at it.

Common transitions in argument:

Transitions from one point to another:

- also
- another fact to consider
- a reason
- another thing
- consider that
- for example
- in addition
- in the first place

Transitions to add emphasis:

- above all
- best of all
- especially
- in fact
- in particular
- more important
- most important
- remember
- the last point to consider
- worst of all