The Narrative Essay

Introduction:

“Narrative” is another word for story: A narrative essayist is simply telling a story or series of related stories. However, unlike a short story or novel whose chief purpose is to entertain, a narrative essay is designed first to make a point and second or coincidentally to entertain. The narrative essayist chooses the narrative technique because he believes it is a good idea to entertain or persuade his or her readers by telling stories that delight as they instruct or inform.

Organization:

Narration is relatively easy to write simply because we have all heard or told many stories in our lifetime. We have this style and procedure ingrained in our speaking and listening habits.

Let us say you are asked to write a narrative essay on the topic of “shoplifting”. Your first task is to relate the topic of shoplifting to something you would like to say about it, as, for example:

Let’s prosecute all shoplifters.

Shoplifting boosts prices.

All convicted shoplifters should go to jail.

Shoplifting is a sign of immaturity.

Let’s work with the last statement “Shoplifting is a sign of immaturity” as the idea you would like to develop. So, in your opening paragraph, you would announce your topic and suggest the story to come.

Example: Once as a child, when it looked like “easy pickins” I was faced with a shoplifting dilemma: “Should I or shouldn’t I put the candy bar in my pocket without paying.

In the rest of the paper, the reader assumes the writer would tell how he became involved in the shoplifting situation, and the essayist would also have to relate one major point: Shoplifting is a sign of immaturity”.

As another example, consider the following skeletal outline applied to the topic of the woman’s movement.
Topic: Women’s Lib

Title: Equality is Everyone’s Fight

Introduction: One day about a month ago, my mother was really upset. She said that the whole house looked like a pig sty and that every bedroom was heaped with clothes, books, and so much junk that it would take an atom bomb to clear away the mess. “I can’t do it all”, she said. “I’m not a slave. I can’t do the cooking, washing, sewing, ironing, cleaning, shopping, bookkeeping, and whatever else I do if I don’t get any help”. She was obviously quite upset: she was mad and tearful at the same time. It was this event that loosened up the “macho” in my father and brothers, and we decided that we would all have to help with the housework so that my mother could have some time for her own personal use. We discussed this problem for hours and eventually it all came down to the question of women’s rights.

Topic sentence #1: My mother has the very complex task of managing a household that had more departments than the Ford Motor Company.

Topic sentence #2: However, to help minimize some of my mother’s burden, my father and all of the boys were willing to share in some of the domestic responsibilities.

Topic sentence #3: Our neighbor, Mr. Nonbudge, does not like what my mother and father are doing with regard to women’s rights.

Fact or Fiction?:

The narrative essay can be fictional or factual. Undoubtedly, and essay is most effective when it is based on real personal experiences rather than fictional ones.

Paragraphs:

Begin a new paragraph every time there is a change in events.

Dialogue:

Dialogue is a useful technique in a narrative essay. However, be sure to change paragraphs each time you change speakers.

Example: “John, help your mother with the dishes,” dad said.

“Oh come on dad, that’s a woman’s work. Besides, Marjorie isn’t doing a thing. She’s just sitting around reading a dumb book.”

Mother looked up and said, “She has a test tomorrow, and it is your turn, young man.”

Connecting the narration to a theme:
Be sure that the story you tell has some purpose. An aimless recounting of a personal event unrelated to a major point or theme would be a useless essay.

Exercise:

Write a narrative essay on one of the following topics:

1. Camping with my family
2. Travel for an education
3. What is poverty?
4. Superstitions
5. Weddings