WR 121
Havenick

NARRATIVE/DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY

“Time passes and the past becomes the present... These presences of the past are there in the center of your life today.” Carlos Fuentes

“What will you do with important things in your life that no one notices? It’s a problem for everyone.” William Stafford

“Seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization. Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won’t see it.” Annie Dillard

ASSIGNMENT (DUE January 22)

In an essay of about 750 words (3 pages), tell the story of an event in your life that changed you. As Kennedy explains in our text, “Try to capture the details of the incident: where, why, and how it happened; how the participants looked and behaved; what the participants said and how they spoke. Shape your writing into an essay full of concrete, specific details so that your readers understand the incident and its effects. Take advantage of your distance from the incident to evaluate how it changed you” (Bedford Reader 34).

Your purpose is to recreate the story in such a way that you are able to show why it is important to you now. Your writing should recreate the event by putting readers in the very flow of the happening so that they may see and hear and feel exactly what it was like. Finally, a reader should have a clear understanding of the event’s significance to you now.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

♦ Embedding the “main point” of your writing in an introductory narrative is an effective writing strategy to introduce the main point of a longer essay.
♦ The habit of repeatedly “observing” what you are describing – an important technique in descriptive writing – will help you to see important details. Further, it will help you to get beyond preconceptions. Observation/description becomes an act of learning on your part first – try to “discover” what you are seeing.
♦ There is a meaningful difference between “showing” and “telling.”
♦ Observation/Description – using specific, concrete, perceptible details – is the basis for all effective writing.

Consider the following techniques in your narrative/descriptive writing:

✓ Use specific details: The key to effective descriptive writing is to show your readers through specific details. Include essential details that effectively recreate the subject, making it perceptible, clear, and consistent for the reader. By perceptible, I mean anchored in one or more sense perceptions. Although abstractions, generalizations, and summary statements may occur in descriptions, they should be supported by something the reader can see, taste, smell, hear, or touch.
✓ Use **concrete diction.** The details of successful description must be conveyed in language that is concrete and particular. Find the right word, not only the word with the exact connotations or associations, but the most concrete word.

✓ Use **comparisons and images.** Comparisons help to extend the range of our sensory experience by connecting something being described with something within the reader’s experience.

✓ Consider all **narrative elements:** context, point-of-view, setting, character, conflict, selection of details, time/verb tense, dialogue, and organization (chronological/flashback).

✓ **Make connections** between past events, people, or places and the present.

✓ **Discover and focus on a main idea** – your essay should show why this memory is an important one.

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**CALENDAR**

**Week One**  
**Mon Jan 6:** Introductions

**Wed Jan 8:**  
**READ:** Intro, pages 1-6 & “Reading Critically” pages 9-31  
**In Class:** Journal Write

**Fri Jan 10:**  
**READ:** “Writing Effectively” pages 33-48  
**Before Class:** Journal Write: Your Writing Process  
**In Class:** Writing Exercise #1 (Takena 213)

**Week Two**  
**Mon Jan 13:**  
**READ:** “Narration” pages 72-85 and “Description” pages 127-135  
“The Chase” by Annie Dillard, pages 97-102

**Wed Jan 15:**  
**READ:** “Once More to the Lake” by E.B. White, pages 670-678  
**Due:** Vocabulary Sheet

**Fri Jan 17:**  
**REVIEW:** Pocket Style Manual  
**Peer Review Workshop:** Bring best working draft of essay to class.  
**Due:** Reading/Response Journal

**Mon Jan 20:**  
*Martin Luther King Jr. Day*

**Wed Jan 22:**  
**DUE:** *Narrative/Descriptive Essay #1* (Please use a folder to include all prewriting notes, drafts, workshop notes, revisions, final draft, and postscript.)

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“Experience is not what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you.”