# Down and Dirty Essay Tips: Narrative

There are many ways to approach a narrative essay; however, if you follow these guidelines, you should be able to successfully complete the assignment.

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<th>Narrative Essay Tips</th>
<th>Helpful Transitional Expressions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Select an event that actually happened in real life. The event shouldn’t be too personal or inappropriate for school. <em>The trick to a good narrative essay is to zoom way down to a narrow focus of less than 1 hour of real-life time; then, fill up the essay with sensory and action details.</em></td>
<td>Transitional expressions can help tie ideas together and show relationships. They also reveal organization patterns to help your reader follow along.</td>
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### Step 1: Narrow the Focus Way Down

The story you tell in your essay should cover no more than one hour of real life time. That means you won’t be able to tell a story about being pregnant because that takes nine months, but you can tell a story about rushing to the hospital and almost giving birth in a taxi cab—a twenty-minute drive.

Try out a few of these time transitions in your paper. Be sure that any you use makes logical sense.

**Examples:**
- A car accident OR A trip to the ER
- Scoring the winning points in a championship game
- Catching your first wave on a surfboard

### Step 2: Draft the Thesis Statement

Draft a thesis statement that provides, even subtly, the general time, location, and meaning of the event. For now just get something on paper; you can improve the statement later. This thesis statement won’t be like the list sentence you may be used to.

**Examples:**
- Even though the trip started out great, we had no idea that we would never make it to our destination.
- After several near drownings and a little bloodshed, I finally got my surfboard to follow my commands.

### Step 3: Organize the Body Paragraphs

Organizing the body paragraphs of a narrative essay is pretty straightforward. Follow the timeline of events and start a new paragraph when:
- The story goes in a new direction
- There’s a scene change
- A dialogue occurs back-and -forth between speakers: make a new paragraph each time someone different speaks

**Dialogue Example:**

With shaking hands, Carlos handed me the destroyed book. He said, “I really don’t mind getting you another one.”

I said, “That’s not the point. It belonged to my mother.”

He looked down at his shoes and said, “I am truly sorry. What can I do? I didn’t even know it was in my backpack.”

I swallowed hard and wiped away a tear, “Nothing.”

### Step 4: Use vivid language

- Include the senses:
  - what you saw, smelled, tasted, touched, and heard.
- Include actions:
  - what you and others said and did.
- Avoid too much feelings and thoughts:
  - rather than say, “I was scared,” describe actions instead. “My stomach dropped and I chewed through my fingernails.”

[http://www.spcollege.edu/tsc/learningSupport.html](http://www.spcollege.edu/tsc/learningSupport.html)
**Down and Dirty Essay Tips: Descriptive**

There are many ways to approach a descriptive essay; however, if you follow these guidelines, you should be able to successfully complete the assignment.

### Descriptive Essay Tips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Choose a Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>Select a person, object, or location you actually observe for about 15 minutes. Take notes during your observation. What you describe in your essay should be one particular person, object, or small scene (like a photograph). For example, focus on just a single piece of art rather than describing the entire museum.</td>
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| Examples: |
| An art piece at the Leepa-Rattner museum |
| A spot in the woods |
| Gasparilla parade in Ybor |
| Unless you’re instructed to do so, avoid interpreting; instead, just write about what you actually observe. |

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<tr>
<th>Helpful Space Expressions</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>here</td>
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<td>above</td>
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<td>beside</td>
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<tr>
<td>below</td>
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<tr>
<td>beyond</td>
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<tr>
<td>further</td>
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<tr>
<td>there</td>
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<tr>
<td>inside</td>
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<td>outside</td>
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<tr>
<td>nearby</td>
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<td>next to</td>
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<td>on the far side</td>
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<td>adjacent to</td>
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<td>opposite to</td>
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<td>to the east</td>
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<td>to the west</td>
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<td>to the north</td>
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<tr>
<td>to the south</td>
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<tr>
<td>behind</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the background</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the middle ground</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the foreground</td>
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<tr>
<td>to the right</td>
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<tr>
<td>to the left</td>
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<tr>
<td>on top</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the middle</td>
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<td>in the bottom</td>
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<th>Step 2: Draft the Thesis Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Draft a thesis statement that provides the name of the person, object, or location being described. There should be some point or purpose implied in the thesis as well.</td>
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| Examples: |
| No matter time of day, is always seems like Michael just woke up. |
| Abraham Rattner’s oil painting, Gomorrah, is a chaotic and gloomy reminder of humanity’s darker aspects. |

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<th>Step 3: Organize the Essay</th>
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<td>A key component to an effective descriptive essay is organization. The order you choose will depend on how you wish to present the information, but the most important is that you intentionally choose an order. The images below are some of examples of how to organize your essay. You’ll dedicate one paragraph to each section. For example, you could have a paragraph about the left side of the painting, a paragraph about the center of the painting, and a paragraph about the right side of the painting.</td>
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**Example:** For the thesis statement, “No matter time of day, is always seems like Michael just woke up” you could use top, middle, bottom organization and describe Michael’s tousled hair and scruffy face in the first body paragraph, his wrinkled clothes in the second body paragraph, and his holey socks and beat up shoes in the last body paragraph.

Or, you could use the senses and describe how he looks, sounds, and smells.

**Example:** For the thesis statement: “Abraham Rattner’s oil painting, Gomorrah, is a chaotic and gloomy reminder of humanity’s darker aspects” you could describe the foreground in the first paragraph, then the middle ground in the next, and the background in the final body paragraph.

You could alternatively approach the organization of the essay by art terms, for example colors, shapes, and techniques.