

Writing a Narrative Essay

In a narrative assignment the purpose is to state what has happened in order of occurrence and examine the strengths and limitations of the scenario you are presenting. Portraying a timeframe of events is key. Although it is important to describe the condition and events, it is equally important to present your case for the most appropriate treatment/approach according to the evidence.

Tips for narrative writing:

- Do not write about the first patient that comes to mind. Although they may be interesting are they a good subject for a narrative?
- Choose your story/patient thoughtfully; do you have the picture of their journey from start to finish?
- Identify your starting point (e.g. the point of admission to hospital)
- Establish whether the purpose of the narrative is to inform, persuade or discuss
- Use third person throughout the narrative (for example: 'Mr X', 'the nurse', 'the MDT')
- Only use 'I' or 'we' if you have been asked to write reflectively in the assessment brief
- Only select the specific everyday health needs of your patient that are significant.

Structuring a Narrative Essay

Introduction

In general, the following three parts of information should be included in an introduction:

1. Most general or broad background information. It needs to be brief and clear enough for your reader to understand your area
2. Outline/structure of your essay. It should clearly demonstrate how you are going to organise the rest of your essay. This is often a list, for example, 'This essay will discuss how patients' health needs can be assessed from three aspects: A, B and C '. List any models you are going to use here.
3. Introduce your scenario –this must be short but contain specific detail about what you will be discussing in your essay.

An introduction should be around 10% of the total length of the assignment. You are allowed to include references within your introduction – these are likely to be most applicable to part 1.

Example of a good introduction

The author starts with background to the topic:	One of the fundamental aspects of nursing is that we must work in partnership with members of the multidisciplinary team (MDT) to deliver effective patient care (Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC), 2015).
The author then details the structure of the essay:	This essay will narrate the author's experience of observing patient care and to comply with the NMC Code of Conduct of confidentiality, the patient to be discussed in this essay will be referred to as Mrs X. After identifying a health need, the role of the nurse

	<p>will be explored and a discussion will be had to clarify how effective communication and teamwork is essential in care delivery. A reflection will conclude the essay demonstrating how future practice has been influenced.</p>
<p>The author concludes with a patient scenario:</p>	<p>This narrative refers to a 75-year-old lady who was admitted with increased shortness of breath. She had a medical history of type 2 diabetes and emphysema. During her stay, she explained how her poor housing conditions impacted on her health, particularly her breathlessness. Her named nurse was able to refer her to appropriate services to enable Mrs X to be moved to temporary accommodation while her flat was being treated for mould infestation.</p>

Main Body

This is the largest part of your assignment where you present the narrative and make it clear to the reader not only what happened but also why.

- Give details of how the nurse and the patient take a 'journey' through the hospital stay
- Make your reader an observer at the scene
- Use a timeline/chronological order to structure your essay – using the past tense
- Use paragraphs to build up a detailed picture of your patient's story
- Each paragraph should identify the significance of a new health need /nurse's role/communication and others involved (MDT, relatives)

- Use **P.E.E.L.** structure for your paragraphs (**Point** - your point; **Evidence** – related literature/clinical findings; **Evaluation** – investigate why this is significant; **Link** – to your patient/assessment brief? See the example below)
- Transition and linking by making connections from one paragraph to another helps to maintain the narrative

Example of the features of a narrative paragraph using P.E.E.L

<p>Point – use a topic sentence to identify the main idea in the paragraph</p>	<p>It was part of the nurse’s role is to assess the patient on admission in order to build up a picture of their health needs, especially those relating to factors aggravating their condition, keeping accurate records of all information gathered (NMC, 2015).</p>
<p>Evidence – include literature and clinical evidence</p>	<p>The nurse allocated to complete Mrs X’s admissions proforma noticed Mrs X sitting forwards by the bed. She appeared very breathless and fatigued and was breathing rapidly. Patients with emphysema are likely to suffer from increased breathlessness (Kozora <i>et al.</i>, 2008). According to Kim and Criner, (2013) increased breathlessness can be a significant symptom of deteriorating emphysema.</p>
<p>Evaluation – why is this evidence significant?</p>	<p>It was challenging for Mrs X to answer the nurse’s questions, due to her breathlessness and this made it difficult for the nurse to obtain a detailed patient history in order to build up a picture of Mrs X’s health needs. Specifically identifying the causes that had led to her admission. Therefore, it was important to manage Mrs X’s breathlessness before proceeding with the admissions proforma.</p>

Evidence – include literature and clinical evidence	<p>The nurse completed baseline observations for Mrs X including recording her respiratory rate, which was elevated and immediately communicated the results to the nurse in charge. According to the RCN (2015), effective communication among nurses is an essential part of care delivery.</p>
Evaluation – why is this evidence significant?	<p>The nurse in charge acted in the patient’s interest and shared results of the admissions assessment with the medical team in order to review Mrs X’s current medication and alleviate her symptoms.</p>
Link – what does this add to your narrative?	<p>Once the Medical team had increased Mrs X’s medication and prescribed oxygen, the nurse re-assessed Mrs X’s level of breathlessness to ensure it was under control before completing the admissions proforma.</p>

Conclusion

Revisit the assessment task here. In general, the following three parts of information should be included in a conclusion:

1. Bring your narrative to an end here, what was the outcome?
2. Synthesise the main points that you made in the main body of your text. What role did communication play (strengths/weaknesses)? To what extent did the nurse/MDT contribute to the outcome?
3. Explain the overall significance of the conclusion – this is your reflective element. In your view, what is the most important information in the main body and what did you learn from it? Why?

Example of a good conclusion

The author begins with an end of narrative statement:	This essay demonstrated that there are a number of roles involved in the delivery of effective patient care and communication by the adult nurse is central to coordinating this.
The author then synthesises main points that made in the main body:	A range of factors including the nurse's availability of time, knowledge and the patient's uptake of support influenced how MDT members were involved. Consequently, a referral to the local council for mould removal was made late.
The author finishes with an explanation of the overall conclusion significance:	Reflecting on this experience I can see how vital it is to complete fully the admissions proforma which includes the patient's living environment. Doing so will highlight early any potential difficulties the patient may be experiencing and enable adequate action to take place. I have also seen how using open questions can allow a patient to speak more openly and in detail, this can provide the nurse with additional information that may not have been ascertained from a yes or no closed type question.

Further information

Visit the Healthcare Academic Skills BREO Community.

List of hyperlinks to additional narrative writing resources:

[The Patient Voices Digital Stories](#)

[Employing Narrative in an Essay \(Writing Commons\)](#)

[In the Moment \(Writing Commons\)](#)

[Dead or Alive: How Will Your Students' Nonfiction Arrive? \(National Writing Project\)](#)