

NARRATIVES

One of the standard types of composition is a **narrative**. You can be asked to write a **short story** (either fictional or real) for which you can be given:

- a title
- the first sentence of the story
- or the last sentence of the story.

The narrator:

Before starting to write, decide from whose **point of view** the story is going to be told. Narratives can be written in the first person ("I or we"), or third person ("he/she/they/it").

With a **first person narrator**, the reader gets a very personal, subjective viewpoint and a strong sense of the narrator's opinion. You get a very partial view of the action and the other characters, because the narrator is also a character in the story.

With a **third person narrative** the author becomes the omniscient **narrator**, therefore, he knows everything about the characters and about the actions.

Sometimes it is not possible to choose the narrator, for example:

▪ *Write a story which ends with the following words: But next time I visit a foreign country I'll definitely learn a few key words of the language before I go.*

In this task you have to use the **first person narrator** because you (=I) are the main character.

▪ *A magazine has asked its readers to submit short stories starting with these words: As soon as Iris got off the train, she knew this would be a special day in her life.*

In this task you have to use the **third person narrator** because Iris is the main character.

Elements in a story:

▪ The three main elements of a story are:

PLOT: The plot of your story tells the actions and events that take place in your story. It's usual to describe events in the order in which they happened.

Your plot should have an introduction, a problem and its resolution. Decide whether your story will have a happy or a sad ending.

The story can be fact or fiction. It's usually easiest to write a story which is based on your own experience, but don't be afraid to change the details or invent new parts if this helps to make the story more interesting or entertaining. A good plot is not only entertaining, but also surprising and/or funny.

CHARACTERS: A person, animal or imaginary creature in your story. There are usually one or two main characters. There can be many secondary characters too, but since you will have to write a very short story, it's not convenient to use more than two or three characters.

SETTING: This is when and where your story takes place. The setting is a **time** - the future, the past, or now. Think of the weather, time of year... Use phrases to show when things happened in your story (e.g. *Three months before... / By the beginning of May...*). The setting is also the **place** (e.g. *on the moon, in Chicago, at the Whitehouse*).

- Stages you should follow to write the story:

Stage 1- PRE-WRITING:

1. **Outline.** Make an outline (=the main ideas or facts about something, without the details) of what the story could basically be about, taking into consideration the exam task. For example:

The main character (Joan) was on a ship. There were huge waves. The captain said that there was a fire in the engine room. Passengers had to put lifejackets on. But finally a voice announced that everything was under control. The ship reached port that afternoon and she was safe.

2. **Brainstorming.** Work out more details. To help with this step, ask yourself lots of questions about the plot, the character/s, and the setting. For example:

Setting:

Where did this take place and when? What time of day was it when the story began? What was the weather like?

Plot:

Where was Joan going? What could she see from the ship?

Character/s:

What did Joan look like? How did she feel when she knew there was a fire?

3. **Organization.** Organize all the ideas that you have so far into paragraphs. Don't forget to write a title (you could do this when you finish writing your story).

1. **Title:** write an interesting title for your story.

2. **Introduction:** set the scene (time, place, characters) and possibly also the source of the story (*I was told this story by my grandfather when I was a child*).

3. **Main body:** consisting of one or two paragraphs in which you develop your story. There must be a problem in your story. In these paragraphs you can describe the characters, the places, the weather...

4. **Resolution:** where the problem is solved. Here you can also describe the characters' feelings and reactions at the end, the consequences of what happened, etc.

Stage 2- WRITING:

Write the composition using the number of words you are told in the exam task.

While writing, pay particular attention to:

1. **Tenses:**

-past simple: to describe actions that happened in sequence and to describe past habits: *I ran to answer the phone but it stopped ringing when I picked up the receiver.*

-past progressive: to describe scenes (background information): *It was raining heavily that day.*

2. **Linkers:** Use a variety of linkers to make your piece of writing more interesting.

David was a tall man. He was in his late forties. → David was a tall man who was in his late forties.

She was cheerful. She was always smiling. → She was cheerful and was always smiling.

Charlie's Lobster House is one of the most popular restaurants in the area. It has delicious lobster dishes. → With its delicious lobster dishes, Charlie's Lobster House is one of the most popular restaurants in the area.

3. **Descriptions:** you can describe characters, places, objects, the weather, physical actions... But remember that at this level you will only have to write compositions of about 100-130 words, so your descriptions should be brief.

Some of the following words related to the senses and feelings could be useful to talk about what the character/s can hear, see, feel, etc.

- Sight verbs: see (notice or examine sb/sth); look (at) (turn your eyes towards sb/sth); watch (pay attention to sth that is moving).

Light adjectives: dark, bright, shiny.

- Hearing verbs: hear; listen to sb/sth (pay attention to things you hear).

Hearing nouns: sound, noise. Hearing adjectives: silent → quiet → noisy.

- Smell verbs - smell: **Always smell wine before tasting it.**

- Taste verbs - taste: **When you've got a heavy cold, you can't really taste things properly.**

Taste adjectives: sweet (honey); salty (crisps); bitter (strong coffee); sour (vinegar); spicy/hot (Indian food). Tasty (food); tasteful (clothes, furnishings, architecture...); tasteless (opposite of both adjectives); exquisite, delicious.

- Touch verbs: feel, touch.

It was a terrible fire, they could feel the hot air.

Don't touch those wires -they're dangerous.

- Verbs connected with the mouth/nose and breathing: breathe (through your nose or mouth), cough, sneeze, smile, laugh.

- Verbs connected with speaking: say to sb, tell sb, shout at sb (loud, angry or excited), scream (loud, frightened or excited).

- Verbs connected with the eyes and face: cry, blush/flush (become red in the face, usually because you are embarrassed or angry).

- Adjectives related to **feelings**:

- Positive feelings: brave, comfortable, glad/ happy/ pleased/ satisfied, curious, excited/ interested, thankful, proud, relaxed, relieved.

- Negative feelings: afraid/ frightened/ scared/ terrified, angry/ annoyed/ furious, bored, cold, depressed, embarrassed, frustrated, full (= ate too much), heartbroken, hot, hungry, hysterical, jealous, nervous/ worried, sad/ unhappy, shocked, sick, sorry, tearful (=want to cry), tired, thirsty, worried.

4. Use a variety of grammar structures and vocabulary.

Stage 3- PROOFREADING:

Read through the story in order to see if you can find any mistakes.

1. Make sure you stick to the **exam task**.

2. Evaluate the **layout** and **organization**. Don't forget the title.

3. Revise **grammar**.

4. Revise **vocabulary**.

5. Revise **spelling, capitalization** and **punctuation**.

6. Revise **style**: narrative stories have a rather informal style. Therefore, ...

6.1. You can use informal vocabulary: e.g. phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions...

6.2. You can use the first person and expressions of personal feelings.

6.3. You can use informal structures: imperative sentences, contractions...

6.4. You can use informal punctuation marks such as exclamation marks, dashes, or parentheses. Pausing is also frequent to add dramatic effect. Example:

And when I pushed open the door... I saw a huge figure standing by the window.