Narration

What Is Narration?

**Narration** tells a story by presenting events in an orderly, logical sequence. In the following paragraph from "The Stone Horse," essayist Barry Lopez recounts the history of the exploration of the California desert.

Western man did not enter the California desert until the end of the eighteenth century. 250 years after Coronado brought his soldiers into the Zuni pueblos in a bewildered search for the cities of Cibola. The earliest appraisals of the land were cursory, hurried. People traveled through it, en route to Santa Fe or the California coastal settlements. Only miners tarried. In 1823 what had been Spain's became Mexico's, and in 1848 what had been Mexico's became America's; but the bare, jagged mountains and dry lake beds, the vast and uniform plains of creosote bush and yucca plants, remained as obscure as the northern Sudan until the end of the nineteenth century.

Narration can be the dominant pattern in many kinds of writing (as well as in speech). Histories, biographies, and autobiographies follow a narrative form, as do personal letters, diaries, journals, and some of the content on personal Web pages or social networking sites. Narration is the dominant pattern in many works of fiction and poetry, and it is an essential part of casual conversation. Narration also underlies folk and fairy tales and many news reports. In short, anytime you tell what happened, you are using narration.

Using Narration

Narration can provide the structure for an entire essay, but narrative passages may also appear in essays that are not primarily narrative. In an argumentative essay supporting stricter gun-safety legislation, for example,
you might devote one or two paragraphs to the story of a child accidentally killed by a handgun. In this chapter, however, we focus on narration as the dominant pattern of a piece of writing.

Throughout your college career, many of your assignments will call for narration. In an English composition class, you may be asked to write about an experience that was important to your development as an adult; on a European history exam, you may need to relate the events that led to Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo; and in a technical writing class, you may be asked to write a report tracing a company's negligent actions. In each of these situations (as well as in many additional assignments), your writing has a primarily narrative structure, and the narrative supports a thesis.

The skills you develop in narrative writing will also help you in other kinds of writing. A process essay, such as an explanation of a laboratory experiment, is like a narrative because it outlines a series of steps in chronological order; a cause-and-effect essay, such as your answer to an exam question that asks you to analyze the events that caused the Great Depression, also resembles a narrative in that it traces a sequence of events. Although a process essay explains how to do something and a cause-and-effect essay explains why events occur, writing both these kinds of essays will be easier after you master narration. (Process essays and cause-and-effect essays are discussed and illustrated in Chapters 9 and 10, respectively.)

Planning a Narrative Essay

Developing a Thesis Statement

Although the purpose of a narrative may be simply to recount events or to create a particular mood or impression, in college writing a narrative essay is more likely to present a sequence of events for the purpose of supporting a thesis. For instance, in a narrative about your problems with credit card debt, your purpose may be to show your readers that college students should not have easy access to credit cards. Accordingly, you do not simply tell the story of your unwise spending. Rather, you select and arrange details to show your readers why having a credit card encouraged you to spend money you didn't have. Although it is usually best to include an explicit thesis statement ("My negative experiences with credit have convinced me that college students should not have access to credit cards"), you may also imply your thesis through your selection and arrangement of events.

Including Enough Detail

Narratives, like other types of writing, need to include rich, specific details if they are to be convincing. Each detail should help to create a picture for the reader; even exact times, dates, and geographic locations can be helpful. Look, for example, at the following paragraph from the essay "My

Mother Never

Varying Sent

Maintaining

Many narr
Mother Never Worked” by Bonnie Smith-Yackel, which appears later in this chapter:

In the winter she sewed night after night, endlessly, begging cast-off clothing from relatives, ripping apart coats, dresses, blouses, and trousers to remake them to fit her four daughters and son. Every morning and every evening she milked cows, fed pigs and calves, cared for chickens, picked eggs, cooked meals, washed dishes, scrubbed floors, and tended and loved her children. In the spring she planted a garden once more, dragging pails of water to nourish and sustain the vegetables for the family. In 1936 she lost a baby in her sixth month.

This list of details adds interest and authenticity to the narrative. The central figure in the narrative is a busy, productive woman, and readers know this because they are given an exhaustive catalog of her activities.

Varying Sentence Structure

When narratives present a long series of events, all the sentences can begin to sound alike: “She sewed dresses. She milked cows. She fed pigs. She fed calves. She cared for chickens.” Such a predictable string of sentences may become monotonous for your readers. You can eliminate this monotony by varying your sentence structure — for instance, by using a variety of sentence openings or by combining simple sentences as Smith-Yackel does in “My Mother Never Worked”: “In the winter she sewed night after night, endlessly. . . . Every morning and every evening she milked cows, fed pigs and calves, cared for chickens. . . .”

Maintaining Clear Narrative Order

Many narratives present events in the exact order in which they occurred, moving from first event to last. Whether or not you follow a strict chronological order depends on the purpose of your narrative. If you are writing a straightforward account of a historical event or summarizing a record of poor management practices, you will probably want to move directly from beginning to end. In a personal-experience essay or a fictional narrative, however, you may want to engage your readers’ interest by beginning with an event from the middle of your story, or even from the end, and then presenting the events that led up to it. You may also decide to begin in the present and then use one or more flashbacks (shifts into the past) to tell your story. To help readers follow the order of events in your narrative, it is very important to use correct verb tenses and clear transitional words and phrases.

Using Accurate Verb Tenses. Verb tense is extremely important in writing that recounts events in a fixed order because tenses indicate temporal (time) relationships. When you write a narrative, you should be careful to keep verb tenses consistent and accurate so that your readers can
follow the sequence of events. Naturally, you need to shift tenses to reflect an actual time shift in your narrative. For instance, convention requires that you use present tense when discussing works of literature (“When Hamlet’s mother marries his uncle . . .”), but a flashback to an earlier point in the story calls for a shift from present to past tense (“Before his mother’s marriage, Hamlet was . . .”). Nevertheless, you should avoid unwarranted shifts in verb tense; they will make your narrative confusing.

**Using Transitions.** **Transitions** — connecting words or phrases — help link events in time, enabling narratives to flow smoothly. Without them, narratives would lack coherence, and readers would be unsure of the correct sequence of events. Transitions indicate the order of events, and they also signal shifts in time. In narrative writing, the transitions commonly used for these purposes include *first, second, next, then, later, at the same time, meanwhile, immediately, soon, before, earlier, after, afterward, now, and finally*. In addition to transitional words and phrases, specific time markers — such as *three years later, in 1927, after two hours, and on January 3* — indicate how much time has passed between events. (A more complete list of transitions appears on page 57.)

**Structuring a Narrative Essay**

Like other essays, a *narrative* essay has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. If your essay’s thesis is explicitly stated, it will, in most cases, appear in the *introduction*. The *body paragraphs* of your essay will recount the events that make up your narrative, following a clear and orderly plan. Finally, the *conclusion* will give your readers the sense that your narrative is complete, perhaps by restating your thesis in different words or by summarizing key points or events.

Suppose you are assigned a short history paper about the Battle of Waterloo. You plan to support the thesis that if Napoleon had kept more troops in reserve, he might have defeated the British troops serving under Wellington. Based on this thesis, you decide that the best way to organize your paper is to present the five major phases of the battle in chronological order. An informal outline of your essay might look like this.

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**Sample Outline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narration</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction:</strong></td>
<td>Thesis statement — If Napoleon had kept more troops in reserve, he might have broken Wellington’s line with another infantry attack and thus won the Battle of Waterloo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1 of the battle:</strong></td>
<td>Napoleon attacked the Château of Hougoumont.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2 of the battle:</strong></td>
<td>The French infantry attacked the British lines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 3 of the battle: The French cavalry staged a series of charges against the British lines that had not been attacked before. Napoleon committed his reserves.

Phase 4 of the battle: The French captured La Haye Sainte, their first success of the day but an advantage that Napoleon, having committed troops elsewhere, could not maintain without reserves.

Phase 5 of the battle: The French infantry was decisively defeated by the combined thrust of the British infantry and the remaining British cavalry.

Conclusion: Restatement of thesis (in different words) or review of key points or events.

By discussing the five phases of the battle in chronological order, you clearly support your thesis. As you expand your informal outline into a historical narrative, exact details, dates, times, and geographic locations are extremely important. Without them, your statements are open to question. In addition, to keep your readers aware of the order of events, you must select appropriate transitional words and phrases and pay careful attention to verb tenses.

Revising a Narrative Essay

When you revise a narrative essay, consider the items on the revision checklist on page 68. In addition, pay special attention to the items on the following checklist, which apply specifically to narrative essays.

**Revision Checklist**

- Does your assignment call for narration?
- Does your essay's thesis communicate the significance of the events you discuss?
- Have you included enough specific detail?
- Have you varied your sentence structure?
- Is the order of events clear to readers?
- Have you varied sentence openings and combined short sentences to avoid monotony?
- Do your transitions indicate the order of events and signal shifts in time?

Editing a Narrative Essay

When you edit your narrative essay, follow the guidelines on the editing checklists on pages 85, 88, and 91. In addition, focus on the grammar,
mechanics, and punctuation issues that are particularly relevant to narrative essays. One of these issues — avoiding run-on sentences — is discussed below.

**GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT** Avoiding Run-Ons

When writing narrative essays, particularly personal narratives and essays that include dialogue, writers can easily lose sight of sentence boundaries and create **run-ons**. There are two kinds of run-ons: *fused sentences* and *comma splices*.

A **fused sentence** occurs when two sentences are incorrectly joined without punctuation.

- **CORRECT TWO SENTENCES:**
  “The sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day. The crops shriveled and died” (Smith-Yackel 124).

- **FUSED SENTENCE:**
  The sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day the crops shriveled and died.

A **comma splice** occurs when two sentences are incorrectly joined with just a comma.

- **COMMA SPlice:**
  The sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day, the crops shriveled and died.

**Five Ways to Correct These Errors**

1. Use a period to create two separate sentences.
   The sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day. The crops shriveled and died.

2. Join the sentences with a comma and a coordinating conjunction *(and, or, nor, for, so, but, yet)*.
   The sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day, and the crops shriveled and died.

3. Join the sentences with a semicolon.
   The sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day; the crops shriveled and died.

4. Join the sentences with a semicolon and a transitional word or phrase (followed by a comma), such as *however, therefore, or for example* *(See page 57 for a list of transitional words and phrases.)*
   The sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day; eventually, the crops shriveled and died.

5. Create a complex sentence by adding a subordinating conjunction *(although, because, if, and so on)* or a relative pronoun *(who, which, that, and so on)* to one of the sentences.
   As the sun came out hot and bright, endlessly, day after day, the crops shriveled and died.
In the following essay, student Erica Sarno traces her development as a writer. Her assignment was to write a literacy narrative, a personal account focusing on her experiences with reading and writing.

Becoming a Writer

I used to think that writing was just about filling pages. Composing an essay for school meant getting the job done and checking it off my to-do list. During my last two years of high school, however, my attitude started to change. Several experiences helped me understand that writing is not a skill that some people are born with and others are not. If I wanted to write, all I needed was a desire to express myself to others and a willing audience. Realizing that there was someone on the other side of the page, eager to listen, helped me develop into a more effective writer.

My first real lesson in my development as a writer took place in Mrs. Strickland's junior English class. Mrs. Strickland was hard to approach. She dressed as if she expected to be giving a press conference at the White House. She wore tan suits and silk scarves, and she had a helmet of dyed blonde hair. We seemed to disappoint her just because we were high school students. Maybe I saw her lack of interest in us and our work as a challenge because, one day, I took a risk and wrote a very personal essay about losing my aunt to cancer. When I got the paper back, Mrs. Strickland had written only. "Did you read the instructions?" I could not believe it. For the first time, I had actually written about what was important to me rather than just filling the pages with words, and she had not even read past my introduction! Still, I knew then that I had something to say. I just needed someone to listen.

The next year, I had Dr. Kelleher for senior English. My year with Dr. K profoundly changed the way I see myself as a writer (and as a reader). Finally, a teacher was paying attention to what I had written. His only rule for writing was “Don’t be boring!” I rewrote
sentences, hoping for an exclamation point or one of Dr. K's other special marks in the margin. Dr. K had a whole list of codes and abbreviations, like "BTH" ("Better than Hemingway") or "the knife" (when the writer slayed the opponent in an argument). I also relied on Dr. K to tell me when I was falling into my old habit of just filling the page. He would write a funny comment like, "Come back! Log out of Facebook!". Then, he would give me a chance to try again. Trusting him to be a generous reader and an honest critic helped me develop my voice and my confidence as a writer.

Meanwhile, I started to become a better reader, too. I could tell when a writer was writing to me, wanting me to understand. I could also tell when a writer was writing just to get the job done. Instead of just skimming the assigned reading, I got in the habit of writing in the margins and making notes about what I thought. I underlined ideas that spoke to me, and I wrote "Really??" next to ideas that seemed silly. Instead of assuming a reading would be boring, I gave every assignment a chance. Whether I liked a book or not, I felt that I could explain my reasons. I was finally seeing for myself that writing is just another way for people to talk to each other.

Eventually, in the spring of my senior year, I experienced what it feels like to connect with a broader audience. I suggested a column about "senioritis" to the school paper, and even though I had never written for the public before, the editor loved my idea. I knew what I wanted to say, and I knew I could collect plenty of stories to help me illustrate my ideas. What I did not predict was how much I would learn from the experience of writing those six columns. Knowing that hundreds of people would be reading my pieces, I revised them over and over again. When Dr. K read one of my last columns aloud to our class, I got to see how my work affected people. Watching the expressions on my classmates' faces and hearing them laugh at the funny parts helped me understand what good writing is. In that moment, I truly connected with my audience.

Although I still have a lot to learn, I now understand how important the relationship between the writer and the reader is. When I write, I am writing to be heard. When I read, I am reading to understand. The communication may not be perfect, but I know
I am not alone in my task. And even though I am not in Dr. K’s class anymore, I still sometimes imagine that he will be reading what I have written. Thinking about him reminds me that someone cares about what I have to say.

Points for Special Attention

**Assignment.** Erica’s assignment was to write a literacy narrative. At first, she considered writing about her favorite childhood books or about how she learned to read, but in the end she decided to focus on more recent experiences because she could remember them more clearly (and, therefore, could include more specific detail).

**Thesis Statement and Title.** Because her focus was on her development as a writer, Erica was careful to include the words *develop* and *writer* in her thesis statement. Her thesis statement also clearly explains the key factor that encouraged her development — the presence of an interested reader.

**Structure.** In her essay’s first two body paragraphs, Erica discusses her junior and senior English classes. However, instead of just contrasting the two teachers, she explains how she herself changed as a result of their different approaches. In paragraph 4, she explains the connection between her reading and her writing, and in paragraph 5, she recounts her development into a reader writing for a wider audience.

**Topic Sentences.** To move her narrative along, Erica was careful to include transitional words and phrases — *The next year, Meanwhile, Eventually* — in her topic sentences to show the movement from one stage of her development to the next.

**Working with Sources.** Erica’s assignment made it clear that although other assignments in the course would be source-based, this narrative essay should be based solely on her own memories and reflections.

**Focus on Revision**

When she reread an early draft of her essay, Erica immediately saw a problem: she had written a comparison-and-contrast essay instead of a narrative. Instead of focusing on her development as a writer, she had simply compared her junior- and senior-year English classes. This problem was revealed by her draft’s thesis statement — “The difference between junior and senior year of high school was the difference between being ignored and being heard” — as well as by the topic sentences of her first two body paragraphs:
First body paragraph: Mrs. Strickland was an uninspiring teacher.

Second body paragraph: Unlike Mrs. Strickland, Dr. Kelleher encouraged me as a writer.

Erica also noticed that her entire essay dealt with classroom style, further highlighting the contrast between her two teachers. Realizing that her development as a writer had also taken place outside the classroom, she condensed her discussion of the two English classes and added material about reading (paragraph 4) and about writing for her school paper (paragraph 5).

When she wrote her next draft, Erica was careful to include transitions and topic sentences that signaled her focus on her development over time, not on the differences between two classes or two teachers. Finally, as she reviewed her draft, she noticed that her original summary statement—"Knowing that there was someone on the other side of the page made me a better writer"—could be expanded into an appropriate and effective thesis statement.

A STUDENT WRITER: Narration

The following essay is typical of the informal narrative writing many students are asked to do in English composition classes. It was written by Tiffany Forte in response to the assignment “Write an informal essay about a goal or dream you had when you were a child.”

My Field of Dreams

Introduction

When I was young, I was told that when I grew up I could be anything I wanted to be, and I always took for granted that this was true. I knew exactly what I was going to be, and I would spend hours dreaming about how wonderful my life would be when I grew up. One day, though, when I did grow up, I realized that things had not turned out the way I had always expected they would.

Thesis statement

When I was little, I never played with baby dolls or Barbies.

I wasn’t like other little girls; I was a tomboy. I was the only girl in the neighborhood where I lived, so I always played with boys. We would play army or football or (my favorite) baseball.

Almost every summer afternoon, all the boys in my neighborhood and I would meet by the big oak tree to get a baseball game going. Surprisingly, I was always one of the first to be picked for a team. I was very fast, and (for my size) I could hit the ball far. I loved baseball more than anything, and I wouldn’t miss a game for the world.
My dad played baseball too, and every Friday night I would go to the field with my mother to watch him play. It was just like the big leagues, with lots of people, a snack bar, and lights that shone so high and bright you could see them a mile away. I loved to go to my dad’s games. When all the other kids would wander off and play, I would sit and cheer on my dad and his team. My attention was focused on the field, and my heart would jump with every pitch.

Even more exciting than my dad’s games were the major league games. The Phillies were my favorite team, and I always looked forward to watching them on television. My dad would make popcorn, and we would sit and watch in anticipation of a Phillies victory. We would go wild, yelling and screaming at all the big plays. When the Phillies would win, I would be so excited I couldn’t sleep; when they would lose, I would go to bed angry, just like my dad.

It was when my dad took me to my first Phillies game that I decided I wanted to be a major league baseball player. The excitement began when we pulled into the parking lot of the old Veterans Stadium. There were thousands of cars. As we walked from the car to the stadium, my dad told me to hold on to his hand and not to let go no matter what. When we gave the man our tickets and entered the stadium, I understood why. There were mobs of people everywhere. They were walking around the stadium and standing in long lines for hot dogs, beer, and souvenirs. It was the most wonderful thing I had ever seen. When we got to our seats, I looked down at the tiny baseball diamond below and felt as if I were on top of the world.

The cheering of the crowd, the singing, and the chants were almost more than I could stand. I was bursting with enthusiasm. Then, in the bottom of the eighth inning, with the score tied and two outs, Mike Schmidt came up to bat and hit the game-winning home run. The crowd went crazy. Everyone in the whole stadium was standing, and I found myself yelling and screaming along with everyone else. When Mike Schmidt came out of the dugout to receive his standing ovation, I felt a lump in my throat and butterflies in my stomach. He was everyone’s hero that night, and I could only imagine the pride he must have felt. I slept the whole way home and dreamed of what it would be like to be the hero of the game.
The next day, when I met with the boys at the oak tree, I told them that when I grew up, I was going to be a major league baseball player. They all laughed at me and said I could never be a baseball player because I was a girl. I told them that they were all wrong and that I would show them.

In the years to follow, I played girls' softball in a competitive fast-pitch league, and I was very good. I always wanted to play baseball with the boys, but there were no mixed leagues. After a few years, I realized that the boys from the oak tree were right: I was never going to be a major league baseball player. I realized that what I had been told when I was younger wasn't the whole truth. What no one had bothered to tell me was that I could be anything I wanted to be — as long as it was something that was appropriate for a girl to do.

In time, I would get over the loss of my dream. I found new dreams, acceptable for a young woman, and I moved on to other things. Still, every time I watch a baseball game and someone hits a home run, I get those same butterflies in my stomach and think, for just a minute, about what might have been.

**Points for Special Attention**

**Assignment.** Tiffany's assignment was to write about a goal or dream she had when she was a child. As a nontraditional student, a good deal older than most of her classmates, Tiffany found this assignment challenging at first. She wondered if her childhood dreams would be different from those of her classmates, and she was somewhat hesitant to share her drafts with her peer-editing group. As it turned out, though, her childhood dreams were not very different from those of the other students in her class.

**Introduction.** Tiffany's introduction is straightforward, yet it arouses reader interest by setting up a contrast between what she expected and what actually happened. Her optimistic expectation — that she could be anything she wanted to be — is contradicted by her thesis statement, encouraging readers to read on to learn how things turned out and why.

**Thesis Statement.** Although the assignment called for a personal narrative, the instructor made it clear that the essay should have an explicitly stated thesis that made a point about a childhood goal or dream. Tiffany knew she wanted to write about her passion for baseball, but she also knew that just listing a series of events would not fulfill the assignment. Her thesis statement — "One day, though, when I did grow up, I realized that
things had not turned out the way I had always expected they would” — puts her memories in context, suggesting that she will use them to support a general conclusion about the gap between dreams and reality.

**Structure.** The body of Tiffany’s essay traces the chronology of her involvement with baseball — playing with the neighborhood boys, watching her father’s games, watching baseball on television, and, finally, attending her first major league game. Each body paragraph introduces a different aspect of her experience with baseball, culminating in the vividly described Phillies game. The balance of the essay (paragraphs 8–10) summarizes the aftermath of that game, gives a brief overview of Tiffany’s later years in baseball, and presents her conclusion.

**Detail.** Personal narratives like Tiffany’s need a lot of detail because the writers want readers to see and hear and feel what they did. To present an accurate picture, Tiffany includes all the significant sights and sounds she can remember: the big oak tree, the lights on the field, the popcorn, the excited cheers, the food and souvenir stands, the crowds, and so on. She also names Mike Schmidt (“everyone’s hero”), his team, and the stadium where she saw him play. Despite all these details, though, she omits some important information — for example, how old she was at each stage of her essay.

**Working with Sources.** Tiffany’s essay is very personal, and she supports her thesis with experiences and observations from her own childhood. Although she could have consulted sources to find specific information about team standings or players’ stats — or even quoted her hero, Mike Schmidt — she decided that her own memories would provide convincing support for her thesis.

**Verb Tense.** Maintaining clear chronological order is very important in narrative writing, where unwarranted shifts in verb tenses can confuse readers. Knowing this, Tiffany was careful to avoid unnecessary tense shifts. In her conclusion, she shifts from past to present tense, but this shift is both necessary and clear. Elsewhere she uses would to identify events that occurred regularly. For example, in paragraph 5 she says, “My dad would make popcorn” rather than “My dad made popcorn,” which would have suggested that he did so only once.

**Transitions.** Tiffany’s skillful use of transitional words and expressions links her sentences and moves her readers smoothly through her essay. In addition to transitional words such as when and then, she uses specific time markers — “When I was little,” “Almost every summer afternoon,” “every Friday night,” “As we walked,” “The next day,” “In the years to follow,” and “After a few years” — to advance the narrative and carry her readers along.
Focus on Revision

In their responses to an earlier draft of Tiffany's essay, several students in her peer-editing group recommended that she revise one particularly monotonous paragraph. (As one student pointed out, all its sentences began with the subject, making the paragraph seem choppy and its ideas disconnected.) Here is the paragraph from her draft:

My dad played baseball too. I went to the field with my mother every Friday night to watch him play. It was just like the big leagues. There were lots of people and a snack bar. The lights shone so high and bright you could see them a mile away. I loved to go to my dad's games. All the other kids would wander off and play. I would sit and cheer on my dad and his team. My attention was focused on the field. My heart would jump with every pitch.

In the revised version of the paragraph (now paragraph 4 of her essay), Tiffany varies sentence length and opening strategies:

My dad played baseball too, and every Friday night I would go to the field with my mother to watch him play. It was just like the big leagues, with lots of people, a snack bar, and lights that shone so high and bright you could see them a mile away. I loved to go to my dad's games. When all the other kids would wander off and play, I would sit and cheer on my dad and his team. My attention was focused on the field, and my heart would jump with every pitch.

After reading Tiffany's revised draft, another student suggested that she might still polish her essay a bit. For instance, she could add some dialogue, quoting the boys' taunts and her own reply in paragraph 8. She could also revise to eliminate clichés (overused expressions), substituting fresher, more original language for phrases such as "I felt a lump in my throat and butterflies in my stomach" and "felt as if I were on top of the world." In the next draft of her essay, Tiffany followed up on these suggestions.

PEER-EDITING WORKSHEET: Narration

1. What point is the writer making about the essay's subject? Is this point explicitly stated in a thesis statement? If so, where? If not, can you state the essay's thesis in one sentence?
2. List some details that enrich the narrative. Where could more detail be added? What kind of detail? Be specific.
3. Does the writer vary sentence structure and avoid monotonous strings of similar sentences? Should any sentences be combined? If so, which ones? Can you suggest different openings for any sentences?
4. Should any transitions be added to clarify the order in which events occurred? If so, where?
5. Do verb tenses establish a clear chronological order? Identify any verb tenses that you believe need to be changed.
6. Does the writer avoid run-on sentences? Point out any fused sentences or comma splices.
7. What could the writer add to this essay?
8. What could the writer take out of this essay?
9. What is the essay’s greatest strength? Why?
10. What is the essay’s greatest weakness? What steps should the writer take to correct this problem?

The selections that follow illustrate some of the many possibilities open to writers of narratives. The first selection, a visual text, is followed by questions designed to illustrate how narration can operate in visual form. (A multimodal text for narration is located online at macmillanhighered.com/patterns.)
MARJANE SATRAPI

from Persepolis II (Graphic Fiction)*

“TO KEEP US FROM STRAYING OFF THE STRAIGHT PATH, OUR STUDIES WERE SEPARATED FROM THOSE OF THE BOYS.”

“I'M YOUR ANATOMY PROFESSOR. IN THE PAST, WE DREW NAKED, BUT THINGS HAVE CHANGED. YOUR MODEL WILL BE COVERED, TRY TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT.”

“WE TRIED.”

“WE LOOKED...”

“...FROM EVERY DIRECTION...”

“...AND FROM EVERY ANGLE...”

“BUT NOT A SINGLE PART OF HER BODY WAS VISIBLE.”

“WE NEVERTHLESS LEARNED IT.”

*These panels, from the graphic novel Persepolis II, tell part of a story about the changes in the life of a young girl during Iran's Islamic revolution. In 1979, the secular monarch was overthrown, and a government run by Islamic religious leaders instituted new rules, including extreme regulations on how women could dress.
**Reading Images**

1. Look carefully at the panels on page 112, and read the footnote that appears below them. Then, list the events depicted in the panels in the order in which they are shown.

2. What visual elements link each panel to the one that follows? Can you identify any words that serve as transitions? What additional transitional words and phrases might help to move readers from one panel to the next?

3. What do you think happened right before (and right after) the events depicted here?

**Journal Entry**

Write a narrative paragraph summarizing the story told in these panels. Begin with a sentence that identifies the characters and the setting. Next, write a sentence that summarizes the events that might have preceded the first panel. Then, tell the story the pictures tell. In your last sentence, bring the sequence of events to a logical close. Be sure to use present tense and to include all necessary transitions.

**Thematic Connections**

- “The Ways We Lie” (page 471)
- “The Wife-Beater” (page 514)
- “Your Flip-Flops Are Grossing Me Out” (page 687)
JUNOT DÍAZ

The Money

Born in the Dominican Republic in 1968 and raised in New Jersey, Junot Díaz earned his bachelor’s degree from Rutgers University and an M.F.A. in creative writing from Cornell University. He is the author of several works of fiction, including *Drown* (1996), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012). The winner of many awards, including a Pulitzer Prize and MacArthur and Guggenheim Fellowships, Díaz is the fiction editor at *Boston Review* and the Rudge and Nancy Allen Professor of Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Background on Dominicans in the United States** Dominicans living in the United States account for 3 percent of the U.S. Hispanic population; they numbered about 1.5 million when the Census Bureau made its American Community Survey in 2011. For many years, the northeast has been home to the majority of Dominicans in the United States. Although historically almost half settled in New York City, in recent years they have established sizable populations in several other northeastern states, such as New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. Dominicans living in the United States are significantly more likely to have been born outside the U.S., as Díaz was, than the general Hispanic population (56 percent versus 36 percent). The Dominican population also has a slightly higher poverty rate compared to all Hispanics; however, it can also claim a higher level of education. Dominicans have had an impact on American food, music, and culture, and they are an integral part of social and commercial life in the United States, where they are teachers, bankers, lawyers, small business owners, entrepreneurs, and workers. With a long history of activism, Dominicans have also begun to wield political influence as elected officials in U.S. state, city, and local governments.

All the Dominicans I knew in those days sent money home. My mother didn’t have a regular job besides caring for us five kids, so she scrimped the loot together from whatever came her way. My father was always losing his forklift jobs, so it wasn’t like she ever had a steady flow. But my grandparents were alone in Santo Domingo, and those remittances, beyond material support, were a way, I suspect, for Mami to negotiate the absence, the distance, caused by our diaspora. She chipped dollars off the cash Papi gave her for our daily expenses, forced our already broke family to live even broker. That was how she built the nut — two, maybe three hundred dollars — that she sent home every six months or so.

We kids knew where the money was hidden, but we also knew that to touch it would have meant a violent punishment approaching death. I, who could take the change out of my mother’s purse without thinking, couldn’t have brought myself even to look at that forbidden stash.
So what happened? Exactly what you'd think. The summer I was twelve, my family went away on a “vacation” — one of my father’s half-baked get-to-know-our-country-better-by-sleeping-in-the-van extravaganzas — and when we returned to Jersey, exhausted, battered, we found our front door unlocked. My parents’ room, which was where the thieves had concentrated their search, looked as if it had been tornado-tossed. The thieves had kept it simple; they'd snatched a portable radio, some of my Dungeons & Dragons hardcovers, and, of course, Mami’s remittances.

It's not as if the robbery came as a huge surprise. In our neighborhood, cars and apartments were always getting jacked, and the kid stupid enough to leave a bike unattended for more than a tenth of a second was the kid who was never going to see that bike again. Everybody got hit; no matter who you were, eventually it would be your turn.

And that summer it was ours.

Still, we took the burglary pretty hard. When you're a recent immigrant, it's easy to feel targeted. Like it wasn't just a couple of aholes that had it in for you but the whole neighborhood — hell, maybe the whole country.

No one took the robbery as hard as my mom, though. She cursed the neighborhood, she cursed the country, she cursed my father, and of course she cursed us kids, swore that we had run our gums to our idiot friends and they had done it.

And this is where the tale should end, right? Wasn't as if there was going to be any “C.S.I.”-style investigation or anything. Except that a couple of days later I was moaning about the robbery to these guys I was hanging with at that time and they were cursing sympathetically, and out of nowhere it struck me. You know when you get one of those moments of mental clarity? When the nictitating membrane obscuring the world suddenly lifts? That's what happened. I realized that these two dopes I called my friends had done it. They were shaking their heads, mouthing all the right words, but I could see the way they looked at each other, the Raskolnikov glances. I knew.

Now, it wasn't like I could publicly denounce these dols or go to the police. That would have been about as useless as crying. Here's what I did: I asked the main dope to let me use his bathroom (we were in front of his apartment) and while I pretended to piss I unlatched the window. Then we all headed to the park as usual, but I pretended that I'd forgotten something back home. Ran to the dope's apartment, slid open the bathroom window, and in broad daylight wriggled my skinny ass in.

Where the hell did I get these ideas? I have no clue. I guess I was reading way too much Encyclopedia Brown and the Three Investigators in those days. And if mine had been a normal neighborhood this is when the cops would have been called and my ass would have been caught burglary.

The dolt and his family had been in the U.S. all their lives and they had a ton of stuff, a TV in every room, but I didn’t have to do much searching. I
popped up the dole's mattress and underneath I found my D.&D. books and most of my mother's money. He had thoughtfully kept it in the same envelope.

And that was how I solved the Case of the Stupid Morons. My one and only case.

The next day at the park, the dole announced that someone had broken into his apartment and stolen all his savings. This place is full of thieves, he complained bitterly, and I was, like, No kidding.

It took me two days to return the money to my mother. The truth was I was seriously considering keeping it. But in the end the guilt got to me. I guess I was expecting my mother to run around with joy, to crown me her favorite son, to cook me my favorite meal. Nada. I'd wanted a party or at least to see her happy, but there was nothing. Just two hundred and some dollars and fifteen hundred or so miles — that's all there was.

Comprehension

1. Díaz grew up poor. How does he communicate this fact to readers?
2. According to Díaz, why is the money in his mother's "forbidden stash" different from the money in her purse? Do you think this distinction makes sense?
3. How did Díaz solve "the Case of the Stupid Morons" (12)?
4. What does Díaz mean when he says, "Just two hundred and some dollars and fifteen hundred or so miles — that's all there was" (14)?

Purpose and Audience

1. Even though Díaz uses a very informal style, full of slang expressions, he also uses words like diapasons (1) and expressions like "Raskolnikov glances" (8). What does this tell you about him — and about how he sees his audience?
2. This essay does not have a stated thesis. What is Díaz's main idea? Write a sentence that could serve as a thesis statement. Where in the essay could this sentence be added? Should such a sentence be added? Why or why not?
3. Does this essay have an informative or a persuasive purpose, or is Díaz just trying to share his memories with readers? Explain.

Style and Structure

1. Identify the one- and two-sentence paragraphs in this essay. Are these very brief paragraphs effective as they are, or should they be expanded or combined with other paragraphs? Explain.
2. This is a personal, informal essay, and it uses first person and contractions. It also includes a number of sentence fragments. Identify a few fragments,
and try to turn each one into a complete sentence. Then, explain why you think Diaz used each fragment.

3. In paragraphs 3, 8, and 10, Diaz asks **rhetorical questions**. How would you answer these questions?

4. **Vocabulary Project.** What words, besides **morons**, does Diaz use to describe the thieves? Which word seems most appropriate to you? Why?

5. Like a crime story, Diaz’s narrative moves readers through events from the crime itself to its impact to its final outcome. Identify each of these sections of the narrative.

**Journal Entry**

Do you think Diaz feels more angry at the “morons” or at himself? Does he also feel frustration? Disappointment? If so, with whom (or what)?

**Writing Workshop**

1. Diaz mentions Encyclopedia Brown and the Three Investigators, fictional young detectives whose adventures he followed. When you were young, what was as important to you as these fictional characters were to Diaz? In a narrative essay, trace the development of your fascination with a particular fictional character, pastime, or hobby.

2. When he returns the money to his mother, Diaz expects “a party or at least to see her happy” (14), but that isn’t the reaction he gets. Write a narrative essay about a time when you expected a particular reaction or outcome but were disappointed or surprised.

3. **Working with Sources.** Consult several dictionaries to find out what the term **diapason** has meant throughout history. Then, write a narrative essay tracing your own family’s diaspora, focusing on their movement from one country, region, or neighborhood to another. Include a definition from one of the dictionaries you consult, and be sure to include parenthetical documentation and a works-cited page. (See Chapter 18 for information on MLA documentation.)

**Combining the Patterns**

Diaz discusses both his family’s life in a Dominican neighborhood in New York City and his relatives’ lives back in Santo Domingo. If he wanted to write a **comparison-and-contrast** paragraph comparing his life to his relatives’, what details might he include? Do you think he should add such a paragraph? If so, why — and where?

**Thematic Connections**

- “Indian Education” (page 142)
- “The Ways We Lie” (page 471)
- “Tortillas” (page 506)
ALAN DEAN FOSTER

Living with Fire

Fantasy and science-fiction writer Alan Dean Foster earned a B.A. and an M.F.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles. He has published dozens of novels and short stories, including books set in the Humanx Commonwealth Universe; the Spellsinger series; and novelizations of Star Trek, Alien, and Transformers films. He is also the author of many standalone novels, including Kingdoms of Light (2001) and Sagamanda (2006).

Background on wilderness fires In this essay, Foster writes about the Yarnell Hill wildfire, near his home in Prescott, Arizona, which burned from June 28 to July 10 in 2013. Before it was over, the fire had burned 8,500 acres (over 13 square miles), killed 19 people, and destroyed many buildings and homes. Such fires have always been part of America's landscape: the Peshtigo wildfire of 1871 in Peshtigo, Wisconsin, burned 1.2 million acres and killed more than 1,500 people; in 1910, a fire in Montana killed 80. High-profile disasters aside, fires are a natural part of the life cycle of wilderness areas, and they are often beneficial, clearing dead brush, wood, and undergrowth. But over the last several decades, the number — and the destructive power — of such fires has increased significantly. According to U.S. Forest Service Chief Thomas Tidwell, more than 9.3 million acres in the United States burned in 2012, and 51 wildfires exceeded 40,000 acres. Moreover, over the last forty years, the length of the fire season has increased by two months. Researchers cite several variables that may be contributing to this phenomenon, from irresponsible campers and changes in weather patterns to logging practices and the composition of insect populations, but two possible factors stand out. First, climate change may be leading to hotter, drier summers, as well as to shifts in regional weather in Western states such as Arizona and California. Second, as the population grows in the American South and West, homes are increasingly being built in areas prone to fires. Ironically, attempts to control and prevent forest and wilderness fires may actually be contributing to the problem as well because smaller, naturally occurring burns can often remove the deadwood and brush that could lead to much more devastating fires.

When you build a fire in a fireplace, you start with paper, add kindling, and finally arrange the larger logs on top. That perfectly describes the summertime environment in the southwestern mountains of the United States.

Yet many thousands of us choose to live here.

I live in Prescott, Arizona, where a wildfire called the Doce fire is now almost completely contained, after burning 6,767 tinder-dry acres. It started two weeks ago, six miles or so from the house where my wife and I have lived for more than thirty years.
We live in the bottom of a small canyon, and it took a moment for me to realize that the smoke I was seeing from the study window was all wrong. Distant fires, which we are used to, score the blue sky with a thin haze, like a watercolorist's brown wash. But this cloud was massive, a darker brown, moving too fast, and flush with orange.

I drove to the top of the highest hill behind our house and as I swung around the crest, between homes with neat desert landscaping, a view opened before me that bordered on the apocalyptic. Someone had switched the channel of my life.

The mountains were on fire. At that moment the wind was so strong that much of the smoke was lying down, the flames blown almost parallel to the ground. It didn't look like a movie. I could smell it.

Confronted by the immediacy of destruction, technology is the first thing that flies. I was reduced to tossing bits of dried weed into the air to check the direction of the wind. You think: water, family, pets. What do I put in the car first? By then the mass of orange-brown smoke had taken over the north sky.

Move, your mind tells you. Yet you can't stop staring. If you stare at it long enough, perhaps it will go away.

But the monster doesn't go away. It burns north-northeast, luckily almost directly away from our house. It burns right into the backyards of some homes, but no structures are lost, no lives are lost, thanks to the coordination of multiple fire units.

Among the best of these, the front-line fighters, are the Hotshots. They're the best trained, the best conditioned, the hardest working of all. They go right up to the fire line, and sometimes into it.

On Sunday they showed up to fight another fire, near the small, picturesque town of Yarnell, some thirty miles southwest of here. At first it wasn't a big fire, nor was it considered a dangerous one.

But a monsoon blew up. The southwest monsoon is not technically a monsoon, but that's what we call it. Rain poured down in Prescott—welcome, drenching rain. Out in front of the storm, however, winds rose, turned erratic.

The fire essentially flipped over a team of Hotshots, the Granite Mountain Hotshots, from Prescott. Nineteen of them died, the worst loss of firefighter life in a wildland fire in Arizona's history, the worst in the country in eighty years. The greatest tragedy to strike the firefighting profession since 9/11.

I did not know any of them personally, but based on the group photo that has been widely distributed, I think some of them went to my gym. It's strange to think I won't see them again. Small blank spaces in one's existence that used to be occupied by actual people.

Terrible calamity, the television anchors keep repeating. Horrible tragedy. If you live here, you don't need those words. You call those you know No place is safe. Not on this planet.
to make sure they’re O.K. You meet people in the drugstore, on the street. A
knowing look, a regretful nod convey all that needs to be said. People living
in proximity to disaster don’t shout; they just prepare in case it turns and
comes for them.

Two major fires in two weeks. Why stay there, people who live else-
where must wonder as they watch such tragedies unfold. Why not move
someplace where you don’t spend every summer wondering if your house
is going to burn down.

Why do humans live on the slopes of active volcanoes? Why do they
live atop major earthquake faults? Why on earth do people continue to
dwell, year after year, in a part of the country called Tornado Alley?

Because such places are beautiful, are peaceful, and, for better or worse,
are home. No place is safe. Not on this planet. So you choose your home for
what you love about it, and not what you fear. If we let fear dictate where we
should live, we would all end up huddled together in one great shivering
ball of humanity, and that wouldn’t be safe, either.

The Doce fire could have been infinitely worse. All it would have taken
was a shift in the wind. Yarnell is still burning. But I have to go feed the
cowboys and the hummingbirds, maybe shoo away a too-curious coyote.
This is my home, and I’ll deal with Mother Nature’s dark side when and if it
comes my way. As must we all.

Comprehension

1. Why was Foster confused when he first saw the fire from his study
window?

2. In paragraph 7, Foster says, “Confronted by the immensity of destruc-
tion, technology is the first thing that flees.” What does he mean?

3. What immediate response did Foster have as he looked at the fire from
the hill behind his house? In what sense is his reaction a paradox?

4. Who are the Granite Mountain Hotshots?

5. Foster observes that people who live “in proximity to disaster don’t
shout” (15). What do they do instead? Why?

6. According to Foster, why do people choose to live in areas that are prone
to natural disasters?

Purpose and Audience

1. What is Foster’s thesis? How would you restate it in your own words?
What do you think he wants his essay to accomplish?

2. At several points in the essay, Foster asks rhetorical questions. What do
these questions suggest about Foster’s view of his audience?

3. Why do you think Foster includes the story of the Granite Mountain Hot-
shots? How does it support his overall purpose?
4. What do you think Foster hopes to accomplish in his essay's last two sentences? Do you think he is successful?

Style and Structure

1. Foster begins his essay with an analogy. Is this an appropriate opening strategy? Why or why not?
2. In paragraph 15, Foster writes, "If you live here, you don't need those words." To which words is he referring?
3. Vocabulary Project. When Foster sees the fire from a hill near his house, the view "bordered on the apocalyptic" (5). What does apocalyptic mean? Do you think the choice of this word is appropriate, or does the word seem overdratic? Explain.
4. How would you describe Foster's attitude toward the fire and its consequences? Fearful? Angry? Exhilarated? How does he convey this attitude to the reader?

Journal Entry

In this essay, Foster writes about the experience of confronting the "immediacy of destruction" (7). Have you ever had an experience of this kind? Even if you have not witnessed disaster or tragedy on a grand scale, have you ever confronted a scene or situation that "switched the channel" (5) in your life? If so, how did you respond? Did you learn anything from the experience?

Writing Workshop

1. In paragraphs 16 and 17, Foster asks several rhetorical questions about people (like himself) who choose to live in areas prone to natural disasters. Consider the dangers — from nature or from other factors — that have threatened you (or that you think might threaten you in the future) in the place where you live. Then, write a narrative essay about a danger that you have faced (or might face) in your home or neighborhood.
2. Working with Sources. As the headnote explains, Foster is a fantasy and science-fiction writer. In what sense does this essay incorporate elements of fantasy or science fiction? How could the landscape it describes, and the central "apocalyptic" event, serve as background for a fantasy or science-fiction story? Write a fictional narrative that traces the events Foster describes. If you quote Foster's essay, be sure to cite your source and to include a works-cited page. (See Chapter 18 for information on MLA documentation.)
3. Think about the factors that Foster identifies as important: beauty, peacefulness, and the sense that some places are just "home" (18). Then, consider the power of a natural or man-made disaster to destroy that sense of home. In a narrative essay, write about a disaster that you witnessed or read about. How did this disaster shape (or change) what home means to you?
Combining the Patterns

How does Foster incorporate description into his narrative? Point to specific examples. Given the overall purpose of his essay, do you think Foster might want to limit his use of description and focus more on narrative action? Or should he do just the reverse?

Thematic Connections

- "Ground Zero" (page 175)
- "The Storm" (page 198)
- "A Peaceful Woman Explains Why She Carries a Gun" (page 353)
- "Homeless" (page 510)
George Orwell (1903–1950) was born Eric Blair in Bengal, India, where his father was a British civil servant. Rather than attend university, Orwell joined the Imperial Police in neighboring Burma (now renamed Myanmar), where he served from 1922 to 1927. Finding himself increasingly opposed to British colonial rule, Orwell left Burma to live and write in Paris and London. A political liberal and a fierce moralist, Orwell is best known today for his novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949), which portray the dangers of totalitarianism. In "Shooting an Elephant," written in 1936, he recalls an incident from his days in Burma that clarified his thinking about British colonial rule.

**Background on British imperialism** The British had gradually taken over Burma through a succession of wars beginning in 1824; by 1885, the domination was complete. Like a number of other European countries, Britain had forcibly established colonial rule in countries throughout the world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, primarily to exploit their natural resources. This empire building, known as imperialism, was justified by the belief that European culture was superior to the cultures of the Indigenous peoples, particularly in Asia and Africa. Therefore, imperialist nations claimed, it was "the white man's burden" to bring civilization to these "heathen" lands. In most cases, such control could be achieved only through force. Anti-imperialist sentiment began to grow in the early twentieth century, but colonial rule continued until the mid-twentieth century in much of the less-developed world. Not until the late 1940s did many European colonies begin to gain independence. The British ceded home rule to Burma in 1947.

In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people -- the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans.
All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically — and secretly, of course — I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lockups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos — all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it. * All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj ** as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, *** upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest’s guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.

One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism — the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one morning the sub-inspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful in terrorem. IV Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant’s doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone “must.” IV It had been chained up, as

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* Eds. note — Orwell was writing in 1936, when Hitler and Stalin were in power and World War II was only three years away.
** Eds. note — The former British rule of the Indian subcontinent.
*** Eds. note — From time immemorial.
IV Eds. note — For the purpose of frightening.
V Eds. note — Was in heat, a condition likely to wear off.
tame elephants always are when their attack of “must” is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout,* the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit; but had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours’ journey away, and in the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already destroyed somebody’s bamboo hut, killed a cow, and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van and, when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violence upon it.

The Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm-leaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy, stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began questioning people as to where the elephant had gone, and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of an elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of “Go away, child! Go away this instant!” and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently chasing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming, evidently there was something the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man’s dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie,** almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back, and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast’s foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly to a friend’s house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelt the elephant.

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant

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* Eds. note – A keeper and driver of an elephant.

** Eds. note – An unskilled laborer.
was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant—I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary—and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eighty yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd’s approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant—it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery—and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of “must” was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes—faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun; all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man’s dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those

* Eds. note — Wet land for growing rice.
yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib.* For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives," and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing — no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with the preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a large animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged I could shoot, if he took no notice of me it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steamroller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of "natives"; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on, and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim.

* Eds. note — An official. The term was used among Hindus and Muslims in colonial India.
The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole; actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick — one never does when a shot goes home — but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line on his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunkken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralyzed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time — it might have been five seconds, I dare say — he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skywards like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long raclng gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open — I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.
In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were bringing dahs* and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

Comprehension

1. Why is Orwell “hated by large numbers of people” (1) in Burma? Why does he have mixed feelings toward the Burmese people?
2. Why do the local officials want something done about the elephant? Why does the crowd want Orwell to shoot the elephant?
3. Why does Orwell finally decide to kill the elephant? What makes him hesitate at first?
4. Why does Orwell say at the end he was glad the coolie had been killed?

Purpose and Audience

1. One of Orwell’s purposes in telling his story is to show how it gave him a glimpse of “the real nature of imperialism” (3). What does he mean? How does his essay illustrate this purpose?
2. Do you think Orwell wrote this essay to inform or to persuade his audience? How did Orwell expect his audience to react to his ideas? How can you tell?
3. What is the essay’s thesis?

Style and Structure

1. What does Orwell’s first paragraph accomplish? Where does the introduction end and the narrative itself begin?

* Eds. note – Heavy knives.
2. The essay includes almost no dialogue. Why do you think Orwell’s voice as narrator is the only one readers hear? Is the absence of dialogue a strength or a weakness? Explain.

3. Why do you think Orwell devotes so much attention to the elephant’s misery (11–12)?

4. Orwell’s essay includes a number of editorial comments, which appear within parentheses or dashes. How would you characterize these comments? Why are they set off from the text?

5. Vocabulary Project. Because Orwell is British, he frequently uses words or expressions that an American writer would not likely use. Substitute a contemporary American word or phrase for each of the following, making sure it is appropriate in Orwell’s context.

   raise a riot (1)  rubbish van (3)  a bit of fun (5)
   rang me up (3)  inflicted violences (3)  I dare say (11)

   What other expressions in Orwell’s essay might need to be “translated” for a contemporary American audience?

6. Consider the following statements: “Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another” (4); “Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant” (14). How do these comments reinforce the idea expressed in paragraph 2 (“All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts”)? What other comments reinforce this idea?

Journal Entry

Do you think Orwell is a coward? Do you think he is a racist? Explain your feelings.

Writing Workshop

1. Working with Sources. Orwell says that even though he hated British imperialism and sympathized with the Burmese people, he found himself a puppet of the system. Write a narrative essay about a time when you had to do something that went against your beliefs or convictions. Begin by summarizing Orwell’s situation in Burma, and go on to show how your situation was similar to his. If you quote Orwell, be sure to include documentation and a works-cited page. (See Chapter 18 for information on MLA documentation.)

2. Orwell’s experience taught him something not only about himself but also about something beyond himself – the way British imperialism worked. Write a narrative essay that reveals how an incident in your life taught you something about some larger social or political force as well as about yourself.
3. Write an objective, factual newspaper article recounting the events Orwell describes.

**Combining the Patterns**

Implicit in this narrative essay is an extended *comparison and contrast* that highlights the differences between Orwell and the Burmese people. Review the essay, and list the most obvious differences Orwell perceives between himself and them. Do you think his perceptions are accurate? If all of the differences were set forth in a single paragraph, how might such a paragraph change your perception of Orwell's dilemma? Of his character?

**Thematic Connections**

- “Thirty-Eight Who Saw Murder Didn’t Call the Police” (page 128)
- “Just Walk On By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space” (page 238)
- “The Untouchable” (page 494)