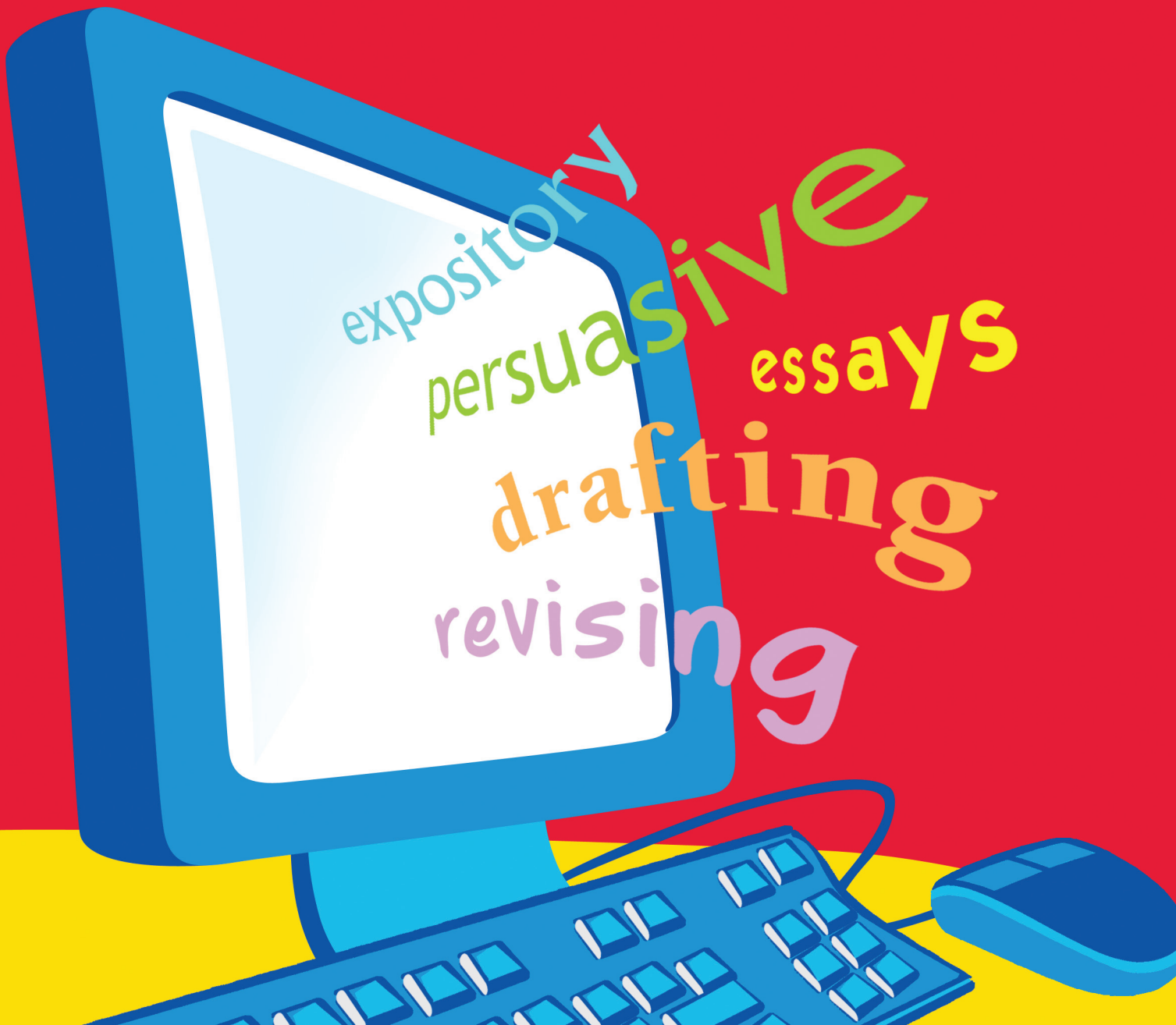
Level C

SADLIER

Writing Workshop



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THE WRITING PROCESS

PREWRITING

Finding an Idea

- Freewrite or brainstorm ideas for a topic.
- Choose and narrow a topic.
- Gather details in a list or a graphic organizer.

Making a Plan

- Define your purpose.
- Know your audience.
- Put your details in order.

DRAFTING

- Concentrate on getting your ideas down—*not* on fixing errors!
- Keep your reader in mind as you write.
- Write a complete beginning, middle, and end.

REVISING

- Review your draft, looking for ways to improve it.
- As you review your draft, focus on five of the six traits of good writing (ideas and content, organization, sentence fluency, word choice, and voice).
- Ask a peer reviewer to give feedback on your draft.

EDITING AND PROOFREADING

- Look for mistakes in the sixth trait of good writing, conventions (grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling).
- Proofread your draft one last time.

PUBLISHING AND PRESENTING

- Write a final version of your paper.
- Share your writing with your audience.

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Chapter 7

WORKSHOP

Writing a Personal Narrative

"You won't believe what happened to me!" When you say this, you are about to tell a personal narrative. A **personal narrative** is a true story about you, told from the first-person point of view (with the pronouns *I* and *me*).

LESSON 1 Choose an Experience to Convey

Choose a topic—an event that happened to you, that matters to you, and that you are willing to share.

Tip

The experiences you are writing about might make you feel joy, fear, tension, or even embarrassment.

An effective topic for a personal narrative. . .

- ✔ consists of just one event, or a series of closely related events
- ✔ is clear enough in your memory for you to recall many vivid details about the people, places, and dialogue
- ✔ brings up feelings that you believe you can express to readers
- ✔ has a beginning, a middle, and an end

A personal narrative can be about a rare experience or a familiar one. Telling the story well, with lots of vivid details, is essential.

Ideas for Your Personal Narrative

- **Going Places:** visiting a national park, taking the train to a ball game, walking your dog early in the morning
- **Memorable Experiences:** meeting your favorite singer, witnessing a storm or a natural disaster, eating the best meal ever, learning a sport or a skill
- **Learning a Lesson:** winning or losing a competition, discovering an important truth about yourself or other people

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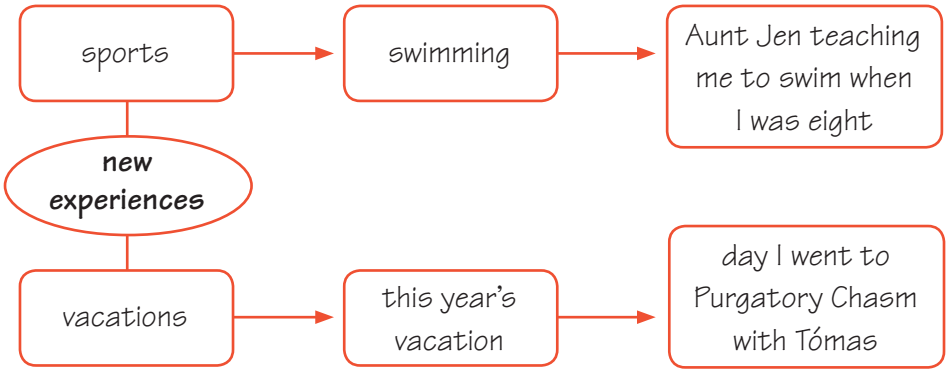
Use a graphic organizer to generate ideas



Notice how the topics this student generated became more specific. Narrowing your topic helps you make your narrative detailed, entertaining, and a reasonable length.

Activity A **Create a graphic organizer like the one above to generate topic ideas for your personal narrative. Write one of these categories in the center oval, or make up a category of your own.**

- favorite childhood memories
- overcoming a fear
- not an ordinary day
- seeing something (or someone) in a new way

Activity B **Based on your answer to Activity A, complete the following statements.**

1. The topic for my personal narrative is _____

_____

2. I believe this topic will work for these reasons: _____

_____

_____

_____

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LESSON 2 Develop Ideas

Writers plan stories. Before you begin drafting, create a Story Map that includes the key points of your personal narrative.

A personal narrative is factual. However, it has many of the same elements as a fictional story. Creating a Story Map will help you decide which details to include and which to leave out.

Tip

Listing events in sequence before you write makes it easier to see if you have left out anything or if events are in the wrong order.

A Story Map includes information about. . .

- ✔ **Topic:** How would you sum up your narrative in ten words or fewer?
- ✔ **Characters:** Who are the people in your narrative?
- ✔ **Setting:** Where and when does the narrative take place?
- ✔ **Plot:** What happens? When does it happen? Why?
- ✔ **Conflict and Resolution:** What problems do the characters face? How are they solved?
- ✔ **Theme:** What lesson or idea about life does your narrative reveal? (Not every personal narrative has a theme.)

Sample Story Map

topic day I went to Purgatory Chasm with Tómas **theme** A boring day can turn exciting.	
main characters me, my mom, my brother, woman in cave	**setting** Purgatory Chasm in Massachusetts, summer
conflict little brother goes into a scary cave and I have to go after him, even though I don't want to	
plot 1. Before the cave: thought trip would be boring, chasm looked amazing, had trouble keeping up with my little brother, Tómas 2. In the cave: entered; cool, shadowy, musty; tight squeeze ahead; didn't want to follow Tómas, afraid of getting stuck 3. Out of the cave: air smelled really good, Tómas already on to the next adventure	
resolution of conflict I overcame my fear because I had to keep up with Tómas and found out the cave was fabulous.	

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Activity A

Look back at your answers for Lesson 1, Activity B. Develop your ideas on the same topic by answering these questions.

1. Where does your narrative take place? What would someone in that place see, hear, feel, smell, and (possibly) taste?

_____

_____

2. Who are the people or animals in your narrative? Name them, and describe how they look, sound, and act.

_____

_____

3. What dialogue (spoken words) can you include? Think about the specific phrases or words the people used and how their voices sounded.

_____

_____

4. What theme or message does your narrative have?

_____

_____

Activity B

Create a Story Map like the one on page 69. Map your narrative, listing events in the order in which they occurred. Think about which details you will include and which you will leave out.

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LESSON 3 Show, Don't Tell

Use sensory details and dialogue to show your reader what your characters are thinking and feeling.

Tip

When writing dialogue, put quotation marks around a person's exact words. Begin a new paragraph for each new speaker.

Writing that *tells* often sounds immature and boring. Writing that *shows* makes your reader want to keep reading.

Telling My mother said we would all go to Purgatory Chasm. I didn't want to go. I didn't know what a chasm was.

Showing When my mother announced we would *all* go to Purgatory Chasm for a family outing, I complained, "I'm not interested in visiting a chasm." At the same time, I was thinking, "What is a chasm, anyway?"

Try These Techniques

Add Dialogue "You'll have fun hiking trails," she reassured me, "and Tómas will learn a lot from watching you."

Use Strong, Unusual Verbs After we parked, Tómas bulldozed out of the car.

Include Sensory Language Up ahead, huge slabs of rough rock leaned against one another at odd angles, as if a giant had smashed a mountain with a colossal ax.

Describe Characters' Gestures and Reactions Glancing back, I saw my mother, her face horrified and her finger pointing at Tómas.

You are the expert on the people, places, and events that make up your personal narrative. Add details and dialogue to give your reader a "you are there" feeling.

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Activity A

Use sensory words and vivid language to rewrite each general statement as two or three short sentences on a separate sheet of paper.

1. I watched the dance with interest.
2. The Eagles broke the tie and won the game.
3. The meal was delicious.
4. We escaped unnoticed.
5. It was a hot day.
6. I was in charge of lighting for the school play.
7. She hated the beach because she couldn't swim.
8. A new restaurant just opened.
9. Boats filled the harbor.
10. The thunderstorm was scary.

Activity B

Use dialogue to rewrite each general statement. Begin a new paragraph with each new speaker. Write your dialogue on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The members discussed the problem.
2. The pet had destroyed the place.
3. We thought we heard something.

Activity C

On a separate sheet of paper, draft your personal narrative. Use the Story Map you created in Lesson 2 to guide you. Remember to show, not tell, as you write.

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LESSON 4 Lead the Reader

Tip

Make sure to tell all parts of your narrative from the first-person point of view. If you switch points of view, it will confuse the reader.

Entice your reader to keep reading by providing a clear structure and using transition words to indicate chronological order.

Your personal narrative needs a clear beginning, a middle, and an end. Remember that you are telling the reader a story.

Structure of a Personal Narrative

- ✔ The **beginning** sets the stage. You introduce characters, describe the setting, and present the first actions.
- ✔ The **middle** leads your reader through the events. Remember to include transition words that show chronological order, or time order. After all, you know the order of events, but your reader doesn't.
- ✔ The **end** brings your story to a satisfying close. You might present a solution for the central problem of the narrative, or you can include a surprise ending. Also, you might reflect on why the narrative's events are significant to you.

In this chapter, you have already read the beginning and the middle of a personal narrative of a trip to Purgatory Chasm. Read on to find out how the narrative ends.

Transition words show chronological order.

When I reached the top, I could see a cave that led down between two rocks. Tómas snapped on his flashlight and leaped for the opening. "Don't go too far," I warned.

At first, the cave thrilled me. It was wide open, with sunlight sprinkling through the side vents. The dark rocks felt cool. As we walked deeper into the cave, shadows flickered on the walls. The air felt musty. The cave grew smaller.

"Let's go back the way we came," I squeaked.

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Tómas would not listen.

Dialogue helps the reader understand the action and the characters' feelings.

"I can't fit through that hole, Tómas," I whimpered. It looked like a mole tunnel. But it was too late to turn back. From behind me, another visitor's flashlight blazed at the hole, the only way forward.

"Move along!" she yelped. "You're not afraid you're too big are you?"

I asked, "Ma'am, does this tunnel lead out?"

"Well, it's our only hope." She laughed—at least I think she did. Tómas slipped through easily. I tried to breathe, but the roof pressed against my chest and the floor squeezed my back as I edged through. Behind us, I could hear the woman grunting as she scraped through the hole.

The ending resolves the conflict and adds a humorous twist.

Suddenly, around a bend, sunbeams slanted overhead. I nudged Tómas through a wide chamber. At last, I emerged, my eyes blinking uncomfortably. The air was fresh. I smiled at Tómas, but he wasn't around. Twenty feet ahead, he was crossing a fault ridge, straddled with one foot on one side and one on the other. Oh, brother!

Activity A

Reread the rough draft you wrote in Lesson 3. Revise your draft to make it clearer and more appealing to your reader. Use these points to guide you.

- The narrative has a clear beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Events are in chronological order.
- Transition words help the reader understand connections between events.

Activity B

Trade papers with a classmate. Review and discuss each other's narratives. Find three things to praise in your partner's work. For instance, you might point out exciting dialogue or clearly described action. Then find one or two elements that could be improved.

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WORKSHOP

Writing Model

An excellent personal narrative. . .

- ✔ focuses on a single event or series of related events and includes the writer's feelings about what happened
- ✔ features sensory details, rich description, and dialogue
- ✔ has a well-organized beginning, middle, and end
- ✔ includes characters, setting, plot, conflict, and theme

Below is one writer's personal narrative.

The narrative begins with an attention-getting introduction.

When my mother announced that *all* of us would spend Saturday at Purgatory Chasm State Reservation, I rolled my eyes. "I'm not interested in visiting a chasm," I whined. At the same time, I was thinking, "What's a chasm, anyway?"

Dialogue helps set the scene and moves the action along.

"You'll have fun hiking trails," she assured me, "and Tómas will learn from watching his older brother—that being you." I could see that I was destined to go along, whether I wanted to or not.

On Saturday morning, I woke up to Tómas's whistling. His overexcitement just made me dread the trip more. The drive there didn't help. It felt much longer than an hour thanks to my little brother's knock-knock jokes. He didn't stop until we finally arrived at the park. As soon as we parked, Tómas bulldozed out of the car. He tripped on a rock, popped up, and brushed himself off. "Let's go!" he cried and took off running.

The writer develops the other characters in the narrative through describing their words and actions.

Up ahead, huge slabs of rough rock leaned against one another at odd angles, as if a giant had smashed a mountain with a huge hammer. The sun felt warm on my skin, and the air smelled fresh. "I didn't think this place would look so awesome," I admitted to my mom, but she had a horrified look on her face. She was pointing at something, and I turned to look. That's when I saw Tómas far ahead, scrambling up a ledge that I was sure led to a drop off a cliff.

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continued

"Hold on, Tómas," I shouted as coolly as possible. Tómas disappeared. My heart seemed to stop, and then it started pounding furiously. Suddenly, Tómas popped up again, waving excitedly. I called again for him to wait and ran toward him.

Tómas had found an opening that led down between two rocks. He made sure I was behind him, and then he scrambled in. "Don't go too far," I warned as I followed him carefully.

With sensory details, dialogue, and humor, the writer builds tension in these paragraphs.

At first, the cave thrilled me. It was wide open, with sunlight sprinkling through the side vents. The dark rocks felt cool. As we walked deeper into the cave, shadows flickered on the walls. As I followed Tómas farther, though, the air started to feel musty. The space between rocks got smaller. "Let's turn back," I squeaked.

Tómas kept going. "I can't fit through!" I whimpered. But it was too late to turn back. From behind me, another visitor's flashlight blazed at the hole, the only way forward.

"Well, it's our only hope," the woman behind me laughed. At least, I think she did. Tómas slipped through easily. I tried to breathe, but the roof pressed against my chest and the floor squeezed my back as I edged through. Behind us, I could hear the woman grunting as she scraped through the hole. I had trouble catching my breath, but I squeezed ahead.

Suddenly around a bend, sunbeams slanted overhead. I nudged Tómas through a wide chamber. At last, I emerged, my eyes blinking uncomfortably and my heart pounding.

The narrative concludes with relief and humor.

I started to smile at Tómas until I realized he wasn't around. Twenty feet ahead, he was teetering along a log bridge over a ravine. Oh, brother!

Assignment

Now write your own personal narrative. Use your draft as a guide, but make whatever changes are needed to improve your paper.

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