

# Narrative writing

tells a story about real or imaginary events.



**H**i, my name is Sasha. I want to learn all I can about narrative writing! When I go camping, I like to take notes about all the different things in nature that I see. I also try to learn about the history of the area. Then I use my notes to write histories, scientific observations, or even mysteries and plays. Once I learn how to write my observations and descriptions in a way that is clear, my stories will be even better!

## IN THIS UNIT

- Personal Narrative
- Fable
- Mystery

LITERATURE CONNECTION

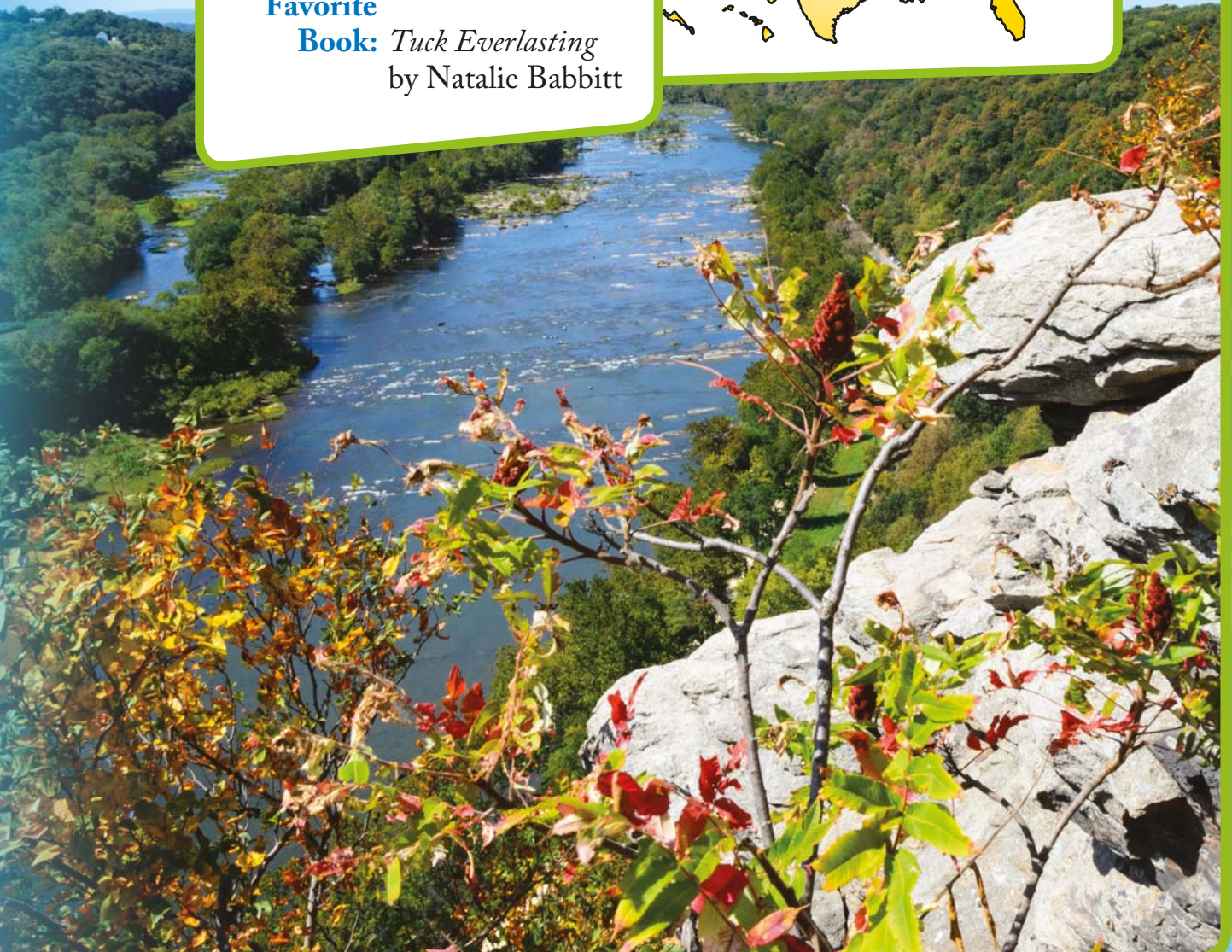
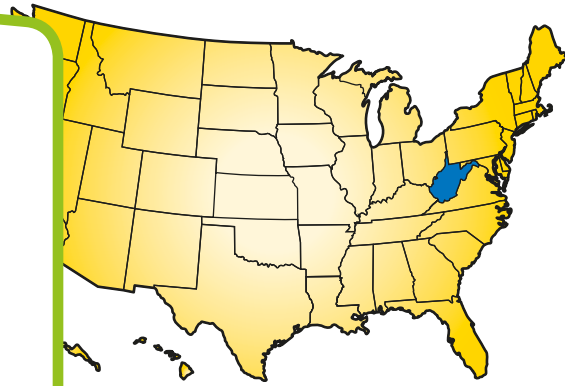
▶ Play

**Name:** Sasha

**Home:** West Virginia

**Favorite  
Activities:** camping and  
swimming

**Favorite  
Book:** *Tuck Everlasting*  
by Natalie Babbitt



# What's a Personal Narrative?

It's a true story that I write about something that happened in my life.

## What's in a Personal Narrative?

### Voice

My writing voice gives my story emotion. It's the mood I want to share with my audience. My tone might be unhappy, suspenseful, scary, or hilarious.

### Character(s)

Characters are the people I include in my story. My story has a narrator, me, telling about a personal experience I had. I may also include other characters.

### Plot

Plot is the action or sequence of events in a story. The plot has a beginning, a middle part, and an ending.

### Setting

Setting is when and where my story takes place. It could be yesterday at home or last summer at the zoo. But no matter what the setting, using vivid words will bring my story to life!



# Why write a Personal Narrative?

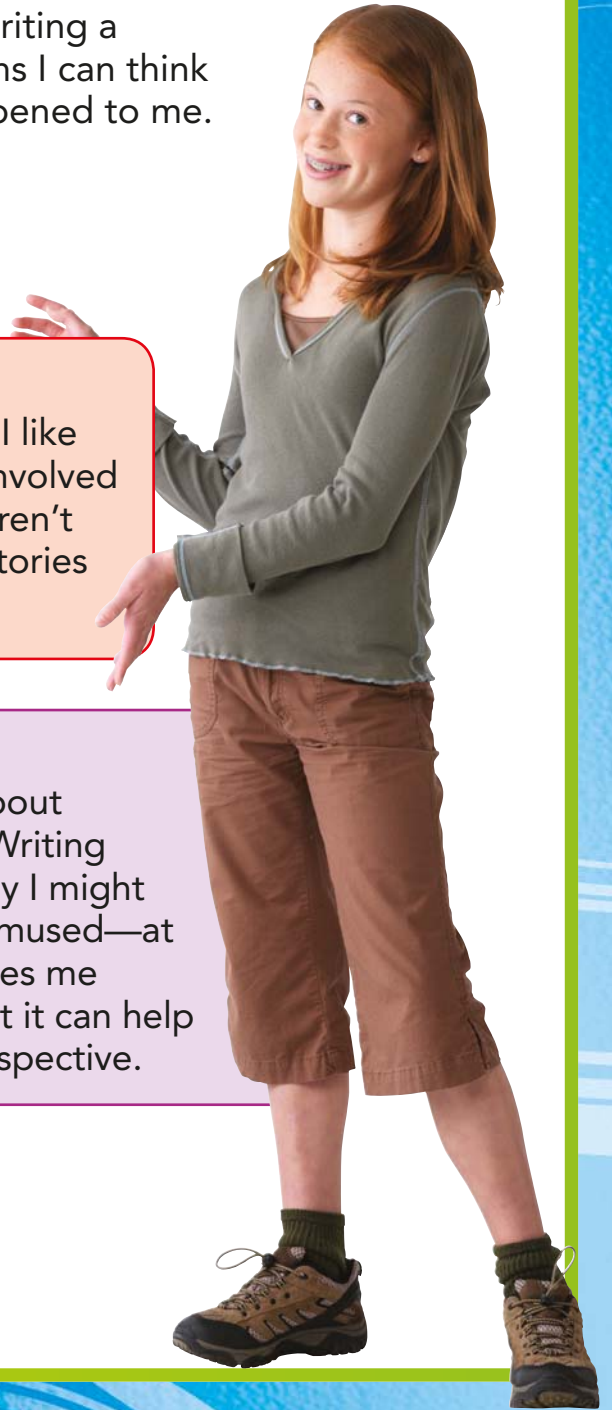
People have all kinds of reasons for writing a personal narrative. Here are some reasons I can think of for writing about something that happened to me.

## Entertainment

A story is even better when it's shared. I like writing a story so that my readers get involved in the experience even though they weren't there when it happened. I like writing stories that my friends would enjoy reading.

## Personal Reflection

Sometimes I feel mixed emotions about something that happens in my life. Writing about it can help me understand why I might feel happy and sad—or upset and amused—at the same time. If an experience leaves me confused or frustrated, writing about it can help me think it through and put it in perspective.



# Linking Narrative Writing Traits to a Personal Narrative

In this chapter, you will write a story about an experience you want to share. This type of narrative writing is called a personal narrative. Sasha will guide you through the stages of the writing process: Prewrite, Draft, Revise, Edit, and Publish. In each stage, Sasha will show you important writing strategies that are linked to the Narrative Writing Traits below.

## Narrative Writing Traits

### Ideas

- a clear, focused topic, experience, or series of events
- memorable details that bring the characters, plot, and setting to life

### Organization

- events told in the order they happened
- an interesting beginning and a satisfying ending
- transitions that signal the sequence of events

### Voice

- a voice and tone that are ideal for telling a story
- dialogue that, when used, gives voice to the characters

### Word Choice

- precise words that describe the characters, plot, and setting

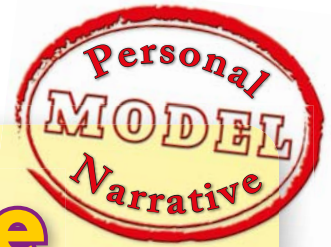
### Sentence Fluency

- sentences that have flow and rhythm, making them enjoyable to read aloud

### Conventions

- no or few errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling

Before you write, read Jackie Haley's personal narrative on the next three pages. Then use the personal narrative rubric on pages 10–11 to decide how well she did. (You might want to look back at What's in a Personal Narrative? on page 4, too!)



# Don't Call Me Goldilocks

by Jackie Haley

narrator

Do you have a nickname? I do, and it's an absolutely horrible one. Everybody calls me Goldilocks! It wouldn't be so bad if I had blond, curly hair and fair skin. However, my hair is black, and my skin is dark. So how did I get this nickname? It all started on a family vacation at Yellowstone National Park.

beginning

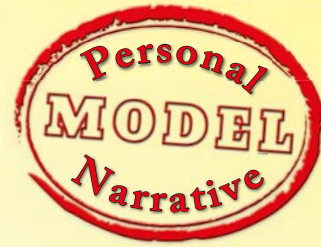
setting

Yellowstone is spectacular. It has towering waterfalls, dramatic canyons, crystal-clear lakes, bubbling pools of boiling water and colorful mud, and incredible geysers that shoot steam and hot water high into the air. The wildlife is definitely not tame, and animals wander freely throughout the park. You can see lumbering bison, stately elk, soaring eagles, cutthroat trout, and graceful trumpeter swans. Naturally, Yellowstone also has bears.

vivid words

plot

On our first day at Yellowstone, my parents decided to plan all of our daily excursions. While they studied hiking and geological maps, I went outside for a walk. They told me to stay near the lodge; they also warned me about the bears. However, I wandered off, following a stream into a wooded area. It was cool, quiet, and dark underneath the trees. I was really enjoying my walk until I heard a loud snap!



I jerked my head in the direction of the noise, but I didn't see a thing. Then the leaves rustled, and I saw something move. When I finally saw what it was, I froze on the spot. Three grizzly bears were looking right at me. The first bear was huge and looked ferocious. The second bear was not quite as large, and the third was a baby bear that would have looked cuddly—in a zoo!

I couldn't move a muscle, but my mind was racing. What did my parents say about bears? How was I supposed to get away from them? I tried to calm down. The bears didn't look too unhappy; that was good. I remembered that Mom said bears have a good sense of smell and bad eyesight. I hoped I didn't smell too good, and I really hoped they couldn't see me very well. She had also said that bears could run over 30 miles per hour. I took a deep breath and decided that I was in serious trouble.

I don't know how long I stood there, but it seemed like forever. I was starting to panic when I heard a low voice say, "Stay calm. I'm right behind you." I cannot tell you how happy I was to hear Dad's voice! He said not to look at the bears; he told me to back away quietly and carefully. As I moved backward very slowly, I knew the three bears were watching me closely.

middle part

character



After several long minutes, Dad said, "I think we're okay now, so turn around and follow me. Don't say a word until I do." When we reached the clearing, he grabbed me and hugged me. "What were you thinking?" he asked in a voice that shook a little. "You could have been killed!"

What could I say? I glanced back and breathed a long sigh of relief. The bears weren't anywhere in sight.

As we hurried toward the lodge, Dad turned to me and said, "Guess we'll have to call you Goldilocks from now on. You could have gotten into a lot of trouble with those three bears today." I sighed; I knew what was coming. Dad went in and announced to everyone that he had saved me. He described the three bears and my predicament in great detail and with elaborate gestures. I got lots of hugs and lectures that afternoon, and, unfortunately, I also got a nickname.

ending

voice



# Personal Narrative Rubric

Use this rubric to analyze the model. Then use it to plan and score your own personal narrative.

	6	5	4	
<b>Ideas</b>	The story shares the narrator's experience. Sensory details convey the experiences and events precisely.	The story shares the narrator's experience. Details help convey the experiences and events.	The story is mostly about the narrator's experience. Including more details would clarify and strengthen the story.	
<b>Organization</b>	The events are arranged in a sequence that unfolds naturally. The story has a beginning that grabs the reader and an ending that satisfies.	The events are arranged logically. The story has a beginning, a middle, and an ending.	Most of the story's events are sequenced logically. A beginning, middle, and ending are present, but the beginning or ending is weak.	
<b>Voice</b>	The writer maintains a narrative voice that connects with the reader.	The writer uses a narrative voice that connects with the reader most of the time.	The writer's voice connects with the reader at the beginning but fades as the story goes along.	
<b>Word Choice</b>	The story uses precise, vivid words and descriptive language.	The story uses descriptive words to enhance the story.	The story uses descriptive words, but some are overused or imprecise.	
<b>Sentence Fluency</b>	Varied sentence structures flow smoothly. Prepositional phrases connect important details.	The writing is smooth, easy to read, and many prepositional phrases connect details.	The writing uses some sentence structure variation. More prepositional phrases would help better connect details.	
<b>Conventions</b>	All sentences are correct. The reader has no problem understanding the message.	The writer mostly uses conventional devices to enhance meaning.	Minor errors do not confuse meaning but require slight editing.	

**+ Presentation** White space helps organize the text on the page.

	3	2	1	
	The story can be inferred, but some details are unclear, missing, or irrelevant.	The story is unclear and needs to be developed. Very few details are included.	The writer's experience is not clear or focused. It is not a story yet.	<b>Ideas</b>
	The time order of several details should be clarified or rearranged. There is no clear distinction between the beginning, middle, and ending.	Many details seem to be out of place or missing. The beginning does not connect to the ending.	The events are not in time order and do not tell a story.	<b>Organization</b>
	The writer's voice fades in and out. The reader has to work to stay interested.	The writer's voice needs to connect with the reader more and match the story's action.	The writer's voice is absent and does not connect with the reader at all.	<b>Voice</b>
	The story would be clearer with more descriptive words. Many words are vague or misleading.	The story contains too many general or overused words.	The story lacks energy due to vague or dull words and random word choice.	<b>Word Choice</b>
	More sentence variety is needed. More prepositional phrases are needed. Many sentences are choppy.	Sentence structure variety is limited. The writing is choppy and difficult to read.	Sentences do not flow smoothly. Some may be incorrect or incomplete. Very few prepositional phrases are used.	<b>Sentence Fluency</b>
	Several errors throughout the writing are distracting and impair readability and meaning.	Many errors throughout the story force the reader to reread. The meaning is difficult to follow.	The writer is not in control of the grammar, spelling, or usage.	<b>Conventions</b>

See Appendix for 4-, 5-, and 6-point narrative rubrics.

# Using the Rubric to Analyze the Model

Personal Narrative

Did you notice that the model on pages 7–9 points out some key elements of a personal narrative? As she wrote “Don’t Call Me Goldilocks,” Jackie Haley used these elements to help her describe a personal experience. She also used the 6-point rubric on pages 10–11 to plan, draft, revise, and edit the writing. A rubric is a great tool to evaluate writing during the writing process.

Now let’s use the same rubric to score the model. To do this, we’ll focus on each trait separately, starting with Ideas. We’ll use the top descriptor for each trait (column 6), along with examples from the model, to help us understand how the traits work together. How would you score Jackie on each trait?

## Ideas

- The story shares the narrator’s experience.
- Sensory details convey the experiences and events precisely.

As Jackie begins her story, she includes so many memorable sensory details I can’t help but feel excited to find out just how she got her nickname. She certainly makes it clear exactly how she feels!

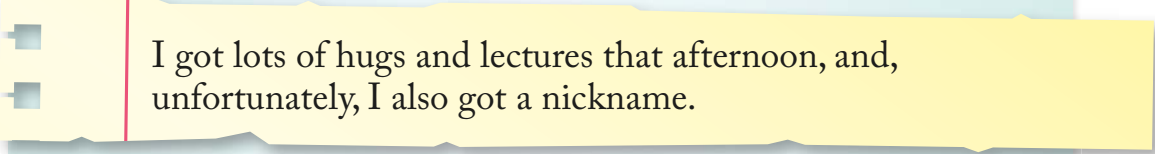
Do you have a nickname? I do, and it’s an absolutely horrible one. Everybody calls me Goldilocks! It wouldn’t be so bad if I had blond, curly hair and fair skin. However, my hair is black, and my skin is dark.



## Organization

- The events are arranged in a sequence that unfolds naturally.
- The story has a beginning that grabs the reader and an ending that satisfies.

Jackie carefully organizes the events of her story in a natural way that's easy to follow. Her beginning caught my attention, the middle explained the whole story, and at the end I was relieved to learn that nothing had been hurt except Jackie's pride.



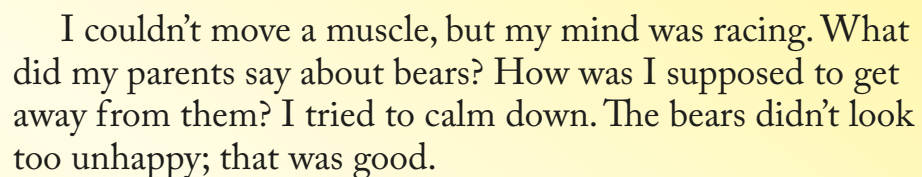
I got lots of hugs and lectures that afternoon, and, unfortunately, I also got a nickname.



## Voice

- The writer maintains a narrative voice that connects with the reader.

Jackie uses a friendly and energetic voice throughout her story. It's so easy to connect with her writing and stay interested until the end. I could almost "hear" her in my mind, wondering how to deal with the bears.



I couldn't move a muscle, but my mind was racing. What did my parents say about bears? How was I supposed to get away from them? I tried to calm down. The bears didn't look too unhappy; that was good.

Personal Narrative

## Using the Rubric to Analyze the Model

### Word Choice

- The story uses precise, vivid words and descriptive language.

Jackie uses vivid words like “crystal-clear lakes” and “bubbling pools of boiling water” to help me picture the scenery. I especially liked her descriptions of the animals.

Three grizzly bears were looking right at me. The first bear was huge and looked ferocious. The second bear was not quite as large, and the third was a baby bear that would have looked cuddly—in a zoo!

### Sentence Fluency

- Varied sentence structures flow smoothly.
- Prepositional phrases connect important details.

Jackie uses prepositional phrases like *on the spot* and *in a zoo* to add important details. Otherwise, all her sentences would be too vague. Notice how the prepositional phrases strengthen her story.

They told me to stay near the lodge; they also warned me about the bears. However, I wandered off, following a stream into a wooded area. It was cool, quiet, and dark underneath the trees. I was really enjoying my walk until I heard a loud snap!

## Conventions

- All sentences are correct.
- The reader has no problem understanding the message.

Jackie is careful to spell, punctuate, and capitalize correctly in her story. She has written some long sentences, but she is careful not to run any sentences together.

I jerked my head in the direction of the noise, but I didn't see a thing. Then the leaves rustled, and I saw something move.

**+Presentation** White space helps organize the text on the page.

## My Turn!

Now it's my turn to write a personal narrative! I'll use the 6-point rubric on pages 10–11 and good writing strategies to help me. Read along to see how I do it.

## Prewrite

Focus on

Ideas

**The Rubric Says** The story shares the narrator's experience.

**Writing Strategy** Look at photographs to get ideas.

How do I decide what to write about for my personal narrative? My teacher says we should pick an experience that we remember really well. It can be a funny experience, or even a sad one. I've been on lots of thrilling river rafting trips, and I think I'd like to write about one of them, but which one?

I looked through our family photos, and I saw a whole bunch of pictures that reminded me of things my family has done together. I found a picture taken after my first rafting trip, which didn't go very smoothly. In the photo our whole family is dripping wet, but we're all smiling. Our adventure will make a great personal narrative!

### Write

Think about some interesting experiences you've had. Look through photographs to refresh your memory. Then make a list of events you'd like to write about.



# Prewrite

Focus on **Organization**

**The Rubric Says** The events are arranged in a sequence that unfolds naturally.

**Writing Strategy** Use a Storyboard to organize ideas.

The rubric tells me that the events in my story need to be in a natural order. The action should have a definite beginning, middle, and ending. I think a Storyboard would help me organize my story. I'll draw pictures of what happened on our rafting trip.

## Writer's Term

### Storyboard

A **Storyboard** is a series of pictures. The pictures show the main events of a story in the order in which they happen.

## Storyboard



## Analyze

How did Sasha organize the four events on her Storyboard?

## Write

Make your own Storyboard. Be sure to show events in the order they happened.



## Draft

Focus on

Ideas

**The Rubric Says** Sensory details convey the experiences and events precisely.

**Writing Strategy** Collect memorable details.

### Writer's Term

#### Sensory Details

**Sensory details** tell what the writer saw, heard, tasted, felt, or smelled. These types of details help a writer share precisely what an experience was like for him or her.

I think I'm ready to draft my story now. I can use my Storyboard to help me remember details about my first rafting trip.

The rubric says I also need to include sensory details. Sensory details will help my readers feel the cold water and hear the waves. I want them to be as shocked as I was when the raft turned over. I want them to feel dripping wet!

As I write, I won't worry too much about mistakes. I'll do my best with grammar and spelling, but I can fix mistakes later.



## Proofreading Marks

- ☐ Indent
- ≡ Make uppercase
- / Make lowercase
- ^ Add something
- ℓ Take out something
- ⊙ Add a period
- ¶ New paragraph
- SP Spelling error

sensory  
details

**[DRAFT]**

### Famous Last Words

The day was supposed to be relaxing. That's what Dad said as the family left the house. I was nine years old, and this was my first rafting trip. The plan was to raft down **the calmer part** of the New River. Mom and I would enjoy the ride and get some sun Dad was going to fish. He promised that we would go rafting on **rougher rapids** someday, but I needed to get some experience on calmer water. Then he said those words again: "We're going to have a **relaxing day.**"

When we got to the New River, Dad rented a yellow raft and two paddles. Mom and Dad's task was to steer the raft; my task was simply to sit there and enjoy the ride. Each of us wore rafting clothes. We also wore helmets and life jackets.

We started down the river. We moved through some small waves that were as easy to handle as taking candy from a baby. Next, we came to a narrow channel where the water moved more swiftly. Finally, we came to a place where the river was as smooth as glass. Dad handed me the paddle and said, "You hold this awhile. I'm going to fish."

### Analyze

What do the sensory details at the beginning of Sasha's draft tell you about her feelings?

### Write

Use your Storyboard to write your first draft. Be sure to include sensory details.

## Revise

Focus on **Organization**

**The Rubric Says** The story has a beginning that grabs the reader and an ending that satisfies.

**Writing Strategy** Connect the beginning of a story to the ending.

I looked back at the rubric after I finished my draft. It says that my beginning should grab the reader. I want my story to really pull readers in, but I'm not sure my beginning does that. It sounds a little dull. I'll add my thoughts to put the reader in my shoes.

### Writer's Term

#### Beginning

The **beginning** of a story grabs the reader's attention. It makes the reader eager for the story to unfold.

attention-grabbing  
detail

**[DRAFT]**

Was he ever wrong!

Then he said those words again: "We're going to have a relaxing day." ^

### Write

Be sure the beginning of your draft hooks the reader. Add an attention-grabbing detail that will make the reader eager to hear more.

The rubric also says I need to end my story in a satisfying way. I want my readers to know that our river mishap ended just fine. Even though I fell in the water like I'd feared, I did not get hurt. I'd like my ending to be funny and to tie into the title and my beginning. Do you think this ending will work?



### Writer's Term

#### Ending

The **ending** ties up loose ends and often reveals something a character learns from the experience.

By the time we got home that night, we were completely exhausted.

Our clothes were still damp, our bruises were beginning to ache, and we didn't have a single fish. We were all smiling, though. Every time one of us mentioned our "relaxing day," we snorted with laughter. Mom called Dad's promise of a relaxing day his "famous last words." Perhaps he should have said, "This will be a day we'll never forget!"

connects to beginning

### Analyze

How did Sasha connect the beginning and the ending of her story? What is the effect?

### Write

Revise the ending of your story so that it is satisfying and ties back to the beginning.

## Revise

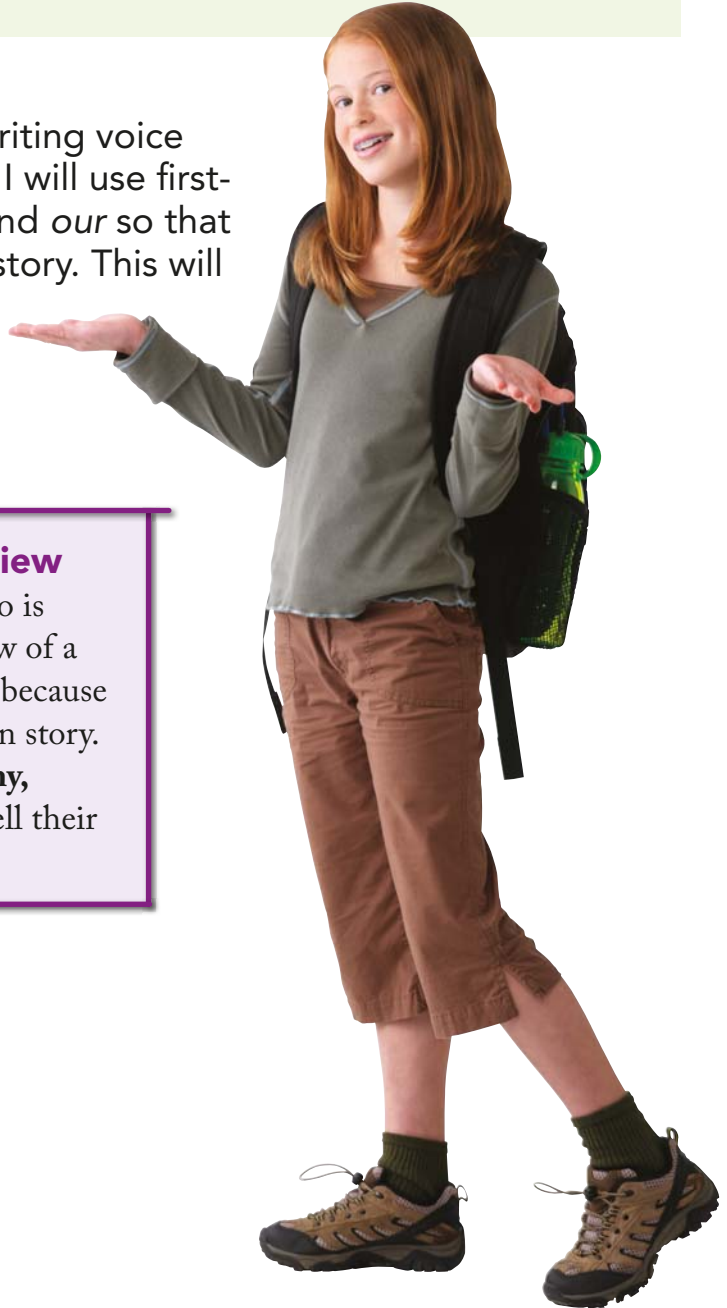
Focus on

Voice

**The Rubric Says** The writer maintains a narrative voice that connects with the reader.

**Writing Strategy** Use the first-person point of view.

According to the rubric, my writing voice should connect with my readers. I will use first-person pronouns such as *I*, *we*, and *our* so that my readers know that I'm in the story. This will really help my readers connect with me as I tell my tale!



### Writer's Term

#### First-Person Point of View

**Point of view** tells the reader who is telling the story. The point of view of a personal narrative is **first person** because the writer is telling his or her own story. Narrators use the words **I**, **me**, **my**, **mine**, **we**, **us**, **our**, and **ours** to tell their story in the first person.

first-person  
point of view

**[DRAFT]**

"We're going to have a relaxing day."

~~The day was supposed to be relaxing.~~ That's what Dad said as  
we the family left the house. I was nine years old, and this was my first  
rafting trip. Our The plan was to raft down the calmer part of the New River.  
Mom and I would enjoy the ride and get some sun Dad was going to fish.

## Analyze

How do you know Sasha was telling a story about her own experience? Point out the words that reveal her point of view.

## Write

Make sure you tell your story from the first-person point of view. Use first-person pronouns, such as *I*, *we*, and *our*.

## Revise

Focus on **Word Choice**

**The Rubric Says** The story uses precise, vivid words and descriptive language.

**Writing Strategy** Replace clichés and overused words with precise, descriptive language.



My readers won't get a good sense of the story if I use clichés and overused words. Instead, I'll use a thesaurus. It will help me replace dull words with vivid ones and clichés with original language.

### Writer's Term

#### Cliché

A **cliché** is a phrase that has been used over and over, such as **as smart as a fox** or **few and far between**.

#### Overused Words

**Overused words** include **said, beautiful, nice, or good**. They should be replaced with words that have more meaning, such as **whispered** or **mumbled**.

**[DRAFT]**

paddled

gentle

We ~~moved~~ through some ~~small~~ waves that were ~~as~~ easy to handle  
as taking candy from a baby.

more precise words

took out a cliché

### Write

Replace dull words in your story with original, vivid descriptions.

# Edit

## Focus on Conventions

**The Rubric Says** All sentences are correct. The reader has no problem understanding the message.

**Writing Strategy** Use conjunctions to fix run-on sentences.

I'm finally ready to check my draft for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The rubric also reminds me to check my sentences. Look at how I fixed run-on sentences by adding a comma and a conjunction.



### Writer's Term

#### Run-on Sentences

A **run-on sentence** happens when two sentences are joined by no punctuation at all.

**[DRAFT]**

, and

Dad threw his line into the water he immediately caught a fish. It



, and

was a small-mouth bass. He cast his line again soon he had a muskie.



created a compound sentence

## Analyze

What do you think? How have Sasha's edits made her writing more interesting and easier to understand?

## Write

### Conventions

Edit your draft for spelling, grammar, and punctuation.



## Publish

## +Presentation

**Publishing Strategy** Submit the story to a magazine.

**Presentation Strategy** Use a limited number of clear fonts.

I've polished my personal narrative! Now I'll publish it. I think it's a story that other kids might like to read, so I'm submitting it to *Highlights for Children* magazine. To make my story easy to read, I will use just a couple of clear fonts. Then I'll mail a neat, double-spaced copy of my story to the magazine, along with a letter that asks the editor to publish my story. I'll include a return envelope for a reply. But first, I'll make sure that I've done everything on my final checklist.



### My Final Checklist

Did I—

- ✓ remember to put my name on my paper?
- ✓ make a neat final copy?
- ✓ prepare an envelope?
- ✓ check for run-on sentences?
- ✓ edit and proofread carefully?

### Write

Create a checklist for publishing your personal narrative. Be sure to use white space to help organize the text on the page.

## Famous Last Words by Sasha

“We’re going to have a relaxing day.” That’s what Dad said as we left our house. I was nine years old, and this was my first rafting trip. I’d heard about people falling overboard and being swept away by swift currents. Our plan was to raft down the calmer part of the New River. Mom and I would enjoy the ride and get some sun; Dad was going to fish. He promised that we would go rafting on rougher rapids someday, but I needed to get some experience on calmer water. Then he said those words again: “We’re going to have a relaxing day.” Was he ever wrong!

When we got to the New River, Dad rented a yellow raft and two paddles. Mom and Dad’s task was to steer the raft; my task was simply to sit there and enjoy the ride. Each of us wore a swimsuit, T-shirt, shorts, old sneakers, a windbreaker, sunglasses, and sunscreen. We also wore helmets and life jackets. We were well prepared and ready to go!

We headed down the stream. We paddled through some gentle waves that were easy to handle. Next, we encountered a narrow channel where the water flowed more swiftly. Finally, we came to a place where the river was bottle-green and perfectly still. Dad handed me the paddle and said, “You hold this awhile. I’m going to fish.” Dad threw his line into the water, and he immediately caught a fish. It was a smallmouth bass. He cast his line again, and soon he had a muskie. Then he landed another and another! Fish were everywhere! Then it happened; Dad’s hook got caught on something big. It was probably a rock, but we thought it might be a huge fish. “Watch out!” he yelled. “I’m going to need some room to get my line loose!”

Just then, we noticed that our boat was drifting into some waves that weren’t so calm. Mom started to say something, but Dad completely lost his balance. He toppled over, and the raft rocked wildly back and forth! Dad’s fishing rod flew up in the air, and the raft started to capsize. Water rushed over the sides of the

raft, and we quickly began to bail it out with our hands. Suddenly, the raft flipped over! We tumbled into cold water, banging into rocks, the raft, and each other. Then we noticed that everything was floating away. We managed to snag the paddles and the fishing rod, but the lucky fish were long gone. We struggled to turn the raft right side up and finally crawled in. We were soaking wet and more than a little cranky!

By the time we got home that night, we were completely exhausted. Our clothes were still damp, our bruises were beginning to ache, and we didn't have a single fish. We were all smiling, though. Every time one of us mentioned our "relaxing day," we snorted with laughter. Mom called Dad's promise of a relaxing day his "famous last words." Perhaps he should have said, "This will be a day we'll never forget!"

## Analyze

Use the rubric to evaluate the story. Then use the rubric to analyze your own story.