Biographical Narrative Guide

MAKE A COPY OF THIS DOCUMENT AND SAVE IT TO YOUR OWN DRIVE.

Your final assessment for this unit is a short biographical narrative focused on a single moment of someone's life. It should highlight a pivotal moment, a significant achievement, or a defining characteristic, **not** a full life story. As you work through the guide below, remember to **write from your interviewee's point of view**. Keep this in mind during the whole writing process, including the brainstorming.

Biographical Narrative Guide		☑
Brainstorm and Develop Ideas		
Step 1	Listen to your audio recording, review the interview transcript and your notes, and "sift for gold." Choose a moment to work with for this narrative.	☐
Step 2	Free-write about the moment.	☐
Step 3	Describe the "who, what, when, where, and how" of the moment.	☐
Step 4	Create a sensory map for the moment.	☐
Draft and Storyboard the Narrative		
Step 5	Use your brainstorming about the moment to write a fifteen minute first draft of the narrative.	
Step 6	Create a storyboard of your narrative.	☐
Step 7	Pick a panel from the storyboard and "explode the moment" from that panel.	☐
Review the Biographical Narrative Rubric		
Step 8	Review the Biographical Narrative Rubric.	☐
Step 9	Review and evaluate an example of a short biographical narrative.	☐
Draft and Finalize		
Step 10	Write a full draft of the biographical narrative.	☐
Step 11	Give and receive peer feedback.	☐
Step 12	Revise, edit, and share the final biographical narrative.	

Brainstorm and Develop Ideas

Step 1	Listen to your audio recording, review the interview transcript and your notes, and "sift for gold." Choose a moment to work with for this narrative.

- ☐ Listen to your interview recording, review the transcript, and read the notes you took on the interview. As you review them, look and listen for the most powerful moments:
    - the moments that elicit the strongest emotional responses.
    - moments that challenged or changed your interviewee.
    - especially vivid memories or statements that sparked your interest.
- ☐ Then, highlight, circle, or **otherwise mark these "golden" moments**.
- ☐ Reflect on all the "literary gold" that you found. Discuss these questions with a partner or write about them in a journal:
    - Which moment do you want to transform into a short narrative you can share with a larger audience? Why?
    - Which moment will help your audience understand your interviewee best (who they are and what is important to them, what influenced their identity, etc.)?

- ☐ **Pick one moment to work with for the rest of this guide.** *You will not use the entire interview in your narrative.* **Briefly describe the moment below.**

Step 2	Free-write about the moment.

Now, use a word or phrase from the interview transcript/your notes as the start of a 10 minute free-write about this moment.

Step 3	Describe the “who, what, when, where, and how” of the moment.

Characters: **who** was there? Describe the people involved (personality, appearance, feelings, etc.).	
Setting: **where** and **when** did this moment take place? Describe the environment and location in detail.	
Describe the problem, situation, and/or conflict: **what** happens? **How** did it happen?	
Dialogue: **what** was said? **How** was it said? 	

Step 4	Create a sensory map for the moment.

Complete the sensory map below to help you zoom in on the moment and brainstorm sensory details that will show your readers the sounds, smells, tastes, textures, and images of the moment. Check out this resource for examples of sensory language.

SOUND people talking (dialogue), sounds in the background of the story, etc. 	
SMELL/TASTE 	
TOUCH texture, temperature, how things feel 	
SIGHT people, objects, setting, actions 	

Draft and Storyboard the Narrative

Step 5	Use your brainstorming about the moment to write a fifteen minute first draft of the narrative.

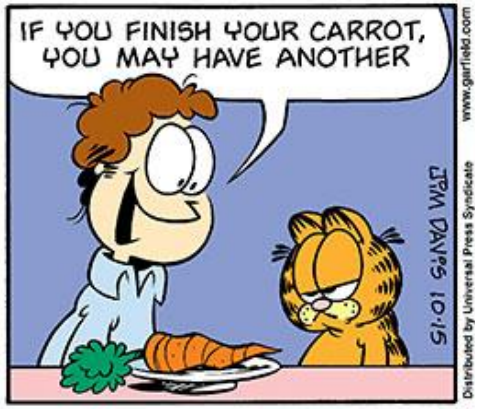
Set a timer for **fifteen minutes** and use that time to **write a quick first draft of the story (**handwritten or typed**)**. Use your sensory map and notes from the previous pages to guide your writing. Try to get as much of the story down on paper as possible and don't worry about writing it perfectly.

Write from a **first person point of view**, *as if you are your interviewee in this moment.*

Step 6	Create a storyboard of your narrative.

A storyboard is a visual representation of a story, typically drawn in a series of panels, where each panel depicts a key moment or scene from the narrative. These can include snippets of dialogue and drawings or descriptions of the characters, setting, and action.

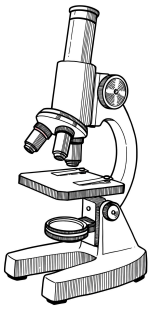
Review the **example storyboard** below. Then, use the draft you just wrote to **map out the story in the blank storyboard that follows**.

Simple drawings: characters, setting, and actions **Dialogue bubbles**: text representing what characters say in each scene			
Narration or description of events	*Garfield looks at a carrot on a plate with disgust. Jon is oblivious.*	*Garfield looks at Jon with disgust and formulates a plan.*	*Jon is irritated. Garfield is satisfied with having made his point.*

Davis, Jim. *Garfield*. The Improvisation School, 29 Sept. 2021, https://theimprovisationschool.com/2021/09/29/keiths-comic-panels/. Retrieved 5 Mar. 2025.

Step 7	Pick a panel from the storyboard and “explode the moment” from that panel.

Think of a slow-motion scene in a movie—every detail is magnified, every movement stretched out for impact. That’s what you do when you **explode a moment** in writing. Instead of saying, “She nervously stepped onto the stage,” you **zoom in** on her thoughts, feelings, and actions:



"Her heart pounded against her ribs. She wiped her sweaty palms on her jeans, her breath coming in short gasps. The stage lights glared in her eyes, making the audience a blur of shadowy faces. One step forward. Another. Her knees threatened to buckle, but she forced herself to stand tall."

This technique helps readers feel like they are inside the moment, experiencing it along with the character.

Go to your story board and circle a single panel that you want to “explode.” Zoom in on that moment by **creating three panels** out of that single panel. Stretch the moment with more dialogue, details, and/or narration.

Step 8	Review the Biographical Narrative Rubric below by highlighting key words and circling anything you don't understand.

BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE RUBRIC

Criteria	Exceeds (4)	Meets (3)	Approaching (2)	Below (1)
Narrative Engagement and Point of View **W.9-10.3.a.** Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters.	The narrative engages the reader by clearly establishing a significant problem or situation. It presents a distinctive point of view from the subject's perspective, with a well-developed narrator and characters.	The narrative engages the reader by establishing a clear problem or situation and point of view. The narrator and characters are present and developed, though some aspects could be deepened.	The narrative shows a basic attempt to engage the reader, but the problem/situation and point of view are not fully clear. The narrator or characters may be underdeveloped.	The narrative lacks a clear engagement or orientation. The point of view, narrator, and characters are poorly defined or absent.
Use of Narrative Techniques **W.9-10.3.b.** Use narrative techniques, including dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. **W.9-10.3d.** Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.	The narrative includes skillful use of dialogue and vivid description to develop the events and characters of the story. Precise word choice and sensory language convey a vivid picture of the experience. Effective pacing enhances the impact of the story and ensures a smooth progression of events.	The narrative includes dialogue and some details and sensory language to develop the events and characters of the story. Pacing is mostly effective, with a generally smooth progression of events, though some sections may feel slightly rushed or drawn-out.	The narrative includes inconsistent or ineffective use of dialogue and minimal details and sensory language mean events and characters are underdeveloped. Pacing is inconsistent; parts of the narrative may feel rushed while others drag, interrupting the flow of the story.	The narrative includes little to no narrative techniques. The narrative lacks engaging dialogue, descriptive detail, or sensory language. Pacing is disjointed, hindering the story's progression. The narrative feels either too rushed or too slow, disrupting the reader's engagement.

Organization, Coherence, and Sequencing **W.9-10.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. **W.9-10.3.c.** Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole (e.g., flashback, foreshadowing, and cause and effect).	The narrative is exceptionally clear, coherent, and well-organized. Sequencing techniques (e.g., flashbacks, foreshadowing, cause and effect) are seamlessly integrated to enhance the progression of events and overall clarity.	The narrative is clear and mostly organized with effective sequencing techniques that contribute to a coherent progression of events. Minor lapses in sequencing or organization may be present.	Organization is inconsistent and the narrative may lack a logical progression of events. Sequencing techniques are minimally or awkwardly applied, affecting overall clarity.	The narrative is confusing or disorganized. The progression of events is unclear, making it hard for the reader to understand.
Revision Process **W.9-10.5**. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.	The narrative exhibits extensive revision and editing, with evidence of thoughtful planning, rewriting, and refinement. Editing results in a high degree of accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and sentence construction.	The narrative exhibits some evidence of thoughtful planning and revision, though further attention to detail in editing would enhance clarity and effectiveness.	The narrative exhibits limited revision and editing and may be underdeveloped. Frequent errors in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction impact clarity.	The narrative shows little to no evidence of revision or editing. The narrative appears unplanned and underdeveloped, negatively impacting clarity and overall quality.
Research Integration **W.9-10.7.** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.	Seamlessly integrates interview insights, synthesizing multiple sources to deepen the reader's understanding of the subject and enhance the narrative's authenticity.	Integrates interview material effectively, with most sources contributing to a solid understanding of the subject. Some connections may require further development.	Incorporates interview insights in a limited or uneven manner, resulting in a superficial connection to the subject. Synthesis of sources is minimal.	Fails to effectively integrate interview insights, resulting in a narrative that lacks depth and a clear connection to the subject.

Step 9	Review and evaluate an example of a short biographical narrative.

EXAMPLE

Read the example biographical narrative, from the point of view of Betsy Ross, below.

1776

It was a warm summer afternoon in 1776, and I was at my workbench, stitching the hem of a new cushion for a client. The quiet rhythm of my needle, the soft rustling of fabric—it was the comfort of routine. But that day, the world outside my little shop in Philadelphia felt anything but routine.

The bell over my door jingled, and three men stepped in. One was a tall, dignified figure I immediately recognized—George Washington. Behind him stood Robert Morris, the financier, and a man I didn't know, but who had a look of urgency in his eyes. They were all business, their faces set in a way I had never seen before.

"Mrs. Ross," Washington said, his voice calm but firm. "We need your help. The Continental Congress has tasked us with creating a flag for our new nation. And we believe you're the one to do it."

My heart skipped. A flag? For a new country? I had been aware of the rumblings of rebellion, of the war for independence, but never did I think my hands, my humble sewing, would play any part in such a monumental moment.

I swallowed, trying to steady my breath. "But...why me?" I asked. "There are others who could—"

"Your skill is well known in this city," Robert Morris interjected. "And more importantly, we trust you. This flag will represent all of us. It must be perfect."

They handed me a rough sketch—an idea of what the flag could look like. Thirteen stars, arranged in a pattern. Thirteen stripes. The very symbol of the colonies' unity and independence. My mind raced as I looked over the design. I felt the weight of it, this simple cloth that would soon become the emblem of something far greater than myself.

"Can you do it, Mrs. Ross?" Washington asked, his eyes fixed on me with an earnestness that made my heart ache with pride.

I nodded, though my hands trembled slightly. "I'll do my best, General."

And just like that, I was entrusted with a task that would forever tie my name to the story of this nation. I felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility. This flag would represent not just the colonies, but the ideals we were fighting for—the freedom, the unity, the dream of a new world. I would sew it with care, knowing that every stitch mattered.

As they left, the door closing softly behind them, I stood there for a moment, the weight of their request sinking in. The flag of the United States of America. And it would be my hands that brought it to life.

Now, evaluate the example narrative using the rubric. Going **row by row**, explain what the example narrative does well and then identify what could be added or changed to improve the narrative. Then, assign a score from 4-1 along the scale for each row.

Criteria	Exceeds (4)	Meets (3)	Approaching (2)	Below (1)
Narrative Engagement and Point of View **W.9-10.3.a.** Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters.	The narrative engages the reader by clearly establishing a significant problem or situation. It presents a distinctive point of view from the subject's perspective, with a well-developed narrator and characters.	The narrative engages the reader by establishing a clear problem or situation and point of view. The narrator and characters are present and developed, though some aspects could be deepened.	The narrative shows a basic attempt to engage the reader, but the problem/situation and point of view are not fully clear. The narrator or characters may be underdeveloped.	The narrative lacks a clear engagement or orientation. The point of view, narrator, and characters are poorly defined or absent.

What does the example narrative do well to engage the reader? How does it establish a point of view and introduce characters?

What would you add or change to improve the narrative for this row from the rubric?

Circle a score for this criteria.

Use of Narrative Techniques **W.9-10.3.b.** Use narrative techniques, including dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. **W.9-10.3d.** Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.	The narrative includes skillful use of dialogue and vivid description to develop the events and characters of the story. Precise word choice and sensory language convey a vivid picture of the experience. Effective pacing enhances the impact of the story and ensures a smooth progression of events.	The narrative includes dialogue and some details and sensory language to develop the events and characters of the story. Pacing is mostly effective, with a generally smooth progression of events, though some sections may feel slightly rushed or drawn-out.	The narrative includes inconsistent or ineffective use of dialogue and minimal details and sensory language mean events and characters are underdeveloped. Pacing is inconsistent; parts of the narrative may feel rushed while others drag, interrupting the flow of the story.	The narrative includes little to no narrative techniques. The narrative lacks engaging dialogue, descriptive detail, or sensory language. Pacing is disjointed, hindering the story's progression. The narrative feels either too rushed or too slow, disrupting the reader's engagement.

Which narrative techniques does the example narrative include?

Describe the pacing of the narrative. Does it feel rushed or too drawn out? Or is there a smooth progression of events?

What would you add or change to improve the narrative for this row from the rubric?

Circle a score for this criteria.

Organization, Coherence, and Sequencing **W.9-10.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. **W.9-10.3.c.** Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole (e.g., flashback, foreshadowing, and cause and effect).	The narrative is exceptionally clear, coherent, and well-organized. Sequencing techniques (e.g., flashbacks, foreshadowing, cause and effect) are seamlessly integrated to enhance the progression of events and overall clarity.	The narrative is clear and mostly organized with effective sequencing techniques that contribute to a coherent progression of events. Minor lapses in sequencing or organization may be present.	Organization is inconsistent and the narrative may lack a logical progression of events. Sequencing techniques are minimally or awkwardly applied, affecting overall clarity.	The narrative is confusing or disorganized. The progression of events is unclear, making it hard for the reader to understand.

How well do you understand the sequence of events in the narrative? Explain.

What would you add or change to improve the narrative for this row from the rubric?

Circle a score for this criteria.

Revision Process **W.9-10.5**. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.	The narrative exhibits extensive revision and editing, with evidence of thoughtful planning, rewriting, and refinement. Editing results in a high degree of accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and sentence construction.	The narrative exhibits some evidence of thoughtful planning and revision, though further attention to detail in editing would enhance clarity and effectiveness.	The narrative exhibits limited revision and editing and may be underdeveloped. Frequent errors in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction impact clarity.	The narrative shows little to no evidence of revision or editing. The narrative appears unplanned and underdeveloped, negatively impacting clarity and overall quality.

Circle a score for this criteria. Explain why you chose that score.

Draft and Finalize

Step 10	Write a full draft of the biographical narrative.

Type a full draft of the biographical narrative, using the Biographical Narrative Rubric you already reviewed in Step 8 to guide your writing.

Remember that your audience is your teacher, classmates, friends, and family, and that you should focus on one single emotional experience or moment. Write from a **first person point-of-view,** (I, me, my, as if *you are your interviewee!).*

Step 11	Give and receive peer feedback.

Together, with a partner, review the techniques for effective pacing.

Techniques for Pacing: Exploding a Moment and Shrinking a Century			
 **Exploding a moment** in writing is like a slow-motion scene in a movie—every detail is magnified, every movement stretched out for impact. This technique helps readers feel like they are inside the moment, experiencing it along with the character.		 **Shrinking a century** is when you fast-forward through time so the story doesn't drag. Instead of describing every little event over weeks or years, you condense time into a short summary. This technique moves the story forward quickly, keeping only the most essential details.	
Before Exploding a Moment	"She nervously stepped onto the stage."	**Before Shrinking a Century**	"And home they went as fast as they could go, over the bridge, up the road, through the meadow, and under the fence. And there, sure enough, was dinner waiting for them with rice pudding for dessert." (Lowrey, 9) Lowrey, Janette Sebring. *The Poky Little Puppy*. Illustrated by Gustaf Tenggren, Golden Books, 1942.
After Exploding a Moment	"Her heart pounded against her ribs. She wiped her sweaty palms on her jeans, her breath coming in short gasps. The stage lights glared in her eyes, making the audience a blur of shadowy faces. One step forward. Another. Her knees threatened to buckle, but she forced herself to stand tall."	**After Shrinking a Century**	"The puppies ran home and ate dessert."

Then, switch papers with your partner. Read your partner's biographical narrative (out loud, if possible) and mark their narrative, focusing on the following:

1. Start with the narrative's impact on you.
    a. Highlight lines you love the most.
2. Then, focus on clarity and confusion.
    a. Put a star ☆ next to parts that let you know something important.
    b. Put a question mark **?** next to the parts that confused you.
3. Finally, focus on pacing.
    a. Which moments need to be exploded? Circle them.
    b. Where could they shrink a century? Write "*shrink*" next to it.

Once you've read and marked each other's narratives, discuss and share your feedback.

Step 12	Revise, edit, and share the final biographical narrative.

1: Read your narrative out loud.

Find a quiet space and read your narrative aloud from start to finish. As you read, listen for places that feel awkward, too long, or unclear. Mark these spots for review.

2: Use the questions below to check your narrative for two common trouble spots.

If you need a refresher on what any of these mean, check out the "Refresher: Trouble Spots in Narrative Writing" at the end of this document.

- Did I maintain a consistent point of view using first person throughout the narrative?
- Have I structured and punctuated dialogue correctly?

3: Compare your revision notes with your partner's feedback.

Reflect on what you marked on your narrative by comparing it to what your partner marked on your narrative.

Consider: What changes are you going to make? How will you incorporate their suggestions as well as your own reflections?

4: Write a final draft of the narrative. Check in with your teacher to see how you will share your narrative.

REFRESHER: TROUBLE SPOTS IN NARRATIVE WRITING

Maintain a consistent first person point of view:

- To maintain first person in a personal narrative, consistently use **"I," "me," "my," and "we"** instead of third-person pronouns like "he," "she," or "they."
- Stay **inside the narrator's perspective**—only describe thoughts, feelings, and experiences they personally know.
- **Example:**

  ✅ *I walked into the room, my heart pounding. I knew this moment would change everything.*

  ❌ *I walked into the room, my heart pounding. She knew this moment would change everything.* (Switches to third person)

Structure and punctuate dialogue correctly:

- Punctuating dialogue correctly makes it clear who is speaking and helps the story flow smoothly.
  - Use quotation marks around the exact words a character says.
  - Place punctuation inside the quotation marks if it belongs to the spoken sentence (like a comma, period, question mark, or exclamation point).
  - Start a new paragraph each time a different character speaks.
  - Use commas with dialogue tags (e.g., he said, she asked). If the tag comes before the quote, use a comma before the opening quotation mark. If the tag comes after, place a comma inside the quotation marks before closing them.
- **Example:**

  Incorrect:

  "Where are we going?" she asked. "To the park" he replied.

  Correct:

  "Where are we going?" she asked.

  "To the park," he replied.

*Notice that a comma comes before "he replied" instead of a period, and a new paragraph starts when a new person speaks.