Write with a Purpose Write an autobiographical narrative that reveals the significance of a personal experience. Your purpose is to express yourself and to entertain and inspire others. Your audience is your classmates and others who can relate to your experience.

Think as a Reader/Writer In this collection, you've seen different techniques writers use to tell stories. Now it is time to write a story based on your own experiences, called an autobiographical narrative. Read the following excerpt from Val Plumwood's "Being Prey" (page 90) to see some of the techniques she uses in her autobiographical narrative.

Yesterday the water lilies and the wonderful bird life had enticed me into a joyous afternoon's idyll as I ventured onto the East Alligator lagoon for the first time in a canoe lent by the park service. "You can play about on the backwaters," the ranger had said, "but don't go onto the main river channel. The current's too swift, and if you get into trouble, there are crocodiles. Lots of them along the river!" I followed his advice and gluttoned myself on the magical beauty of the lily lagoons, untroubled by crocodiles.

Today, I wanted to repeat that experience despite the drizzle beginning to fall as I neared the canoe launch site. I set off on a day trip in search of an Aboriginal rock art site across the lagoon and up a side channel. The drizzle turned to a warm rain within a few hours, and the magic was lost. The birds were invisible, the water lilies were sparser, and the lagoon seemed even a little menacing. I noticed now how low the 14-foot canoe sat in the water, just a few inches of fiberglass between me and the great saurians, close relatives of the ancient dinosaurs.

A Good Autobiographical Narrative

- focuses on a single experience
- provides essential context or background information
- uses sensory details to describe setting and characters
- reveals thoughts and feelings through interior monologue
- explains why the experience is significant

See page 424 for complete rubric.

Think About the Professional Model

With a partner, discuss the following questions about the model.

1. Which details show the change in setting and in Plumwood's mood?
2. How does Plumwood create suspense in this narrative?

Skills Focus

Write autobiographical narratives: Include the meaning of the experience; include thoughts and feelings.
Prewriting

Search Your Memory for Experiences
In your autobiographical narrative, you will relate and reflect on an experience from your past that is **significant**, or important, to you. What has been your greatest achievement? your biggest failure? your most important lesson learned? Make a list of experiences that are important to you in a chart similar to the one below. Then, make notes: What happened? Where did it happen? Who was there? Why is this event so memorable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Where?</th>
<th>Why significant?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting my first horse</td>
<td>the farm</td>
<td>I really wanted a horse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Where?</th>
<th>Why significant?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Going to my grandmother’s house</td>
<td>Rochester</td>
<td>my love for my family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluate Your Memories
How do you choose the best experience for your autobiographical narrative? Ask others which experience is most interesting. Most important, answer these questions about each memory for yourself:

- How important is this experience to me?
- How well do I remember the experience?
- Am I willing to share this experience with others?
- Would others relate to this experience in some way?

A Moment in Time Once you choose an experience to write about, remember that your narrative should focus on a specific **incident** in the experience. In “Being Prey,” Plumwood focuses on the moment she encounters the dangerous crocodile and survives—not her entire trip or her notable history as a conservationist. Decide on the most **significant** incident in your experience. What **context** does the reader need in order to understand and appreciate the significant moment in time?

Think About Purpose and Audience
As you plan, keep your purpose and audience in mind. Your **purpose** in writing an autobiographical narrative is to entertain and perhaps inspire your readers. Your **audience** may be your family, friends, fellow students, or readers in a much wider audience. Remember that your audience affects how you convey the experience.

Your Turn
Get Started Freewrite in your RWN for ten minutes on the personal experience you've chosen. Be sure your experience is **significant** and that you focus on one specific **incident**. Keep your **purpose** and **audience** in mind as you write.
Gather Sensory Details
Your audience can better share the experience relayed in your autobiographical narrative if you include sensory details. Sensory details appeal to all five senses: sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. Use your imagination to add details that you can’t remember. Sensory details appeal to your audience by bringing the reader into the experience. Notice how one student writer recorded sensory details that she wanted to include in her narrative in the center circle of the graphic organizer.

Thoughts and Feelings
Your autobiographical narrative recalls more than just the people, places, and events of your experience. It reveals your thoughts and feelings through interior monologue. An interior monologue expresses in words your thoughts and feelings. Ask yourself, “What did I think and feel as the experience unfolded?” Notice how a student writer shows her feelings about visiting her grandmother’s house in the middle circle of the graphic organizer.

Relate the Significance
Your autobiographical narrative should include broader reflections on the whole experience—your thoughts and feelings on the experience now, after some time has passed. Look back at the details, thoughts, and feelings, and ask the following questions:

- How did the experience change me?
- What did the experience teach me?

Notice how the student writer reflects broadly on the experience of a holiday visit to her grandmother’s house in the outer circle of the graphic organizer.

Your Turn
Create a Circle Graph In your RWN, draw a circle graph like the one at right. Draw it to fill a page. It will focus your memories of the experience you have chosen for your autobiographical narrative.

- Label the inner circle "Sensory Details," and jot down every detail you can remember.
- Label the middle circle "Thoughts and Feelings," and record there what you thought and how you felt at the time of the event.
- Label the outer circle "Significance to Me." There, write notes about how you feel now that you've had time to think about the significance of the experience.

Drafting

Writing Tip
- Use first-person pronouns I, me, my, and we when referring to yourself.
- Keep a consistent first-person point of view
Organize and Draft Your Narrative
Autobiographical narratives usually unfold in chronological order—showing the events as they happened over time. You can use the basic structure shown at the right in your autobiographical narrative.

Relate Your Experience with Transitions
Because autobiographical narratives relate actions and experiences across time and place, remember to connect ideas and events with transitional words, phrases, and clauses. Transitions keep the events flowing smoothly so that the reader is always aware of time, order, location, and importance of the details in your experience.

Structure of Autobiographical Narrative

**Introduction**
- Begin with an engaging opening.
- Supply background information so that readers understand the context of the experience.

**Body**
- Describe the people, places, and sequence of events.
- Include your thoughts and feelings as the experience unfolds.
- Keep a natural pace in the action, reflecting changes in time or mood.

**Conclusion**
- Reflect on what the experience means to you now.

Grammar Link Punctuating Introductory Adverb Clauses
One way to connect your ideas in time and place is by using adverbial clauses at the beginning of some sentences. Adverb clauses tell readers why, where, how, or when something happens. Some common subordinating conjunctions begin introductory adverb clauses: after, before, because, when, while, as, if, although, since, while, and until. They effectively provide transition between events and actions.

Here are two examples of introductory adverb clauses from the student model on pages 421–422.

When we get off of the plane, we walk through an endless stretch of gates to the baggage claim.

As I look out the window, I see the mushy gray clumps of what used to be snow, now pushed to the side by huge, neon orange snow plows.

Notice that introductory adverbial clauses are set off from the rest of the sentence by commas.

Your Turn
Draft Your Narrative Using the notes on your circle graph and the basic structure of an autobiographical narrative, create your first draft. Also think about the following:

- What does my audience need to know to appreciate the experience?
- How can I use transitional devices to connect ideas in time and place?
Writing Workshop

Autobiographical Narrative

Evaluating and Revising

Read the questions in the left column of the chart, and then use the tips in the middle column to help you make revisions to your autobiographical narrative. The right column suggests techniques you can use to revise your draft.

**Peer Review**

Working with a peer, go over the chart at the right. Then, review your draft. Answer each question in this chart to locate where and how your drafts could be improved. Be sure to take notes on what you and your partner discuss. You can refer to your notes as you revise your draft.

### Autobiographical Narrative: Guidelines for Content and Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Question</th>
<th>Tip</th>
<th>Revision Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the introduction include engaging opening and background information that creates a context?</td>
<td><strong>Bracket</strong> the opening statement and details that show where and when the experience happened.</td>
<td><strong>Replace</strong> weak openers with a quotation, question, or surprising statement to engage the reader. <strong>Add</strong> background information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Does the narrative include sensory details about the events, people, and places?</td>
<td><strong>Circle</strong> details that describe sights, sounds, smells, textures, and tastes. If you have fewer than three circles in each paragraph, revise to add more.</td>
<td><strong>Elaborate</strong> with sensory details about events, people, and places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does the writer include thoughts and feelings in the narrative?</td>
<td><strong>Highlight</strong> statements of the writer’s thoughts and feelings. If there is not at least one piece of interior monologue, add one.</td>
<td><strong>Add</strong> specific details about thoughts and feelings, including interior monologue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is the order of the events clear?</td>
<td><strong>Number</strong> the events as they appear in the paper. Compare the numbered events to the actual sequence of events.</td>
<td><strong>Rearrange</strong> events in chronological order.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Does the writer smoothly connect ideas and events across time and place?</td>
<td><strong>Put parentheses around</strong> transition words as well as phrases and clauses that connect ideas.</td>
<td><strong>Add</strong> transition words to connect ideas or combine ideas using introductory phrases and clauses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does the conclusion indicate why the experience is significant?</td>
<td><strong>Underline</strong> sentences that reveal the broader meaning of the experience.</td>
<td><strong>Add</strong> one or two sentences that clearly state the significance of the experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Read this student draft, and notice the comments on its strengths and suggestions on how it could be improved.

**Student Draft**

**Traditions**  
by Lauren Stoker, Harrison High School

Every year in the chill of November, my family and I fly to Rochester, New York, to my grandmother’s house. When we get off of the plane, we walk through an endless stretch of gates to baggage claim. My aunt and cousin are there waiting for us, arms open wide, warm and welcoming. My cousin and I embrace in the airport with nothing else in the world bothering us, absorbing the sheer joy we get when we are together. We gather our two-hundred pound suitcases and head for the car, my grandmother’s old, teal green Lincoln. As I look out the window, I see the mushy, gray clumps of what used to be snow, now pushed to the side by the huge, neon orange snow plows.

Finally, we arrive at my grandmother’s house. Inside it is warm, welcoming us with the smell of dinner cooking in the small kitchen. The air is filled with a sweet, flowery perfume, tickling my nose. Then I see her.

Sweater covered in lint, shoes scuffing across the squeaky hard wood floor, glasses dangling from a chain around her neck, there she is, my grandmother. She greets us with a loving kiss on the forehead, fire-truck-red lipstick smearing our tired faces. Soon after the traditional teacakes and hot chocolate, I watch grainy home movies on a forty-year-old projector, seeing my mother and her siblings grow up: birthdays, Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July.

**MINI-LESSON**  
How to Use Interior Monologue

Unlike the dialogue between people, **interior monologue** is not spoken aloud or heard by other people. Instead, a person’s inner thoughts and feelings are put into words. Lauren’s narrative can be improved by adding her thoughts about her experiences. Lauren adds the following interior monologue to her last sentence in the third paragraph above.

**Lauren’s Revision of Paragraph Three**

... seeing my mother and her siblings grow up: birthdays, Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July. Being at my grandmother’s house reminds me that my past and present are made up of laughter and love.

**Your Turn**

Use Interior Monologue Read your draft, and then ask yourself:

- What was I feeling and thinking about the experience at this point?
- Where can I best add interior monologue?
Finally it’s here, turkey day, Thanksgiving, the day I have been waiting for. The long, hardwood table is 
surrounded by mismatched chairs and the people sitting in them watching, waiting for the food to arrive. My 
grandmother says a few words. Then comes the moment we have all been waiting for when the food arrives—steaming, mouth-watering food. Mashed potatoes, homemade rolls, stuffing, green beans, cranberry sauce, creamed onions, the turkey, golden brown in color, flaky outside skin, taunting us. Family from near and far, we pass around the food, chatting, laughing, and loving. We’re a modern version of a Norman Rockwell painting.

Thinking about that Thanksgiving, I realize the dinner isn’t the best part at all. It is my whole family 
being together. Waiting for the moment makes it so much sweeter, so I dream of when the day will come again. This day, my favorite tradition of them all, is an overlooked holiday that comes once a year in November: Thanksgiving Dinner.

How to Create Effective Conclusions

The conclusion of an autobiographical narrative usually leaves the reader with some last thoughts about 
the significance of the experience. Statements that do not add to the significance can be deleted. To 
improve her conclusion, Lauren decided to delete the last sentence to leave the reader thinking about the 
significance of the experience. Read the revised version aloud to determine if you think her revision made 
it more effective.

Lauren’s Revision of the Last Paragraph

Thinking about that Thanksgiving, I realize the dinner isn’t the best part at all. It is my whole family being together. Waiting for the moment makes it so much sweeter, so I dream of when the day will come again. This day, my favorite tradition of them all, is an overlooked holiday that comes once a year in November: Thanksgiving.

Your Turn

Create an Effective Conclusion

- Re-read your final paragraph. Where is your reflection on the significance of the experience?
- What words, phrases, or sentences may divert the reader's attention away from the significance?
- Revise your conclusion to make it more effective.
Proofreading and Publishing

Proofreading
Proofread your paper before you prepare a final copy for publishing. Find and eliminate errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage.

Grammar Link Using Active Voice
When you write about yourself, you often use be verbs: am, are, be, been, being, is, was, and were. However, you can unintentionally create passive-voice sentences by using be verbs—making the subject of the verb receive the action, rather than perform the action. Passive voice sentences are not as powerful as ones that use active voice. You can evaluate your use of be verbs to determine if you need to change to active voice, keep the be verb, or combine sentences to eliminate it.

Lauren found and revised some be verbs in her draft.

Finally, we arrive at my grandmother's house. Inside it is warm, welcoming us with the smell of dinner cooking in the small kitchen. The air is filled with a sweet, flowery perfume, tickling my nose. Then I see her.

Why do you think Lauren replaced only the second be verb?

Publishing
Readers like to cry, laugh, and learn from others’ experiences. Here are some ways you can share your narrative with a wider audience:

- Add photos or drawings; then give it to a loved one as a keepsake.
- Publish your narrative as a blog entry or post it to a Web site dedicated to student writing.

Reflect on the Process
In your RWN, write short responses to the following questions:

1. How did writing this narrative help you to understand this experience differently?
2. Which parts of your narrative required the most change? Which required the least? What types of changes did you make?
3. Which step of the writing process was most difficult? What can you do to make it easier next time you write an autobiographical narrative?

Your Turn
Proofread and Publish Proofread your draft. As you proofread, circle all of the be verbs. Revise passive-voice sentences if you think they are awkward or weak. Then, make a final copy of your autobiographical narrative and publish it.
You can use one of the rubrics below to evaluate your autobiographical narrative from the Writing Workshop or from the activity on the next page. Your teacher will tell you which rubric to use.

### 6-Point Scale

#### Score 6 Demonstrates advanced success
- focuses consistently on a clear, controlling idea
- shows effective organization throughout, with smooth transitions
- offers a thoughtful, creative approach to the narrative
- develops the narrative thoroughly, using incidents, details, and explanation
- exhibits mature control of written language

#### Score 5 Demonstrates proficient success
- focuses on a clear, controlling idea
- shows effective organization, with transitions
- offers a thoughtful approach to the narrative
- develops the narrative competently, using incidents, details, and explanation
- exhibits sufficient control of written language

#### Score 4 Demonstrates competent success
- focuses on a clear, controlling idea, with minor distractions
- shows effective organization, with minor lapses
- offers a mostly thoughtful approach to the narrative
- develops the narrative adequately, using some incidents, details, and explanation
- exhibits general control of written language

#### Score 3 Demonstrates limited success
- includes some loosely related ideas that distract from the controlling idea
- shows some organization, with noticeable gaps in the logical flow of ideas
- offers a routine, predictable approach to the narrative
- develops the narrative with uneven use of incidents, details, and explanation
- exhibits limited control of written language

#### Score 2 Demonstrates basic success
- includes loosely related ideas that seriously distract from the writer’s controlling idea
- shows minimal organization, with major gaps in the logical flow of ideas
- offers a narrative that merely skims the surface
- develops the narrative with inadequate use of incidents, details, and explanation
- exhibits significant problems with control of written language

#### Score 1 Demonstrates emerging effort
- shows little awareness of the topic and purpose for writing
- lacks organization
- offers an unclear and confusing narrative
- develops the narrative in only a minimal way, if at all
- exhibits major problems with control of written language
Preparing for Timed Writing  
**Autobiographical Narrative**

When responding to a prompt, use what you’ve learned from your reading, writing your autobiographical narrative, and studying the rubric on page 424. Use the steps below to develop a response to the following prompt.

**Writing Prompt**  
Much has been written and said about the meaning of courage today. Write an autobiographical narrative about an experience that defined courage for you.

**Study the Prompt** Begin by reading the prompt carefully. Circle or underline key words: *courage, meaning of courage, defined, and for you.* Re-read the prompt to see if there is additional information that can help you.

Your purpose is to narrate, or tell about, a story from your life that made the meaning of *courage* clear to you. Organize your response around a specific experience set in a context of other events. You will also relate your thoughts and feelings about the experience.
Remember, unless you were personally involved, the story you tell will not be autobiographical. Tip: Spend about five minutes studying the prompt.

**Plan Your Response**
Make a list of experiences you have had with courageous actions. Then, using a chart like the one below, record how the experience defined courage and why the experience was significant to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>How It Defines Courage</th>
<th>Why It Is Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Choose the experience from your list that clearly shows what courage means to you and that you can describe with specific details. Answer these questions about your chosen experience:

- What background information do my readers need to understand the experience?
- How can I show readers, rather than tell them, about my experience?
- How will I reveal my thoughts and feelings?
- How will I show a clear connection between the experience and my definition of courage?

Tip: Spend about ten minutes planning your response.

**Respond to the Prompt**
Start writing, even if you are unsure about how to begin. The most important thing is to get your ideas on paper. You can always write an introduction after you’ve told the main part of your story. One way to begin is to create a dialogue that provides background information. Tip: Spend about twenty minutes writing your autobiographical narrative.

**Improve Your Response**
**Revising** Go back to the key aspects of the prompt. Is your response about your own experience? Have you explained what courage means to you? Do sensory details and narrative actions help convey the story? If not, add these elements.

**Proofreading** Take a few minutes to edit your response to correct errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Make sure that your edits are neat and that the paper is legible.

**Checking Your Final Copy** Before you turn in your paper, read it one more time to catch any errors you may have missed. You’ll be glad you took one more look to present your best writing. Tip: Save five or ten minutes to improve your paper.