

First Person Narrative

What is a first person narrative?

Much like Edgar Allan Poe's narrator in "The Pit and the Pendulum," the narrator of your story will be "I." "I was a teenage CIA agent." The story may be fiction or non-fiction.

How long should it be?

Your story should have a sense of completeness, developed with enough detail to keep the reader's attention, but not so much detail that they get bored or lost. Most students' papers will be between 3 and 4 double-spaced pages. Talk to me if your story is going to be longer than this.

How do I get an idea?

You can tell a story from your life; give voice to a neglected or misunderstood fairy tale character; imagine the story of a face in a magazine or the characters in a newspaper article; write from the point of view of someone much older or younger than you.

How do I know which of my ideas are good ones?

Choose the character or situation that most interests you – not necessarily the one you think is easiest to write. If you are developing your character as you write, that energy will translate into an interesting story.

How do I tell my story well?

Generally, your story will be strongest if you put your character in a specific, interesting situation, and let the character speak/think. For example, instead of letting the Big Bad Wolf tell his whole life story from beginning to end, you may have him defend his actions against the Three Little Pigs to a judge in court. He may, of course, include some background information, such as how he was taunted by the pigs as a child and how his mother neglected him.

To focus your story, consider having your character address a specific audience: the Wolf defends himself to the judge; the character in "Dear Amanda" writes letters to an ex-girlfriend; a teenager tries to talk his/her way out of trouble with a teacher. A character gives an awkward wedding toast or eulogy.

To keep your readers' attention, think about ways in which your character could change (or have the opportunity to change and not take it). Your character might reveal (or try to keep) a secret, meet someone who challenges a stereotype, face a fear, recognize (or be oblivious to) a character flaw. Think about a character's primary desire and obstacles to his/her success.

Dialogue is a wonderful addition to these types of stories or you may choose to write one side of the conversation. Focus on the character's VOICE: the character's

distinct personality, which comes across through the writing by the way he/she uses words (a southern belle vs. gangster vs. a district attorney).

CHECKLIST: (Not all of these will be as important in a voice driven piece)

- Interesting Title
- Paper's format (double-spaced, single-sided)
- Uses specific detail ("daffodil," instead of "flower")
- Uses sense detail where it will enrich the story
 - smell sounds
 - taste sights
 - texture
- Uses effective/interesting verbs
- Slows down the most important moment
- Character changes (or has the potential to change and doesn't)
- Begins at an engaging place
- Ends in a satisfying way
- Weaves in setting
- Paragraphs effectively
- Has a distinctive voice
- Grammar checked
- Has cut unnecessary adverbs, adjectives, repetition
- Spell checked
- Read out loud for rhythm and clarity

Rubric criteria for highest quality papers:

- A** You have chosen a topic that interests, challenges, or amuses you emotionally and/or intellectually. Your title captures your reader's attention and informs the piece. Your writing has a focus; your structure serves the purpose of your piece; your pacing is effective. Your writing voice is fresh, distinct, and consistent. Where they enrich the story, you have used specific detail, sense detail, scenes, and active verbs. Your opening engages; your ending satisfies. You have used paragraph breaks intelligently. Something happens in your piece: either the character or reader is somehow different at the end of the piece than at the beginning. The writing flows, and the reader is not distracted from your content by grammatical issues.