

## Is it Narrative, or Not?

The story has been told and we are left wondering..... how did they get into that mess? How did all those problems arise? We are amazed, too, that it was all sorted out in the end, and that there were happy outcomes.

It all started in America, when Jane visited her relatives during the Christmas holidays. She was just settling down to enjoy herself when it all began to happen. First, the nasty letters began to arrive, then her cousin Elizabeth suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. It wasn't long before the ransom note arrived. Elizabeth had been kidnapped! What should the family do? Should they go to the police? Elizabeth's father decided to do a bit of detective work himself. He was a top executive and he had recently sacked an employee. Sure enough, his inquiries revealed that the past employee had gone out of town. His landlady said that he gone to visit relatives and he had been seen driving his car along the road out of town. It was now time for Elizabeth's father to go to the police. It was not long before the police discovered the hideout. Soon Elizabeth was returned safely to her home in time for a happy Christmas.

The question is, "Is this a narrative?" We need to consider the special features of a narrative:

First, in a traditional narrative, the focus of the text is on a series of actions, i.e. orientation, complication or problem and resolution.

- Characters are defined with distinct personalities/identities.
- Dialogue is often included.
- Descriptive language is used to create images in the reader's mind and to enhance the story.

Now we need to consider the structure of a narrative, with a closer look at the series of actions within the story:

- In the orientation, the characters are introduced and the setting and timing of the story are established. This is when we think Who? When? Where? eg. (from the story above) Jane is visiting her relatives in America during the Christmas holidays. It is the orientation that claims our attention and engages us in the story.
- Then a complication occurs, or a series of complications. This is when the story becomes really exciting and we can't put the book down. The complications usually lead to a climax involving some sort of drama.
- A resolution needs to be found, either for better or worse, happily or unhappily. If there are a series of complications, interest and suspense are added and sustained for the reader. When it is all over, we breathe a sigh of relief and feel happy, or we may have a few tears and feel sad.

We can now return to the outline of the story above, and ask the questions:

- Is there an orientation?
- Were there complications?
- Was there a resolution?

If the answers to these questions are “Yes”, then the story is indeed a narrative. If the answers are “No”, then maybe it is a recount or an anecdote from somebody’s life.

How does this relate to speechmaking?

For the storytelling assignment, the Master Manual suggests that:

1. You select a story with a plot.
2. Know what the story is about.
3. There needs to be a climax.
4. Select events that are necessary to the narrative.
5. Consider how much description to involve.
6. Decide if you want to include dialogue, and, if so, what type of dialogue to use. Sometimes, speakers include recounts of personal anecdotes in their speeches. These recounts are not to be confused with narratives. In another article, I will outline the features of a recount and look at the differences between narratives and recounts.

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