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| traci's lists of ten |

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| |  | | --- | | links  [lists of ten](http://www.tengrrl.com/tens/index.shtml) [lesson plans](http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/author_detail.asp?authorid=3) [technotes](http://www.tengrrl.com/technotes/) [reviews](http://www.tengrrl.com/reviews/) [changelog](http://www.tengrrl.com/blog/index.shtml) [who is tengrrl](http://www.tengrrl.com/about.shtml) [search](http://www.tengrrl.com/search.shtml)  tens links [by subject](http://www.tengrrl.com/tens/index.shtml) [chronologically](http://www.tengrrl.com/tens/chron-index.shtml) [faqs and whatnot](http://www.tengrrl.com/tens/faqs.shtml) [copying & sharing](http://www.tengrrl.com/tens/sharing.shtml) |   *The Magic Eight Ball says, “YOU MAY RELY ON IT”*  Traci's 6th List of Ten: Ten Prewriting Exercises for Personal Narratives  These prewriting exercises probably work best when combined with a more traditional technique such as using the Journalist's Questions. The idea is to ask students to think about the events that they narrate in a less typical way and then to use those thoughts to develop their narratives.  These exercises can be useful after the students have begun drafting, since they think about the details of the event that the writer can add to a working draft. For instance, after scripting a section of the narrative, writers could work on adding dialogue to their working drafts. Or after thinking about the decision points in the series of events, they can add some details to their working drafts on the reasons that the series of events occurred in the way that they did. The exercises listed below include connections to the writer's working draft, but I'd suggest cutting that part off when assigning the exercises, to help students focus on invention rather than on thinking about how to use the material later. Once they complete the exercise, I'd give them the follow-up application, focusing on their working draft of the narrative itself.  Some of the exercises make for good class or small group discussion as well. If students script pieces, they can read the scripts out loud, assigning one another parts -- with the author of the script taking notes on places where the dialogue is difficult or incorrect. Using this technique, writers can find places where their attempt to capture the flow of a conversation is stilted or unrealistic.  Students also seem to enjoy sharing their writing on the event for a tabloid, an interview or as a fable -- though the exercise can lead to giggling and noise. Student writers can also benefit from sharing their list of decision points, since classmates can often think of alternatives that the writers do not. By thinking through all the possible alternatives, students are better able to think about the significance of the events for the "So what?" details that they'll need in their narratives.   1. Think of the different people involved in the event that you're narrating as characters in a piece of literature. In the same way that you'd write a character sketch for characters in a short story or play, write a paragraph on each of the people involved in the event you're writing about. Once you've finished, compare the details in your sketches to the details on the characters in your draft. Revise your draft, based on the differences that you find. 2. Sketch out the events as blocks in a comic strip. Don't worry about the artwork -- just use stick figures. What events would you focus on in your sketches? What parts would you leave out? Comic strips don't show every single event that occurs; they focus on the events that are necessary to the overall message. Once you've sketched out your blocks, take a look at your working draft. Are the blocks that you include in your comic strip included in the narrative? Are they recognizable -- how do the blocks in your comic strip relate to the organizational structure of your narrative? Are the ones that you've left out of the comic strip included in the narrative -- if so, what do they add to your overall purpose? 3. Write a version of the events in your narrative for a newspaper article. Remember to include the answers to the journalist's questions (who? what? where? when? why? how?). Focus on the facts as they occurred. Use an inverted pyramid order -- begin with the facts and details that are most important to readers and end with the facts that are less important. Once you've finished, compare the article to your working draft. Have you included all the facts in your draft that you included at the beginning of your newspaper article? Are the details that you include toward the end of the article (the ones that are less important) included in your working draft -- are they emphasized or subordinate? Think about what you would want someone who read that newspaper article to know that isn't included in the article itself. Are those points included in your narrative? 4. Outline the events that occur in your narrative. Identify the places where you or others involved had to make a decision of some kind. For each decision point, brainstorm on the alternatives that could have been pursued. What other options were available? Once you've thought through the possibilities, examine the way that you discuss the decisions in your draft -- do you include details on the alternatives? How do these other options affect the way that you think about the event now? Have you looked back at the event that you're writing about and thought, "Gee, I wish I had done that differently"? Add some depth to your narrative by fleshing out alternatives as well as how and when they became important. 5. Choose a time in your narrative when you and other characters are talking with one another. Script out the conversation as an exchange in a play. Try to capture the language in the style that would have actually been used. Make the dialogue accurate to the event; don't worry if it's not Standard Written English (personal conversations rarely are). Once you've scripted out your dialogue, move to your working draft. How does the dialogue that you've written in your script compare to the episode in your narrative? Can you add details from the script to your draft? How would adding the dialogue affect the purpose of your narrative? 6. Describe the events that occurred for a different audience. How does your narrative change if it is written for an older family member, someone interviewing you for a job, a younger student, or someone you had never met before? What would you leave out? What would you add? What would you describe in different language and style? How would the points that you emphasize change? Once you've thought about the differences, return to your working draft. Are the points that you DO include right for your audience? Are there parts of your alternate version that can be added to your working draft? As you revise, think about the details in the narrative fit your audience in particular. 7. Reflect on the events as you recall them. Readers will want to know why you're sharing the story. Your narrative needs to answer the question, "So what?" When your readers get to the end of the story, you should have answered the question for them. Draw a chart with three columns. Label the columns as follows:  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Events | So What Do/Did I Think? | So What Do/Did I Think? | |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  1. Outline the major events in rows under the "Events" column; then, fill in the spaces under the other columns for each of the major events. For each of the columns, try to think about the "So What?" Explain why the event matters to you in the second column, and why the event matters to others who are involved (directly or indirectly) in the third column. Think about how the events mattered at the time and how they matter now, looking back. Once you've finished filling in the chart, move to your working draft. Are the "So what?" details that you included in the chart clear in your draft? Are there details that you can add to make the significance of the event understandable to your readers? 2. Think about the longevity of the event in your narrative. How will you remember the event five years from now? ten years? twenty-five years? As you think about the effect of the events in the narrative, you need to focus on how the events will matter to you and your readers. What kind of staying power do the events have? Brainstorm or free-write a few paragraphs on why you think this event will still matter in the future. Once you've written about the longevity and enduring importance, move back to your working draft. When you talk about events is their staying power clear to the reader? How do you communicate the enduring qualities of the events in your narrative? What details from your brainstorming or free-writing might you work into your draft? 3. Think about the details included in your narrative -- facts, sensory details, and emotions. Draw a chart like this:  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Facts | Sensory Details | Emotions | |  |  |  |  1. Then think about the facts that are important to your narrative, and fill in the chart. Work to find at least ten important facts. For each, think about related sensory details (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell), and consider the emotions related to the facts (fear, pleasure, sadness, etc.). For instance, a fact in my narrative might be "three fresh baked loaves of bread on the kitchen table." For sensory detail, I'd write about the smell of fresh baked bread, the warmth of the kitchen from the still hot stove, and the golden brown color of the bread. For emotions, I'd write about how the loaves of bread gave me a happy feeling as I remembered how my father always bakes bread for special holidays and how my grandmother always baked us bread when we visited her. Once you've finished working through the chart for the facts from your paper, move back to your working draft. Are the sensory details and emotions that you included in the chart communicated in your draft? Revise to add details, taking material from your chart whenever you can. 2. Write an account of the events in your narrative for a fable, a tabloid, or a television or radio interview. These options give you a lot of room for creativity. What happens if the people involved in the events were animals and you had to come up with a moral? If the events were reported in a tabloid paper, what would be emphasized? Where would things be embellished? What would be left out? Finally, if you were interviewed about the event, what would you include in your story -- your answer depends on where you're being interviewed (by Barbara Walters once you're rich and famous? on a talk show by Oprah? on a late night show by David Letterman or Jay Leno?) Be sure to indicate where you're being interviewed. Once you finish your alternate account of the events, move to your working draft. Are there facts that you can add now that you've thought about the events in your narrative from a different point of view? Are there facts that seem less important? Can they be deleted? Did you add details and description to your account that can be revised and added to your draft? What parts of your alternate version wouldn't make any sense at all in your final draft of the narrative? |

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