



What is the **CODE** for a successful narrative?

C - CLARITY –

- make sure the ideas, events, and actions are clear to the reader
- read the story out loud to see if something needs to be explained better

O – ORGANIZATION

- stay focused on the prompt
- have a beginning, middle, & end
- use proper paragraphing
- use transitional words, phrases
- use varied sentence structure

D – DETAILS

- show, not tell – paint a picture in the reader’s mind
- use good word choice, don’t overuse the same word
- use dialogue here and there (with quotation marks)

E – EVENTS

- something must **HAPPEN** in the story
- there must be a **PLOT** (one thing happens and then another)
- show the character’s **REACTION** to the events (was the character scared? happy? What did he/she do to **SHOW** it?)



Word Choice Suggestions

sad - depressed, disappointed, miserable, dejected, glum, gloomy, sorrowful, heartbroken, crestfallen, devastated

happy – thrilled, delighted, elated, ecstatic, joyful, glad, cheerful, jolly

great - splendid, spectacular, super, stupendous, superior, superb, stellar, supreme, sensational, outstanding, remarkable, extraordinary, magnificent, marvelous, fantastic, fabulous, terrific, wonderful, excellent, exceptional (incredible, thrilling if in the right context)

bad – terrible, horrible, horrendous, awful, wicked, catastrophic, tragic, disastrous, horrific

very – extremely (other choices like ‘exceedingly’ or ‘remarkably’ might work, but this word works in virtually every case)

like – adore, admire, enjoy (such as a sport), prefer, treasure, cherish

funny – hilarious, amusing, humorous, comical, hysterical, witty

nice – kind, thoughtful, gracious, considerate, courteous, cordial (wonderful, etc. as in a nice day or beautiful, etc. as in a nice house)

smart – intelligent, bright, wise

a lot – many, plenty, numerous, quite a few, a variety of, a plethora of

pretty – lovely, beautiful, attractive, gorgeous, stunning,

big – enormous, huge, large, gigantic, massive, colossal, towering, mammoth

hungry – starving, famished

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ran – raced, dashed, jogged, trotted, hurried, rushed, darted, sprinted, bolted, scurried

walked – trudged, strolled, staggered, stumbled, paraded, hiked, tip-toed, stalked

looked – glanced, stared, peered, gazed, glared

saw – spotted, glimpsed, spied, noticed, discovered

laughed – giggled, chuckled, snickered, howled, cackled, chortled

**cried – sobbed, wept (weeping), sniffled, whimpered, teary-eyed, bawled, blubbered, whined –
(the other meaning) : shouted, yelled, exclaimed, screamed, shrieked, bellowed, boomed**

mad – angry, upset, furious, enraged, fit-to-be-tied,

confused – bewildered, puzzled, perplexed, baffled, mixed-up

**afraid – frightened, scared, fearful, alarmed, terrified, horrified, petrified
** (another form of the word) frightening, scary, alarming, terrifying, horrifying, spooky**

embarrassed – humiliated, mortified, ashamed

**surprised – astonished, astounded, amazed, stunned, startled, shocked, flabbergasted, thunderstruck, dumbfounded, floored
(maybe a person is excited or happy *because* they are surprised, but they are not synonyms)**

excited – enthusiastic, eager, thrilled

exciting – thrilling, suspenseful, adventurous, heart-pounding, spine-tingling, exhilarating

interesting – intriguing, fascinating

interested – intrigued, fascinated (if the character is very interested and can't take his/her eyes off of something, then you might want to use 'captivated' or 'mesmerized')

hard – difficult, tough, challenging

brave – courageous, bold, daring, fearless, showed a lot of courage

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dangerous – risky, unsafe, perilous

said – remarked, responded, demanded, warned, replied, whispered, asked, moaned, groaned, stated, declared, announced, claimed, exclaimed, suggested, mentioned, explained, begged, pleaded, agreed, confirmed

cold – freezing, frigid, chilly, frosty, icy, nippy, (bitterly cold)

hot – scorching, sweltering, steaming (blazing hot)

Other good words to learn how to spell to use in student writing: nervous, proud, realized, decided, important, emotional, inspiring, experience, grateful, exhausted, achievement (achieved), accomplishment (accomplished), several, frustrated, understand, rewarding, overwhelmed, absolutely, definitely

DO NOT use the word ‘stuff’ as in “My best friend and I did lots of stuff.” Be specific.

After selecting a synonym to use for a word, read the sentence to make sure the synonym works. Sometimes another synonym will fit into a sentence better and more smoothly than others.

Also, sometimes a word has several different ways to use it, such as: important – 1. *It is important that we win the next game.* Here we can replace the word ‘important’ with the word ‘crucial’ or ‘vital’ or ‘essential’. But in the next sentence these two synonyms don’t work as well: 2. *The speaker at the ceremony was a very important person.* In this sentence, it’s better to replace the word ‘important’ with ‘prominent’, ‘powerful’, ‘respected’, or ‘distinguished’. So make sure the synonym makes sense in the sentence.

Some Basic Grammar to Help Build Sentences:

A simple sentence consists only of a subject and predicate.

The man ran to the car. (simple sentence with a single subject and a single predicate)

Ted and Mark ran to the car. (simple sentence with a compound subject and a single predicate).

The boys yelled and cheered at the game. (simple sentence with a single subject and a compound predicate.)

Susan and Lauren swam in the pool and played tennis. (simple sentence with a compound subject and a compound predicate.)



Beware of run-on sentences and sentence fragments!

- 1. What is a run-on sentence?** A run-on sentence has two complete ideas or simple sentences (each idea with a subject and verb) without being joined correctly.

Such as *I really wanted to go to the beach this weekend I had to go to my aunt's wedding instead.* The first complete idea is that this person really wanted to go to the beach this weekend; the second idea is that he had to go to the aunt's wedding instead. These ideas must be separated and not run into each other (run-on). It is difficult for a reader to understand two ideas run together like this.

How do we correct a run-on sentence?

- A. We could make it two sentences with a period between the two complete ideas.
I really wanted to go to the beach this weekend. I had to go to my aunt's wedding instead.

- B. We could add a comma and conjunction (and, but, so, or) after the comma to properly connect the two ideas.

I really wanted to go to the beach this weekend, but I had to go to my aunt's wedding instead. (use the conjunction that makes the most sense and shows the relationship between the two ideas – 'and' is used to add another idea, 'but' is used to show the contrast between ideas/why there's a problem with the first idea, 'so' is used to show that the second idea happened because of the first idea (a result of it) , and 'or' is used when the sentence is about two choices.)

Example with 'and' – *The fair is opening on Friday, and my cousin and I can't wait to go!*

Example with 'but' - *Ken wanted to go to the concert, but he couldn't get a ticket.*

Example with 'so' - *It was pouring rain outside, so we decided not to go to the park.*

Example with 'or' - *I could go to the game with my brother, or I could go to the movies with a friend.*

These are called **compound sentences** because two ideas are combined in one sentence with the proper punctuation and conjunction.

NOTE: All of these sentences **NEED to have a conjunction and a comma to connect the two ideas; a comma alone is not enough. Without a conjunction, it would STILL be a run-on sentence.** Example: *Ken wanted to go to the concert, he couldn't get a ticket.*

Even though, the sentence has a comma, it still needs a conjunction to be correct. Also, before the conjunction, there must be a comma.

DON'T string together lots of ideas in one sentence (*Ken wanted to go to the concert, but he couldn't get a ticket so he went to a movie instead, but he got there late so he missed some of the movie and he had to sit way up in the front, and he didn't like sitting in the front.*) This is too many ideas in one sentence, making this another example of a kind of run-on sentence.

2. What is a sentence fragment?

A sentence fragment is a group of words that is not a whole sentence or complete idea because it is missing either the subject or the main verb. Example: *I think school uniforms are a good idea. Even in middle school.* “*Even in middle school*” is a sentence fragment; it is not a complete idea and cannot stand alone as a sentence. To correct this, combine the two ideas: *I think school uniforms are a good idea, even in middle school.*

I often see sentence fragments start with words like ‘because’, ‘since’, ‘after’ or ‘although’. Such as: *He couldn't get into the movie. Because it was sold out.* “*Because it was sold out*” is a sentence fragment – or part of a sentence. It is not a complete idea and should not be capitalized and treated as a sentence. Usually, we can add the incomplete idea (fragment) to the other idea and make a complete sentence. *He couldn't get into the movie because it was sold out.* Be on the lookout for such sentence fragments.

3. Using clauses correctly

“*Because it was sold out*” is a **dependent clause**. It's a group of words that depends on something else to make it a complete sentence. “*He couldn't get into the movie*” is an **independent clause** because it can stand by itself as a complete idea and has a subject and predicate.

Example: *I want Paul to be on my basketball team.* This is a complete idea, and so it is an independent clause. It can stand alone as a sentence.

Because he has the best jump shot. This is not a complete sentence and cannot stand alone. It is a dependent clause. This is a sentence fragment if used alone. Yet, this dependent clause contains further information about the subject of the independent clause. So we can combine the two clauses into one sentence: *I want Paul to be on my basketball team because he has the best jump shot.* (The dependent clause adds

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valuable information that lets the reader know *why* this person wanted Paul to be on the basketball team) When an independent and dependent clause are combined into one sentence, it is called a **complex sentence**. *He couldn't get into the movie because it was sold out.*

The dependent clause can come first or last in a sentence.

Mark had to walk five miles to the nearest phone after his car broke down.

After his car broke down, Mark had to walk five miles to the nearest phone.

If the dependent clause comes first, then there must be a comma after it.

Change two simple sentences into a complex sentence by making one of the ideas a dependent clause: *They were playing on the swing set. They heard their mother call them.*

While they were playing on the swing set, they heard their mother call them.

Transitions

Transitions are like bridges; they take the reader from one place or point to another. Think about the word *transportation* for a moment. That word means going from one place to another, literally, on land, sea, or air. Transportation means a person is MOVING, changing from here to there.

Transitions help writers MOVE from one place to another in essays or stories. They signal to the reader that a change is coming and help the reader see how the the next part of the essay relates to the last part. In order for a paragraph to do its part in the paper, it must connect smoothly with the parts around it. An essay can fall apart unless the paragraphs are clearly linked together. Transitions help the reader to follow the main line of thought. Transitions also make it easier for the writer to write an essay because they keep the writer moving ahead, making progress.

Transitional words or phrases connect parts of the story/essay to one another by clarifying the relationships between sentences and paragraphs. As with any other words, don't overuse these. Sometimes students use the word 'then' or 'next' to start a lot of sentences; read it out loud and they will notice.

Transitions that allow the reader to follow the story through time (in a narrative): **next, the next day, then, after that, after, afterwards, later, later on, later that day, later that week, a few hours later, a few days later, soon, meanwhile, finally, and eventually.** (Don't use any of these too often, particularly 'then' and 'next'.

Using a transition like "later that week" allows you to move to the next important highlight rather than get caught up in telling unnecessary information about three days where nothing much happens.



Other Tips for Narrative Writing



1. A note on endings to stories: good phrases to wrap up or look back and reflect at the end of story are: Since that day, since that time, looking back, Now I understand that

2. Quotation Marks- Put quotation marks “ ” around the exact words that are said by someone. *“Don’t go outside!” she screamed.* The words *she* and *screamed* are not inside the quotation marks because they were not SAID by the speaker.

a. Periods go inside quotation marks. But when you put *said* or other attribution (who said it) after the dialogue, then put a comma inside the quotation marks instead of a period.

Jason told his teacher, “My grandparents are coming to visit next week.”
(*comma replaces period*) “No, I couldn’t get tickets,” Tommy replied.

b. If the dialogue is a question or exclamation with attribution after it, then a ? or ! replaces the comma.

“Are you going to the big game tomorrow night?” Megan asked.
“Man, would I love to go!” Tommy exclaimed.

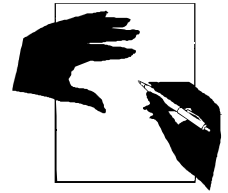
4. Don’t use too much dialogue in a narrative – maybe two or three quotations at the important or exciting part (the ‘wow’ or ‘zoom’ moment).

5. To make a story really come alive, put in quotations and add what the person is doing while they’re saying it.

“Time to go to bed,” my dad reminded me while he was reading the newspaper.

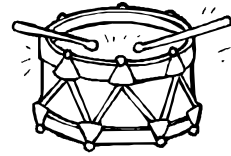
“Aww, Dad, do I have to?” I complained, frowning at him.

“It’s late,” he replied firmly as he switched off the television.



Guidelines for Writing a Narrative

1. Remember a narrative is telling about a series of events in chronological order (moving the reader through time from the first event to the last).
2. Don't start a story with the words "One day" or "One time" or "One sunny day", etc. Don't end a story by writing "Then I woke up and it was all a dream." Don't start by saying, "Hi, my name is _____ and I want to tell you a story." Just jump right in and start telling it.
3. Make sure your point-of-view stays the same throughout the story. *First person* (using the word "I") is a good point-of-view to use for narratives (I ran down the hallway). It reveals what you - the main character - has experienced or knows. *Third person* (using the pronouns she, he, someone's name) can also be used (Sam/He ran down the hallway.) Don't use both in one story.
4. Stories need to be focused. Don't give unnecessary information.
5. Your beginning can start with a hook (a way to grab the reader), but make sure it also gives information about the setting and your main character. Get to the prompt in the beginning or soon afterwards. Make sure your middle has two or three events that to build the plot. Your ending should repeat the prompt and conclude the story so the plot is finished and makes sense. Your reflections about what happened also makes a strong ending. Wrap it up.
6. To paint a picture for your reader, show, don't tell. Don't write "She was sad". Write "She frowned as her lip quivered and tears filled her eyes."
7. Use verbs that are exact. "Stared" or "gazed" is better than "looked".
8. Don't forget to show your (the character's) REACTION to major events.
9. Stories should have varied sentence length and structure.
10. Proper paragraphing and good transitional words will make your story easier to read.
11. Use dialogue to move the story along or reveal something about the character. Use quote marks around what the characters say. Don't use too much dialogue, though.
12. Read your story out loud if possible to see how it sounds. This is often a good way to see if sentences need to be varied, if something's not clear, and/or if word choice or transitions need work.



Sentence Variation & Rhythm

Writing should have a distinctive rhythm, just like music. To attain this, you must vary sentence length. Mix up short and longer sentences. If your essay consists of all sentences the same length, then your essay will sound choppy. Read your essay out loud to test how it sounds. Sentence variation helps to create your style as a writer. Combine some sentences by using conjunctions or add phrases to vary them. Make sure your ideas and paragraphs flow easily into one another; check transitions. Below are examples:

Conjunctions

(But, however, because, although, so, while, and, as, since)

They were playing on the swing set. They heard their mother call them.
While they were playing on the swing set, they heard their mother call them.

I was still cold. I had put two blankets over me.
I was still cold although I'd put two blankets over me.



Sarah didn't like ham. She ordered turkey instead.
Sarah didn't like ham so she ordered turkey instead.
Since Sarah didn't like ham, she ordered turkey instead.

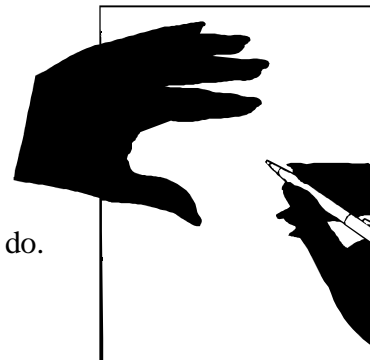
I grinned. I held on tight. The roller coaster took off!
I grinned and held on tight as the roller coaster took off!

Larry dashed down the football field. He fumbled the ball.

Larry dashed down the football field and fumbled the ball.
As Larry dashed down the football field, he fumbled the ball.
Larry fumbled the ball as he dashed down the football field.
Larry dashed down the football field, but he fumbled the ball.

I like year-round school. I don't like making up days on Saturdays.
I like year-round school, but I don't like making up days on Saturdays.

I like being out for the whole summer. There are a lot of fun things to do.
I like being out for the whole summer because there are a lot of fun things to do.



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Phrases

My friend and I skated at Jellybeans until eleven o'clock. It was open all night.
My friend and I skated at Jellybeans, **which was open all night**, until eleven o'clock.

Andrew Johnson was the 17th President of the United States. He was born in Raleigh, NC.

Andrew Johnson, **who was born in Raleigh, NC**, was the 17th President of the United States.

The tornado touched down in four towns. It devastated the entire county.
The tornado touched down in four towns, **devastating the entire county**.

My dad drove down the road. He was listening to a jazz station on the radio.
My dad drove down the road, **listening to a jazz station on the radio**.

Remember, sentences are not supposed to be only SUBJECT-VERB-ADJECTIVE.. To be a good writer, you have to balance the sentence lengths and structures (add phrases). At the same time, avoid run-on sentences (two sentences/ideas run together in the same sentence without proper punctuation or a conjunction).

Writing is indeed a balancing act.



Zooming In

(writing details, giving a clear picture for the reader like a zoom lens does on a camera; have children write their own telling sentence/showing paragraph about a time in their life (getting a pet, winning, losing, etc.), a hobby, or just describing something)

Telling: California was really beautiful.

Showing: I loved how the ocean met the mountains as we drove along the Pacific Coast Highway. We were right on the edge of the curvy road high above the rocky coastline below us dotted with the white foam of the waves. On the other side of our car were the jagged mountains, standing tall and proud above the crashing sea. It was a beautiful, warm California day, and to me it was the most magnificent place on earth.

Telling: Brian was upset because his basketball team lost.

Showing: Brian looked up at the scoreboard and shook his head slowly. He couldn't believe his team lost the basketball game by only two points. The players on the other team were celebrating their victory, jumping up and down and chest butting each other. Brian bit his lip to stop it from quivering. His eyes teared up, and the crowd looked all blurry. He blinked the tears away because he didn't want anyone to see him cry. Mark, a player on his team, came up and patted Brian on the shoulder. "Don't worry about missing that shot," he reassured Brian. "Without you, our team would never have even been in the game at all."

Telling: My best vacation was when my family and I went to New York City.

Showing: The lights of Broadway glittered in the night as I looked out of my hotel window. My family and I were on vacation in New York City, and I couldn't wait to go out on the town. We had tickets to "The Lion King" – one of the biggest shows on Broadway, and I was so excited I could hardly stand it.

Sample of sports-related story with emotion and details

The Rebound

“Get those rebounds,” my dad advised me from the stands as my team, the Rockets, walked out onto the shiny wood basketball court. It was the semifinal game of the city championship tournament against the Hornets for the 6th grade division. I was playing center against a bulky guy about three inches taller than I was. Just looking at him made me nervous. I hoped I could defend him.

The crowd’s cheering made me have butterflies in my stomach. “Let’s go Rockets!” they yelled in unison as they clapped their hands. I could see the excitement in the eyes of all the players, but there was a bit of panic there, too. We all knew this was a huge game.

When the game started, I was surprised to find I could do okay against the taller guy, Number 8, on the other team. He was strong and could push and shove under the basket pretty well, but he wasn’t as fast as I was. I made a few lay-ups on some break away plays, got one basket on a quick spin around move, and one jump shot from the side. He got more rebounds than I did but I pulled down some myself. At the half, I had eight points and we led by three – 22-25.

In the second half, Number 8 came out smoking. He shot three times in a row and made them all. I felt pretty terrible because it was my responsibility to stop him. Then my team got hot and started making a lot of baskets. Our two guards were hitting jump shots, swishing them through the net.

With two minutes to go in the game, our team was up 44-42. My heart felt like it was in my throat. The Hornets passed the ball around and then got it in to number 8. I didn’t want him to tie the score so I tried to block it. The ref’s whistle blew as the ball went through the net. A basket and a foul. I felt terrible, absolutely awful. He went to the line with about twenty seconds left on the clock. He bounced the ball two or three times, staring at the goal, as the crowd went wild. Then he shot, and the ball hit the rim, then rolled in. The Hornets were ahead by one. It was all my fault.

We had to score in a hurry. The guard brought the ball down the court and dished it off to one of our forwards out in the right corner. He bounce passed it to me, but Number 8 was on me so close I couldn’t get a clear look at the basket. I tried to turn to do a hook shot, but the big guy was playing tight defense. Ten seconds left. The crowd started counting down, “Nine, eight”.

Suddenly I saw one of the guards break free from his defender out near the three point line. “Seven, six . . .” the crowd counted. I whipped it quickly out to him, and he went up for the shot to win it. Clang! The ball hit the rim and bounced up into the air. I jumped as high as I could to reach for it. Somehow I grabbed it and put it up with two seconds remaining. I couldn’t believe it when I watched the ball hit the backboard and go in. We won by a point as time ran out.

“All right!!” I screamed as my team members mobbed me on the gym floor. I’d never been that happy in my entire life.

Then Number 8 walked by and muttered, “Good game.”

“You, too,” I said, glad I didn’t have to play against him anymore.

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My dad came over and gave me a hug. “It’s a good thing you got that rebound,” he told me, smiling. I nodded and smiled back, looking up at the scoreboard.