

NARRATIVE ESSAY PROMPTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

1. [Being Unprepared] Because you have been sick, out of town, busy at work, or working on other homework, you didn't have as much time to study for an important test as you needed. Everyone going to school has been in this situation. Think of a specific test that you took that you felt unprepared for and narrate the events. Tell your readers about the preparation that you were able to do, the reasons that you didn't get to prepare as well as you wanted, taking the test, and any significant events that happened after you took the test. Your paper should help readers understand what it felt like to be unprepared.
2. [Lightbulb Moment] Think of an experience when you realized that you suddenly understood an idea, a skill, or a concept you had been struggling with -- it might be something related to a class that you took or a specific athletic skill you were trying to perfect. For instance, you might think about trying to understand how to identify iambic pentameter in a poem or how to complete a Taylor Series problem in your Calculus class. Or you might consider trying to perfect your free throws and suddenly understanding how your follow-through was affecting your success. Write a narrative that tells the story of your movement toward understanding. How did you finally come to understand? What changed your perceptions and gave you a new understanding? Your paper should help readers understand how you felt to struggle with the idea or skill and then to understand.
3. [Childhood Event] Choose a vivid time from your childhood -- You might think of the first time that you rode a school bus, of a time when you went to the principal's office, the first A you earned on a test or paper, earning money to buy something that you really wanted, and so on. Narrate the events related to the childhood memory that you've chosen so that your readers will understand why the event was important and memorable.
4. [Achieving a Goal] Think of a time when you achieved a personal goal -- you might have finally completed a marathon or triathlon, or you might have bettered your score on the SATs or another test, or you might have learned how to use a piece of software like Microsoft Word or Excel. Tell your readers about the story of how you met your goal. Be sure that your readers understand why the goal is important to you.
5. [The Good and the Bad] Think about an event in your life that seemed bad but turned out to be good. Maybe you got injured and while you were waiting for your broken leg to heal, you learned how to use a computer. What makes the event change from bad to good may be something that you learned as a result, something that you did differently as a result, or something that happened that wouldn't have occurred otherwise. Tell the story of the event that you experienced and help your readers understand how an event that seemed negative turned out to have valuable consequences.

6. [Being a Teacher] Teaching someone else how to do something can be rewarding. Think of a skill that you've taught someone else how to do. Perhaps you taught someone else how to swim, showed someone how to bake a souffle, or helped someone learn how to study more effectively. Think about the events that made up the process of teaching the skill, and narrate the story for your readers.

7. [Changing Places] Every place has things that change -- sometimes as the result of economics, sometimes because different people are involved, and sometimes for no clear reason that you know about. Think of a change to a place that you know well. Perhaps the local grocery store you grew up with as Smith and Bros. Grocery was bought out by a regional chain like Food Lion or Winn Dixie. Maybe the First National Bank of Smithburg suddenly becomes NationsBank. Perhaps the change was more personal -- an older sibling moves out of the house and your family changes the room to a guest room or an office. Think of a specific change and narrate the events that occurred. Readers should know the details of the change, and they should know how you feel about the changes that occurred.

8. [Personal Rituals] Describe a personal ritual that you, your friends, or your family have. Think about the personal steps that you always go through when you prepare for an exam. Do you sit at a desk, spread books and notes across your bed, or use the kitchen table? Do you have to have something to drink...soda, water, jolt? There are numerous things that we do for which we create our own personal rituals. Choose one event -- studying for a test, writing a paper, dressing and warming up before a game, or preparing and having a special family meal. Narrate the events that take place when you complete your ritual so that your readers understand the steps that the ritual includes and why you complete them.

9. [Standing Up] Choose a time when you did something that took a lot of nerve, a time when you didn't follow the crowd or a time when you stood up for your beliefs. Perhaps your friends were urging you to do something that you were uncomfortable with and you chose not to cave into peer pressure. Maybe you took a stance on a political issue that was important in your community, or you might have. Whatever you choose, think about the details of the event and write a story that tells about what happened. Your narrative should show your readers why you decided to make a stand or try something that took nerve, give specifics on the events, and share how you felt after the event.

10. [Disagreeing] Think of a time when you disagreed with a decision that had been made and did something about it. The decision might have been made by someone you know personally -- your Biology teacher announced a new policy to grade for spelling and grammar on your quizzes and homework, or an older family member decides to cancel a subscription to a magazine that you liked to read. You might have responded by discussing your concerns with your principal or dean, or you might have decided to get a part-time job to earn enough money to buy the magazine yourself. Or the decision could have been made by someone you never met -- perhaps your school board decided to change the lines in your school district

so that you would have to go to a different school, or your state legislature has passed a bill that you disagreed with. Your response might have been to write a letter to the editor, to your state representative, or to the school board. Whatever happened, your job is to write a paper that narrates the events that occurred -- from the decision that was made to your response. Be sure that your paper gives enough details that your readers understand why you disagreed with the decision and why you felt that your response was appropriate.