Organize Ideas for a Personal Narrative

1. Focus

Explain the Process

Say: We’ve chosen our idea for a personal narrative but we’re not ready to write yet. We need to organize our ideas first. We need to think about how we can describe the events in our personal narrative in such a way that our readers will be able to visualize them. Today I’m going to show you how to use a planning chart to help you organize your ideas before you begin your drafts.

Model Organizing Ideas

Display the planning chart on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Use some, or all, of the sample think-alouds below based on “Inner Tubing in Colorado.” (Note: If you haven’t read aloud this mentor text, you may wish to do so now.)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Looking down the steep hill</td>
<td>Hill covered in snow</td>
<td>Fresh, clean air</td>
<td>Butterflies in my stomach</td>
<td>Cold and shaking</td>
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<td>2. Getting on the inner tube</td>
<td>Mom waving, winding line of people behind me, breath looked like smoke from train</td>
<td>Blast of wind, voices behind me</td>
<td>Fresh, clean air</td>
<td>Cheeks hurt from cold, panicked</td>
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<td>3. Flying down the hill on inner tube</td>
<td>Trees flying past</td>
<td>Whoosh of my inner tube</td>
<td>Wind slapping my face</td>
<td>Flecks of snow</td>
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<td>4. Crashing the inner tube</td>
<td>Something big and brown, snow everywhere, my mom extending a hand</td>
<td>A loud bam!</td>
<td>Shock and surprise, feeling of my body skipping across snow</td>
<td>Mouthful of snow</td>
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Conclusion: Went back to hotel room; warmth of fire; taste of hot chocolate; family’s voices

Sample Personal Narrative Planning Chart (BLM 4)
Sample think-alouds. Say: I’m going to use “Inner Tubing in Colorado” to model how to use the planning chart. I’ll imagine that I’m the writer. I’ll jot down details that describe my different senses at the time of each event.

Event 1. Say: I want to convey to my readers the feelings I had when I looked down that steep hill. I was cold and I was scared of what I was about to do. I’ll describe the butterflies in my stomach and how I was shaking from the cold. Model writing details on the chart.

Event 2. Say: Now I want to tell what it was like just before I jumped on the inner tube. I remember letting out a deep breath and seeing my breath like smoke from a train. I remember my mom waving to tell me to hurry up and there was a line of people waiting behind me. I felt a bit panicked. Model writing on the chart.

Continue modeling as you complete the chart.

2. Rehearse

Practice Organizing Ideas for a Personal Narrative

Invite students to jot down words to describe the first event for their own personal narrative ideas. Reinforce the idea that writers think about ways they can use words to make their events come alive.

If your class includes English learners or other students who need support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring students together and invite volunteers to describe their first events, using details for as many senses as they can.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that it’s important to use strong descriptive details to tell about events in our personal narratives. We can use a planning chart to help us think of good descriptive words involving as many senses as we can. Then when we write, we can help our readers visualize what’s happening.

Make BLM 4 available to students who are ready to organize ideas for their personal narrative during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to share descriptive details about some of their events. Ask them how using the planning chart is helping them think of ways to create strong, multisensory descriptions.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to draw an event from their personal narratives. Then ask them to describe the event using words or gestures. Prompt them by asking how they remembered what they saw, how they felt, and what they smelled, tasted, and heard.

Intermediate and Advanced

Encourage ELs to use the following sentence frames to help them talk about their story ideas:

- I saw ______.
- I felt ______.
- I heard ______.
- I tasted ______.
- I smelled ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share this English/Spanish cognate: describe/describir.