Literacy Narrative: Building Bridges, Bridging Gaps

3



FIGURE 3.1 Five Black officers of the Women's League in Newport, Rhode Island, c. 1899. Mary Dickerson (1830–1914) and her husband, Silas, moved to Newport, Rhode Island, around 1865. Empowered by literacy, Mary had founded a dressmaking business by 1872, and she helped found the New England Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (later renamed the Northeastern Federation), which is still active, in 1896 and the Rhode Island Union of Colored Women's Clubs in 1903. The women pictured, among others, are credited with "an inherited interest in social questions and a . . . spirit and pride" that contributed to social equality and justice, including the empowerment of women through the right to vote. For more information, read Mary Dickerson's obituary (https://openstax.org/r/obituary). (credit: "Five female Negro officers of Women's League, Newport, R.I." by Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Public Domain)

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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INTRODUCTION "Literacy is now understood as a means of . . . communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and fast-changing world," according to UNESCO. The literacy narrative is a genre that provides an account of an individual or a member of a community and their experience with learning.

Combining the broad definition of *literacy* with the term *narrative*, or *storytelling*, produces the literacy narrative: a story that provides an account of a learning experience. As you begin to reflect on what it means to learn, particularly in a college setting, this chapter will guide you through an exploration of the various features of the literacy narrative genre to prepare you to write one of your own.

One path to becoming familiar with the language of higher institutional learning, or the academy, is what professors like to call *entering the academic discourse community.* This phrase means that you begin to reflect on the experiences that have laid the path for your admission to this new community. In the traditional sense, when talking about **literacy**, people think of reading and writing. However, in the modern multimedia and kinesthetic world, the definition of *literacy* has been expanded to mean "competence in communication," including a multitude of methods, modes, and texts. This emerging definition means that literacy includes the abilities to compose and interpret messages using images, visual arrangements, spoken words, and other modes beyond simple written texts. People are considered literate in almost any concentrated area in which they demonstrate knowledge and communicate proficiently.



FIGURE 3.2 In fact, literacy may no longer involve physical pages of paper. (credit: "Woman working on iPad" by Marco Verch/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Having this broad understanding of literacy allows individuals to think about the **genre**, or writing type, of the **literacy narrative** in many ways: ways that are textual, musical, digital, social, communal—the list continues. What scholars know for certain is that literacy involves individual as well as community engagement. One does not achieve literacy through isolation but rather as a result of active engagements with members of communities.

3.1 Identity and Expression

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Use reading and composing for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating.
- Discern the nature of identity in various rhetorical and cultural contexts.

You likely express your identity, or ideas about who you are, through language. The language you use also signals the ways in which you are rooted in specific culture, or groups of people who share common beliefs and lived experiences. Because the ways in which people speak and write are closely intertwined with their self-images and community affiliations, you can think, communicate, and interact most freely with others by using your personal **idiolect**—that is, your individual way of speaking and writing—which is based in cultural language use. This section examines a few myths about language use and explores some productive ways to think about language and communication.

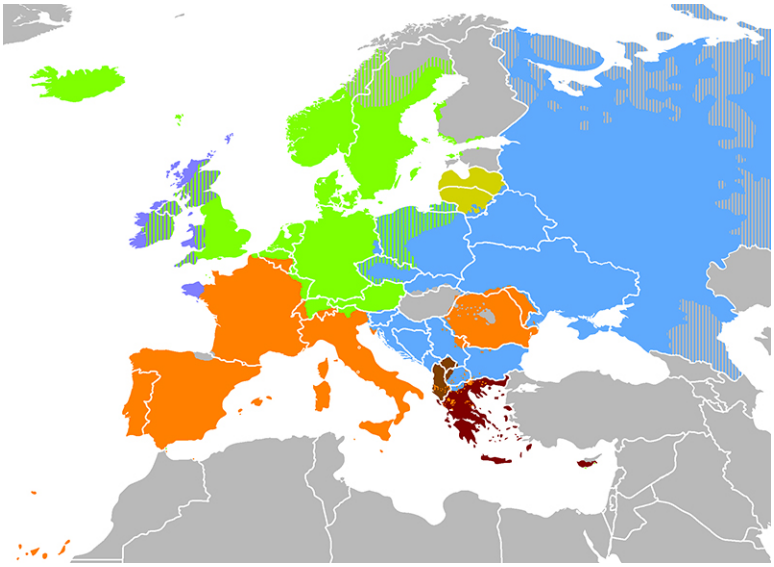


FIGURE 3.3 Various language families in Europe (credit: "Indo-European languages" by Servitje/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

Language and Identity

As members of different communities, most Americans speak and write in a number of English varieties without even thinking about doing so. Like others, you generally speak differently with friends than you do with elders. You usually use different types of language when texting on your phone than when writing a professional email. As you make these communication choices based on different settings and audiences, you signal your identity and culture through word choice, sentence structure, and use of language in specific situations. For example, when speaking with friends, you may engage in wordplay to show identification with the group. On the other hand, you may speak with respect to elders to show an identity as a well-mannered younger relative, and you may use a standard email format to show a professional identity. If you speak other languages, you may find yourself freely switching between English and those other languages when conversing with people who share the same linguistic abilities; these shifts from one language to another showcase your identity as a multilingual person. As author Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004) writes in *Borderlands / La Frontera*, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white" (59).

Every time you communicate, you signal some aspect of your identity. In the same way that everyone has multiple, intersecting identities, everyone has multiple ways of expressing themselves through language. As members of a multiethnic, multicultural society, everyone should recognize and respect these personal ways of communicating, which are integral to a shared human experience.



FIGURE 3.4 Many view the world as a global village, which contains many language identities. (credit: "Anonymous globe of flags" by Wikimedia Commons, CC0)

Expressing Identity in Writing

Even though individuals speak and write effectively using different varieties of English, many people nevertheless believe that one standard, "proper" English variety exists and that this "correct" way of speaking and writing should be used universally in all settings. This viewpoint considers varieties of English outside the imagined norm to be "wrong," "bad," or "substandard." For example, speakers of some southern U.S. English varieties are often judged as "poor" or "unintelligent." Similarly, people who speak English with the accent of another language may be incorrectly assumed to be illiterate. If you speak and write using one of those undervalued English varieties, others may have judged you for your language use or told you that your writing is "wrong." Even without such judgment, you may have felt apprehensive when sharing your writing with others; you may still fear a harsh assessment, or you may feel vulnerable when others read your compositions.



FIGURE 3.5 Leaders of the Writing in a Foreign Language panel at Finncon 2013 (credit: "Writing in a foreign language at Finncon 2013" by Henry So?derlund/ Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 3.0)

The truth is that people speak and write in different ways for different **rhetorical situation**, or instances of communication. People in different communities and professions employ distinct kinds of English. You already use different varieties of English in different parts of your life; as you progress through college and into your career, you will learn the language expectations for the rhetorical situations you will encounter in those spaces. In learning these expectations, you will gain new identities. For example, you may become someone who knows how to write an exemplary lab report, you could develop an identity as an emerging researcher in any number of fields, or you may simply become someone who is comfortable letting other people read your writing. These new linguistic identities do not need to replace language use in other areas of your life. For instance, you should not feel the need to use a different form of grammar or punctuation in your social media posts. You should feel comfortable using your familiar English varieties in familiar rhetorical situations while, if needed, using new varieties of English you may learn in the new rhetorical situations you encounter. Additionally, you can and should seek out opportunities to use your familiar, nonacademic English varieties in academic and professional settings when you feel it is appropriate and aligns with the expectations of your instructor or employer.

Because people write in many different settings for many reasons, no particular English variety is appropriate for all writing tasks. As you become more familiar with the different ways English is used in different settings and communities, you can choose which variety to draw on in each rhetorical situation. You also may choose whether to meet or to disrupt the expectations of the people you are communicating with. In making these choices, you will rely on your existing literacies as well as newly learned ones.

3.2 Trailblazer

Literacy Narrative Trailblazer: Tara Westover

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Use reading for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating.
- Identify various types of literacy in the context of a literacy narrative.

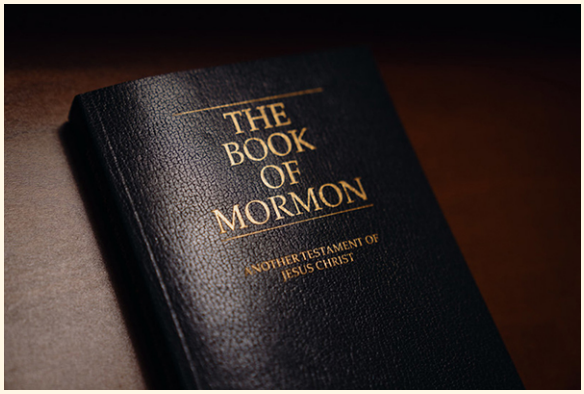


FIGURE 3.6 The Book of Mormon was the basis of one of Tara Westover's (https://openstax.org/r/Tara) early literacies. (credit: "The Book of Mormon" by Tony Webster/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

"We are all more complicated than the role we are assigned in stories."

Being *Educated*

In her 2018 best seller, *Educated: A Memoir*, Tara Westover (b. 1986) considers the effects of academic and nonacademic literacies in her life. She also contemplates the ways in which identification with certain literacies can both create and disturb an individual's relationships and community memberships. While *Educated* addresses a variety of themes, including the tensions that family members must confront when they disagree, the memoir can be read largely as a literacy narrative.

Early in her memoir, Westover discusses a range of literacies she developed as the youngest of seven children in a homeschooled family. Although she was taught to read, her literary world consisted almost exclusively of the Book of Mormon and other religious texts. Her other literacies included preserving food, preparing herbs, and caring for the animals on the family farm, located on an Idaho mountain. She felt a keen sense of belonging both to her family and to their mountain home. Westover also learned how to work in and survive the dangerous junkyard her family owned and operated. Even though many family members sustained a variety of horrific accidents and injuries over the years, mostly at the junkyard or in car accidents, the family relied entirely on natural remedies; both parents considered doctors and medicine to be sinful. Despite the range of literacies that Westover learned at home, her parents did not value formal schooling and were indifferent to the development of a broad understanding of science, history, or current events. The Westover children were almost entirely self-directed in their academic studies.

As a young child, Westover fully embraced her parents' beliefs that "government schooling" was wholly unchristian and equivalent to brainwashing. Her brother Tyler, however, had always loved "book learning" and decided to leave home to attend college. He could not fully articulate why he felt compelled to be the first to leave, and his departure intrigued Westover. She, too, began to think about pursuing higher education. After another brother became physically abusive toward her, Tyler encouraged her to use college as an escape. She then bought an ACT prep book, studied on her own, and did well enough on the exams to be accepted to Brigham Young University.

Westover articulates in her memoir that once on campus, she realized how her haphazard homeschooling experience had left her with large gaps in knowledge and no preparation for studying and taking tests. As she improved her academic skills, she also learned methods of academic inquiry that were at odds with her parents' faith-based interpretations of both world and personal events.

As Westover gained a science-based worldview through her college experience, she struggled to integrate her

new understandings with her family's perspectives; in other words, her new literacies were at odds with her old ones. She still felt connected to her family, but her new understanding of the world was irreconcilable with her father's survivalist, fundamentalist beliefs. When she refused to submit to her father's will and return to his rigid worldview and interpretation of Mormonism, Westover's relationship with most of her family members disintegrated. Instead, she used her academic literacies to examine the history of their religion in her doctoral research. All three Westover children who left the mountain—and, to some extent, their family—earned PhDs.

For Westover, the schism with her family was not primarily the result of her literacy learning; rather, the relationship ruptured because she refused to repudiate her newfound knowledge as inferior to her family's ways of knowing. In subsequent interviews, Westover has discussed the loss she felt in being cut off from her family and place of origin. Although many college students experience similar challenges when integrating new ways of encountering the world with their family's views of "how things are" or "how things should be," some families feel enriched by the new information, whereas others feel threatened by it.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the literacies that Westover learned while living at home? How might they conflict with the new ones learned away from home?
2. How might literacy learning have the potential both to separate and to unite individuals and their communities?
3. Do you think the Westovers with PhDs are more "literate" than the ones who remained at home? Explain your answer.
4. How are literacy and gaining new literacies related? Ambition? Desire for knowledge? Rebellion? Dissatisfaction? Explain your answer.
5. How do your childhood literacy experiences align with Westover's? How do they differ?
6. At this point in your college experience, have you had any encounters with ideas that conflict with the value system(s) with which you were raised, as Westover did? How do you envision navigating those differences?

3.3 Glance at Genre: The Literacy Narrative

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Read and compose in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes.
- Match the capacities of different environments to varying rhetorical situations.

Over time, people have developed specific ways of writing for particular rhetorical situations. These distinctive ways of writing can be referred to in part as genres. You may have heard the term *genre* in reference to publishing categories, such as novels or memoirs, but the term can refer to any type of writing that conforms to specific forms and benchmarks. Many genres include stories of different kinds—for example, folktales, short stories, accounts of events, and biographies. As author Jonathan Gottschall says in his 2012 book of the same title, humankind is "the storytelling animal"; people of all cultures have engaged in telling stories, both as storytellers and as audience members. Simply put, narrative stories are essential to many genres of writing.



FIGURE 3.7 Bronwyn Vaughan, storyteller (credit: "At the foot of the storytellers chair" by Mosman Library/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Exploring Narrative: Elements of Storytelling

Narratives, whether about literacy or anything else, include these key elements:

- **Plot.** Authors of narratives tell about one or more events. In fiction, the plot is the sequence of those events. In nonfiction, a plot is often referred to simply as the events, but nonfiction texts follow similar plot patterns, including exposition or introduction, a series of events leading to a climax or discovery, and events following the climax or discovery.
- **Characters.** The events in the story happen to characters, or individuals who are part of the story. In nonfiction, these characters are usually real people. The audience should feel a connection to the main character or characters. Readers may like or dislike characters, blame them or feel sorry for them, identify with them or not. Skilled writers portray characters through the use of dialogue, actions or behavior, and thoughts so that readers can understand what these individuals are like.
- **Setting.** Stories, fiction and nonfiction, take place in settings, which include locations, time periods, and the cultures in which the characters or real people are immersed.
- **Problem and Resolution.** In narratives, the characters generally encounter one or more problems. The tension caused by the problem builds to a climax. The resolution of the problem and the built-up tension usually occurs near the end of the story.
- **Story Arc.** Most narratives have a story arc—a beginning, a middle, and an end—but not necessarily in that order. The story arc, or order of events, may occur chronologically, or the story may begin in the middle of the action and explain earlier events later in the sequence.

Specific Details and Other Conventions

To immerse the audience in the story, authors provide specific details of the scenes and action. Many authors, and teachers, call this strategy "showing, not telling." These aspects can include the following elements:

- **Sensory Details:** Full, literal or figurative descriptions of the things that the characters see, smell, hear, touch, and taste in their surroundings.
- **Dialogue:** Conversation between characters.
- **Action:** Vivid portrayal of the events in the story. Writers often use short sentences and strong verbs to indicate physical or mental action.
- **Engaging Language:** Sentence structure and word choices, including **tone** (vocal attitude of the narrator or characters), **diction** (language used by the narrator or characters), and **varied constructions** (different kinds of sentences), that provide specific, clear, and compelling information for the audience.

Establishing the Significance

Most importantly, the audience must feel that the story has some significance. While the author's main point may only be implied, rather than stated outright as in a conventional academic essay, readers should understand the point of the story and believe that it matters.



FIGURE 3.8 Malala Yousafzai in 2015 (credit: "Malala Yousafzai- Education for girls" by UK Department for International Development/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0)

For example, in the prologue to her memoir about the importance of education for girls, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013), Malala Yousafzai (b. 1997) writes, "The day when everything changed was Tuesday, 9 October 2012." Yousafzai provides reference to an exact date, the precise moment when a Taliban gunman shot her in the head because she had spoken publicly in favor of girls' right to education. Identifying the date in this way is a technique that serves a variety of purposes. This technique provides a focal point to draw the audience into the story, identifies details that serve as rising action that the audience can assume will culminate on this date, marks the setting in both time and place for the audience, and ultimately foreshadows a climax of action for the reader. The following elements, therefore, are crucial for writers of narratives to consider when creating content for their writing.

- **Audience.** Narratives are designed to appeal to specific audiences; authors choose storytelling elements, details, and language strategies to engage the target audience.
- **Purpose.** Authors may tell stories for different reasons: to entertain, to reinforce cultural norms, to educate, or to strengthen social ties. The same story may, and often does, fulfill more than one purpose.

3.4 Annotated Sample Reading: from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Read in several genres to understand how conventions are shaped by purpose, language, culture, and expectation.
- Use reading for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating in varying rhetorical and cultural contexts.
- Read a diverse range of texts, attending to relationships among ideas, patterns of organization, and interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements.

Introduction

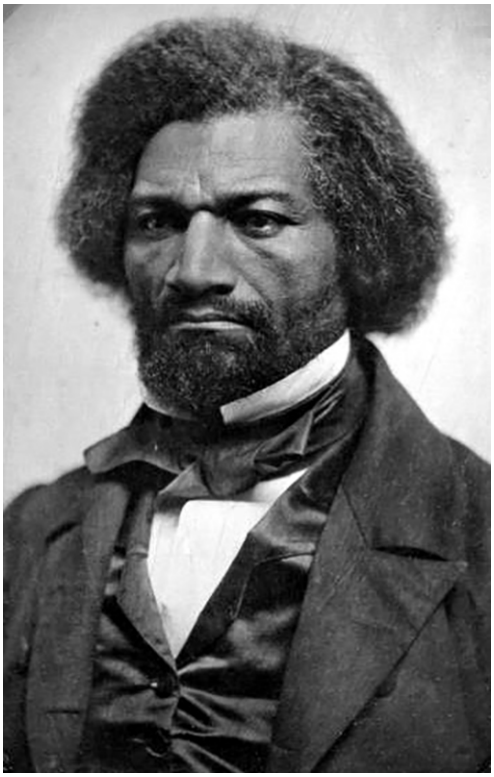


FIGURE 3.9 Frederick Douglass: speaker, writer, abolitionist (credit: "Frederick Douglass, from an 1856 Ambrotype in the National Portrait Gallery" by Mike Licht, NotionsCapital.com/flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was born into slavery in Maryland. He never knew his father, barely knew his mother, and was separated from his grandmother at a young age. As a boy, Douglass understood there to be a connection between literacy and freedom. In the excerpt from his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, that follows, you will learn about how Douglass learned to read. By age 12, he was reading texts about the natural rights of human beings. At age 15, he began educating other enslaved people. When Douglass was 20, he met Anna Murray, whom he would later marry. Murray helped Douglass plot his escape from slavery. Dressed as a sailor, Douglass bought a train ticket northward. Within 24 hours, he arrived in New York City and declared himself free. Douglass went on to work as an activist in the abolitionist movement as well as the women's suffrage movement.

In the portion of the text included here, Douglass chooses to represent the dialogue of Mr. Auld, an enslaver who by the laws of the time owns Douglass. Douglass describes this moment with detail and accuracy, including Mr. Auld's use of a racial slur. In an interview (https://openstax.org/r/interview) with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Harvard professor Randall Kennedy (b. 1954), who has traced the historical evolution of the word, notes that one of its first uses, recorded in 1619, appears to have been descriptive rather than derogatory. However, by the mid-1800s, White people had appropriated the term and begun using it with its current negative connotation. In response, over time, Black people have reclaimed the word (or variations of it) for different purposes, including mirroring racism, creating irony, and reclaiming community and personal power—using the word for a contrasting purpose to the way others use it. Despite this evolution, Professor Kennedy explains that the use of the word should be accompanied by a deep understanding of one's audience and by being clear about the intention. However, even when intention is very clear and malice is not intended, harm can, and likely will, occur. Thus, Professor Kennedy cautions that all people should understand the history of the word, be aware of its potential negative effect on an audience, and therefore use it sparingly, or preferably not at all.

In the case of Mr. Auld and Douglass, Douglass gives an account of Auld's exact language in order to hold a mirror to the racism of Mr. Auld—and the reading audience of his memoir—and to emphasize the theme that literacy (or education) is one way to combat racism.

LIVING BY THEIR OWN WORDS

Literacy from Unexpected Sources

From the title and from Douglass's use of pronoun I, you know this work is autobiographical and therefore written from the first-person point of view.

> *[excerpt begins with first full paragraph on page 33 and ends on page 34 where the paragraph ends]*

> Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read.

Douglass describes the background situation and the culture of the time, which he will defy in his quest for literacy. The word choice in his narration of events indicates that he is writing for an educated audience.

> To use his own words, further, he said, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy."

In sharing this part of the narrative, Douglass underscores the importance of literacy. He provides a description of Mr. Auld, a slaveholder, who seeks to impose illiteracy as a means to oppress others. In this description of Mr. Auld's reaction, Douglass shows that slaveholders feared the power that enslaved people would have if they could read and write.

Douglass provides the details of Auld's dialogue not only because it is a convention of narrative genre but also because it demonstrates the purpose and motivation for his forthcoming pursuit of literacy. We have chosen to maintain the authenticity of the original text by using the language that Douglass offers to quote Mr. Auld's dialogue because it both provides context for the rhetorical situation and underscores the value of the attainment of literacy for Douglass. However, contemporary audiences must understand that this language should be uttered only under very narrow circumstances in any current rhetorical situation. In general, it is best to avoid its use.

> These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I the least expected it. Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master.

In this reflection, Douglass has a definitive and transformative moment with reading and writing. The moment that sparked a desire for literacy is a common feature in literacy narratives, particularly those of enslaved people. In that moment, he understood the value of literacy and its life-changing possibilities; that transformative moment is a central part of the arc of this literacy narrative.

> Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both.

Douglass articulates that this moment changed his relationship to literacy and ignited a purposeful engagement with language and learning that would last throughout his long life. The rhythm, sentence structure, and poetic phrasing in this reflection provide further evidence that Douglass, over the course of his life, actively pursued and mastered language after having this experience with Mr. Auld.

> *[excerpt continues with the beginning of Chapter 7 on page 36 and ends with the end of the paragraph at the top of page 39]*

> [In Chapter 7, the narrative continues] I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. In accomplishing this, I was compelled to resort to various stratagems. I had no regular teacher. My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct, but had set her face against my being instructed by any one else. It is due, however, to my mistress to say of her, that she did not adopt this course of treatment immediately. She at first lacked the depravity indispensable to shutting me up in mental darkness. It was at least necessary for her to have some training in the exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute.

> My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practise her husband's precepts. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself.

Douglass describes in detail a person in his life and his relationship to her. He uses specific diction to describe her kindness and to help readers get to know her—a "tear" for the "suffering"; "bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner."

> She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

The fact that Douglass can understand the harm caused by the institution of slavery to slaveholders as well as to enslaved people shows a level of sophistication in thought, identifies the complexity and detriment of this historical period, and demonstrates an acute awareness of the rhetorical situation, especially for his audience for this text.

The way that he articulates compassion for the slaveholders, despite their ill treatment of him, would create empathy in his readers and possibly provide a revelation for his audience.

> From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*.

Once again, Douglass underscores the value that literacy has for transforming the lived experiences of enslaved people. The reference to the inch and the ell circles back to Mr. Auld's warnings and recalls the impact of that moment on his life.

> The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country.

Douglass comments on the culture of the time, which still permitted slavery; he is sensitive to the fact that these boys might be embarrassed by their participation in unacceptable, though humanitarian, behavior. His audience will also recognize the irony in his tone when he writes that it is "an unpardonable offense to teach slaves . . . in this Christian country." Such behavior is surely "unchristian."

> It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life*! Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

Douglass pursues and attains literacy not only for his own benefit; his knowledge also allows him to begin to instruct, as well as advocate for, those around him. Douglass's use of language and his understanding of the rhetorical situation give the audience evidence of the power of literacy for all people, round out the arc of his narrative, and provide a resolution.

Discussion Questions

1. Based on what you have learned about literacy thus far, would you consider this excerpt from Frederick Douglass's autobiography a literacy narrative? Explain your response by providing evidence from Douglass's text.
2. How do Douglass's descriptions of Mr. and Mrs. Auld make these characters come to life for the reader?
3. What do Douglass's tone, use of language, and commentary reveal about him and why literacy was so important?
4. African American storytelling features a common trope (device) of a trickster character. The trickster is characterized by intellect or secret knowledge that they use to defy convention. How does Douglass play

the role of trickster in this excerpt from his narrative, and what impact does this rhetorical device have on the reading audience?

5. What elements of Douglass's narrative might help you develop your own narrative about literacy?

3.5 Writing Process: Tracing the Beginnings of Literacy

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Develop a writing project through multiple drafts.
- Use composing for inquiry, learning, critical thinking, and communicating in various rhetorical, cultural, and language situations.
- Give and act on productive feedback to works in progress.
- Benefit from the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes.
- Use language structures, including multilingual structures, grammar, punctuation, and spelling, during the processes of composing and revising.

Many inexperienced writers imagine that "good" writers compose their texts all at once, from beginning to end, and need only a small amount of attention to polish the grammar and punctuation before arriving at a final draft. In reality, however, the **writing process** (steps for creating a finished composition) is typically **recursive**. That is, it repeats steps multiple times, not necessarily in the same order, and the process is more messy than linear or systematic. You can think of the writing process in terms of these broad categories:

- **Prewriting.** You will end up with a stronger composition if you do some work before you begin writing. Before putting complete sentences on a page, take some time to think about the rhetorical situation for your writing, gather your thoughts, and consider how you might arrange your ideas.
- **Drafting.** In the past, you may have dedicated most of your writing time to drafting, or putting words into a document. When you have strong prewriting and revision habits, however, drafting is often a smaller portion of the writing process.
- **Peer Review.** Almost all strong writers rely on feedback from others, whether peers, instructors, or editors. Your instructor may guide you in some peer review exercises to complete with your classmates, or you might choose to consult with your university's writing center. When others give you clear, honest feedback on your draft, you can use that information to strengthen your piece.
- **Revision.** After you have a draft, carefully consider how to make it more effective in reaching the audience and fulfilling its purpose. You can make changes that affect the piece as a whole; such changes are often called global revisions. You can also make changes that affect only the meaning of a sentence or a word; these changes can be called local revisions.

Summary of Assignment: Independent Literacy Narrative

In this assignment, you will write an essay in which you offer a developed narrative about an aspect of your literacy practice or experience. Consider some of these questions to generate ideas for writing: *What literacies and learning experiences have had profound effects on your life? When did this engagement occur? Where were you? Were there other participants? Have you told this story before? If so, how often, and why do you think you return to it? Has this engagement shaped your current literacy practices? Will it shape your practices going forward?*

The development of your literacy experiences can take multiple paths. If you use the tools provided in this section, you will be able to effectively compose a unique literacy narrative that reflects your identities and experiences. The questions prompting your writing in this section can help you begin to develop an independent literacy narrative. The next section, on community literacy narratives, helps you consider your composition course community and ways to think about your shared experiences around literacy. The following section, on literacy narrative research, guides you to a database of literacy narratives that offer an

opportunity to analyze the ways in which others in the academic community have reflected on their literacy experiences. Further sections will guide you through the development and organization of your work as you navigate this genre.

Another Lens 1. As an alternative to an individual literacy narrative, members of your composition course community can develop a set of interview questions that will allow you to learn more about each other's past and present experiences with literacy. After the community has determined what the interview questions will be, choose a partner from the composition community to work with on this assignment; alternatively, your instructor may assign partners for the class. Using the interview questions you have discussed and developed, you will conduct an interview with your partner, and they with you. Your instructor will allow you and your peers to record and transcribe one another's responses and post them where all students in the community have access. After you have completed, transcribed, and posted your interviews, everyone will closely examine each of their peers' interviews and look for recurring themes as well as unique aspects of the narratives shared. This assignment will inevitably illuminate both the communal nature and the unique, independent experiences of literacy engagement.

Another Lens 2. Using DALN (https://openstax.org/r/daln), perform a keyword search for literacy narratives on one aspect or area of concentration that interests you, such as music, dance, or poetry. Select two or more narratives from the archive to read and analyze. Read and annotate each narrative, and then think about a unique position you can take when discussing these stories. Use these questions to guide the development of your stance: *Do you have experiences in this concentrated area of literacy? If so, how do your experiences intersect with or depart from the ones you are reading? What common themes, if any, do these narratives share? What do these narratives reveal about literacy practices in general and about this area of concentration in particular?*

Quick Launch: Defining Your Rhetorical Situation, Generating Ideas, and Organizing

When you are writing a literacy narrative, think about

- your audience and purpose for writing;
- the ideas and experiences that best reflect your encounters with various literacies; and
- the order in which you would like to present your information.

The Rhetorical Situation

A **rhetorical situation** occurs every time anyone communicates with anyone else. To prepare to write your literacy narrative, use a graphic organizer like Table 3.1 to outline the rhetorical situation by addressing the following aspects:

Rhetorical Situation Element	Brainstorming Questions	Examples	Your Notes
Author (who)	Which of your identities will you inhabit as you write this assignment?	Student in this class? Member of a specific family? Part of a particular cultural group? Person who loves a certain literacy?	
Message (what)	What do you want to communicate?	Significance of a particular literacy? Meaning of a given literacy in my life?	
Audience (to whom)	Who is your primary audience? How will you shape your writing to best connect with this audience? Do you need to consider any secondary audiences?	My class community? My instructor? Will I want to share this narrative with others outside of class? If so, with whom? How will I shape my language to communicate with these audiences?	
Purpose (why)	Earning a grade is a valid purpose, but what other reasons do you have for writing this piece?	Informing readers about a specific literacy or about my community partner? Persuading readers to see a literacy or my community partner differently? Entertaining readers? Reflecting on a deeper meaning of a literacy or literacy experience?	

TABLE 3.1

Rhetorical Situation Element	Brainstorming Questions	Examples	Your Notes
Means (how)	Your instructor will provide the means for this assignment: write a text that conforms to the expectations of the literacy narrative genre, and submit it in the way the instructor expects.	Given: literacy narrative May I include visual elements, and do I want to do so? Should my drafts and final submission be printed or submitted electronically? What program should I use to create the document (Microsoft Word, for example)? How and when will I submit drafts in progress and the final draft?	
Context (when/ where)	How will the time period or location change the way you develop your piece?	What is happening right now in my city, county, state, area, or nation or the world that relates to this narrative? Have any new literacies appeared recently that relate to my narrative? Does anything about my college or university connect with this piece of writing?	
Culture (community)	What social, cultural, or environmental assumptions do you, your subject, or your audience have?	How will I negotiate between my identity and communication style and the expectations of others?	

TABLE 3.1

Generating Ideas



In addition to these notes, write a few ideas relating to your literacy experiences. Feel free to use bullet points or incomplete sentences.

- What instructors, formal or informal, helped or hindered you in learning literacies?
- Which of your literacies feel(s) most comfortable?
- Which literacy experiences have transformed you?
- Do you use specialized language to signal your identity as part of a community or cultural group?
- After you look back over your notes, what is the most compelling story about a literacy or literacy experience that you can share, and what is the significance of that story?

Organizing

In one last step before beginning to draft your literacy narrative, think visually about how you will put the pieces together.

- Where will you begin and end your literacy narrative, and what is your story arc? Will you jump right into some richly described action, or will you set the scene for the reader by describing an important story locale first?
- What tension will the story resolve?
- What specific sensory details, dialogue, and action will you include?
- What vignettes, or small scenes, will you include, and in what order should the audience encounter them?
- Some of your paragraphs will "show" scenes to your readers, and some of your paragraphs will "tell" your readers explanatory information. After you decide what elements to show to your readers through vivid descriptions and what elements you will inform your readers about, decide how to order those elements within your draft.
- Review the specific writing prompt given in the summary of the assignment, and make any additional notes needed in response to that material. Use visual organizers in such as those presented in Figure 3.10 through Figure 3.13 to develop the plan for your draft:

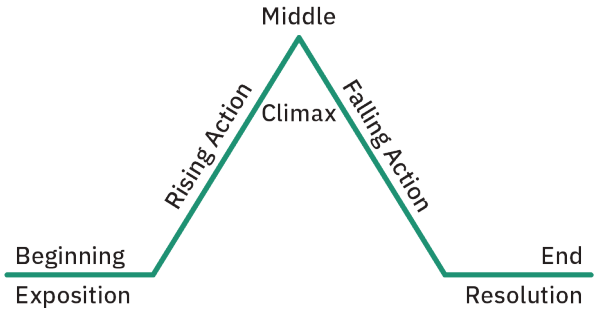


FIGURE 3.10 Plot diagram (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY NC-SA 4.0 license)



FIGURE 3.11 Storyboard (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY NC-SA 4.0 license)

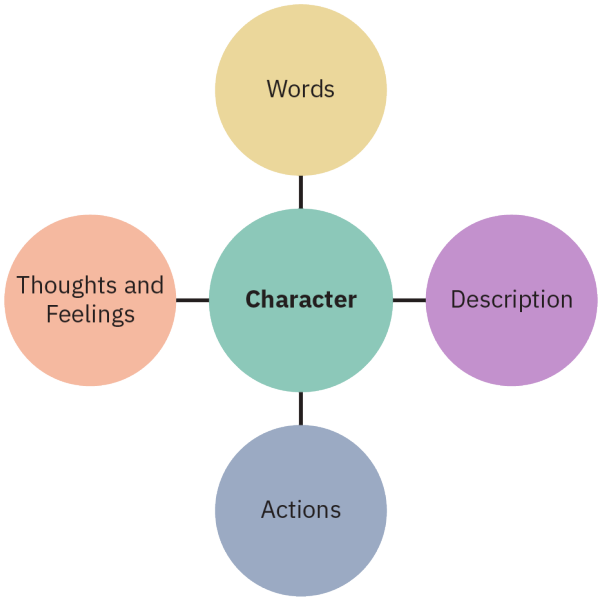


FIGURE 3.12 Web diagram (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY NC-SA 4.0 license)

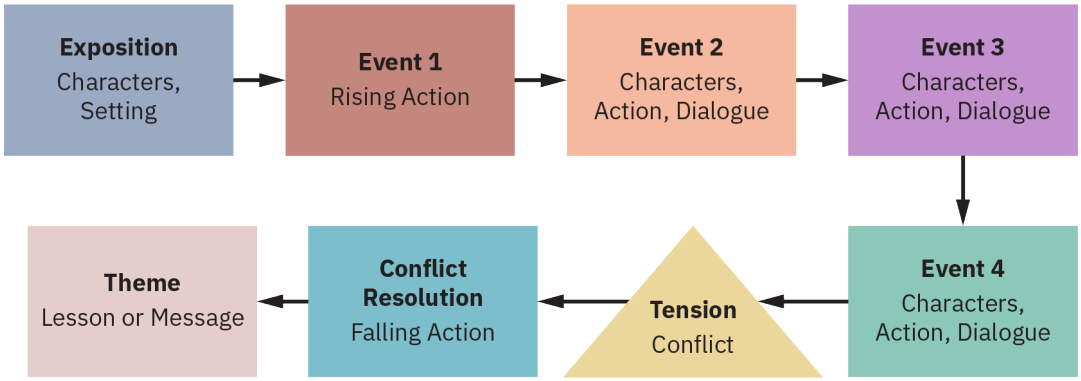


FIGURE 3.13 Graphic sequence chart (attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC BY NC-SA 4.0 license)

Use the graphic organizer structure above that best helps you establish the narrative arc for your literacy story, including the following elements:

- **Beginning.** Set the scene by providing information about the characters, setting (where and when the narrative takes place), culture, background, and situation.
- **Rising Action.** In each successive section, whether it is a paragraph or more, add dialogue and other details to make your story vivid and engaging for readers so that they will want to continue reading. Tell your story in an order that makes sense and is clear to readers.
- **Climax.** At this point, show what finally happened to clinch the experience. *How did the literacy experience finally take hold? Or why didn't it? What happened at this "climactic" moment?*
- **Falling Action.** This is the part where the tension is released and you have achieved—or not—what you set out to do. This section may be quite short, as it may simply describe a new feeling or reaction. It leads directly to the next section, which may be more reflective.
- **Resolution.** This is a reflective portion. *How has this new literacy affected you? How do you view things differently? How do you think it affected the person who taught you or others with whom you are close?*

Drafting: Writing from Personal Experience and Observation

Now that you have planned your literacy narrative, you are ready to begin drafting. If you have been thoughtful in preparing to write, drafting usually proceeds quickly and smoothly. Use your notes to guide you in composing the first draft. As you write about specific events and scenes, create a rich picture for your reader by using concrete, sensory details and specific rather than general nouns as shown in Table 3.2.

	Person	Place	Thing	Idea
General	girl	park	game	competition
Less Specific	schoolmate	bench	chess	tournament
More Specific	Sasha	gaming area	board	semifinal match
Sensory	tall, dark-haired Sasha	quiet, tree-shaded gaming area	glossy black and white board	popcorn-scented semifinal match

TABLE 3.2

Using Frederick Douglass's Text as a Drafting Model

As Douglass does, create your literacy narrative from your recollections of people, places, things, and events. Reread the following passage.

> The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life*! Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

In this selection from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, elements of the literacy narrative genre as explained in Glance at Genre: The Literacy Narrative are evident. First, Douglass introduces additional characters who help him resolve his earlier complication of being prevented from learning to read by the Aulds. The interaction he records here reiterates the larger conflict of the narrative: Douglass's continuing enslavement. Although he does not give many scenic details, few more would be needed, for he places the action on the street near a shipyard, thereby giving an indication of the surroundings. Douglass presents his own words in dialogue to reinforce for readers that he knows how to speak and write in the ways that white people with means were taught at the time. In this piece, set against the backdrop of a culture that insisted on viewing enslaved people as "brutes," Douglass demonstrates his dignity by displaying his facility with language and his humanity by offering bread to hungry children who have more freedom and opportunity, but less food, than he does.



To create a draft that draws on multiple elements of storytelling, as this selection from Douglass does, you may need to generate ideas for additional scenes, or you may need to revisit a particular place so that you can provide concrete and sensory details for your readers. Refer to the storyboarding, web diagram, and plot flow charts in the "Organizing" section above to further develop your draft.

Another Way to Draft the Literacy Narrative

Read the literacy narrative by American author and educator Helen Keller (1880–1968). An Alabama native, Keller lost both sight and hearing after a serious illness as a young child. The selection relates a transformational literacy moment in her life, when Anne Sullivan (1866–1936), Keller's teacher, helps her understand the connection between hand-spelled words and physical items. Keller's literacies, along with heroic support from her teacher, later enabled her to complete college and tour as an activist and lecturer.



FIGURE 3.14 Helen Keller with Anne Sullivan, July 1888 (credit: "Helen Keller with Anne Sullivan in July 1888" by Family member of Thaxter P. Spencer/Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain)

> The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrasts between the two lives which it connects. It was the third of March, 1887, three months before I was seven years old.

The introduction sketches the boundaries of this literacy narrative by noting that the arrival of a teacher separated Keller's life into two distinct parts.

> On the afternoon of that eventful day, I stood on the porch, dumb, expectant. I guessed vaguely from my mother's signs and from the hurrying to and fro in the house that something unusual was about to happen, so I went to the door and waited on the steps. The afternoon sun penetrated the mass of honeysuckle that covered the porch, and fell on my upturned face. My fingers lingered almost unconsciously on the familiar leaves and blossoms which had just come forth to greet the sweet southern spring. I did not know what the future held of marvel or surprise for me. Anger and bitterness had preyed upon me continually for weeks and a deep languor had succeeded this passionate struggle.

This paragraph helps establish the problem to be resolved in this short narrative: Keller is "dumb" but "expectant." Additionally, the three characters in this section have been introduced—mother, teacher, and Keller herself—though the audience has few details yet about any of them. The author provides some sensory details in this paragraph, however, including her mother's movements, the afternoon sun, and the tactile feeling of the honeysuckle.

> Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbour was. "Light! give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour.

When Keller's autobiography was originally written, the audience was readers of the Ladies' Home Journal, a monthly magazine popular with homemakers; Keller's autobiography was published in monthly installments. Keller

appeals to this audience with her allusions to Judeo-Christian imagery and an evocative writing style. While her wording may seem a bit overdone today, such phrasing would have been familiar to her contemporary readers. A year later, in 1903, Keller's story was published as a book and expanded to a much wider audience.

> I felt approaching footsteps, I stretched out my hand as I supposed to my mother. Some one took it, and I was caught up and held close in the arms of her who had come to reveal all things to me, and, more than all things else, to love me.

The subject of love often appears in the literacy narrative genre, whether love of a certain skill or pastime or love for a relative or teacher who taught a certain literacy.

> The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. The little blind children at the Perkins Institution had sent it and Laura Bridgman had dressed it; but I did not know this until afterward. When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word "d-o-l-l." I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it. When I finally succeeded in making the letters correctly I was flushed with childish pleasure and pride. Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation. In the days that followed I learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words, among them pin, hat, cup and a few verbs like sit, stand and walk. But my teacher had been with me several weeks before I understood that everything has a name.

With the introduction of finger spelling, this paragraph and the next present the rising action building toward the climax of this story.

> One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled "d-o-l-l" and tried to make me understand that "d-o-l-l" applied to both. Earlier in the day we had had a tussle over the words "m-u-g" and "w-a-t-e-r." Miss Sullivan had tried to impress it upon me that "m-u-g" is mug and that "w-a-t-e-r" is water, but I persisted in confounding the two. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. I was keenly delighted when I felt the fragments of the broken doll at my feet. Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst. I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment or tenderness. I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.

In Keller's "still, dark world," she offers little indication of setting, giving the audience only glimpses of her surroundings: honeysuckle, a house with interior stairs, and a hearth in her teacher's room. Because she could not converse at the time, the only dialogue in this story appears in the form of the finger-spelled words. Plot tensions rise with Keller's action of breaking the doll.

> We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

Keller's literacy in finger spelling not only laid the foundation for her future literacies in reading, writing, and speaking but also provided her foundational access to language itself. This paragraph provides the climax of this story as well as the resolution for the problem introduced earlier; having been introduced to language, Keller is no longer "dumb" (though she cannot yet speak).

> I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

> I learned a great many new words that day. I do not remember what they all were; but I do know that mother, father, sister, teacher were among them—words that were to make the world blossom for me, "like Aaron's rod, with flowers." It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come.

The final two paragraphs offer falling action following the dramatic climax.

Consider the ways in which Douglass's account and Keller's account are stylistically similar and different. Both use figurative language—"bread of knowledge"—and make allusions to the Christian tradition. However, Douglass uses dialogue to illustrate a social disparity, whereas Keller's transformation and her language are largely internal. You should make use of the strategies that best fit your own literacy narrative as shown in Table 3.3.

Writing Strategy	Examples and Explanation	Try It
Reflective diction	Remember Filled with wonder Consider Guessed vaguely Unconsciously Uncomprehending Confounding *Keller uses these words to suggest that the transformation is mental rather than physical.*	In your literacy narrative, where does the shift in being occur? Is it mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical? Is it social, political, or cultural? What words might you use throughout your draft to convey this idea? Create a word bank from which to draw.
Figurative language (such as comparison through metaphor and simile)	Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbour was. "Light! give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour. *Keller's comparison between a ship lost in the fog and her preliterate life provides insight into her mental state.*	Complete the following sentence frames: My literary practice or experience is like _____. My literary practice or experience is as _____ as _____. My literary practice or experience is a(n) _____ (insert a noun) because _____. Add versions of some or all of these sentences to your draft.

TABLE 3.3

Writing Strategy	Examples and Explanation	Try It
Sensory language	We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly, then rapidly. *Keller involves readers in the experience by appealing to their senses.*	Complete the following sentence: My literary practice or experience . . . . . . sounds like _____. . . . smells like _____. . . . tastes like _____. . . . feels like _____. . . . looks like _____. Add versions of some or all of these sentences to your draft.

TABLE 3.3

Writing Strategy	Examples and Explanation	Try It
Allusion	"like Aaron's rod, with flowers" *Keller equates her literacy with a biblical miracle.*	Complete the following sentences: My literary practice or experience reminds me of . . . . . . the book _____. . . . the movie _____. . . . the story _____. . . . the TV show _____. . . . the play _____. . . . the song _____. Add versions of some or all these sentences to your draft.

TABLE 3.3

Writing Strategy	Examples and Explanation	Try It
Shift in perception	On the afternoon of that eventful day, I stood on the porch, dumb, expectant. . . . That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! *Keller shifts from expectancy to awakening through literacy.*	Complete the following sentence: My literary practice or experience caused me to shift from _____ to _____. Add a version of this sentence to your draft.
Theme	"Light! give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me in that very hour. *Keller equates her literacy with light and then love.*	Complete the following sentence: My literary practice or experience means _____ to me. Add a version of this sentence to your draft.

TABLE 3.3

Peer Review: Giving Specific Praise and Constructive Feedback

Although the writing process does not always occur in a prescribed sequence (you can move among steps of the process in a variety of ways), participating in peer review is a necessary part of the writing process. Having the response and feedback of an outside reader can help you shape your writing into work that makes you proud. A peer review occurs when someone at your level (a peer) offers an evaluation of your writing. Instructors aid in this process by giving you and your peers judgment criteria and guidelines to follow, and the feedback of the reader should help you revise your writing before your instructor evaluates it and offers a grade.

When given the opportunity to engage in a peer review activity, use the following steps to provide your peers with effective, evidence-based feedback for their writing.

- Review all the criteria and guidelines for the assignment.
- Read the writing all the way through carefully before offering any feedback.
- Read the peer review exercise, tool, or instrument provided by the instructor.
- Apply and complete the peer review exercise while rereading the work.
- Provide feedback to your peer. Your comments should focus on these questions:
  - In what ways are the organization and coherence of the narrative logical and clear so that you can follow events?
  - What, if anything, do you not understand or need further explanation about?
  - What do you want to know more about?

Following these steps will give your reading the necessary context and situate your feedback within the criteria and guidelines of the assignment. This process will be critical to the revision process for your peer. In addition, reading and evaluating the work of another, and using the criteria and guidelines for that assignment, will strengthen your writing skills and help you when you revise your own work.

Before you can engage in a successful peer review exercise, you must develop a first draft and carefully read it to determine whether you need to make any of these changes.

- On a global, or structural, level, do you need to insert material, delete tangents, or rearrange some sections? Make the changes necessary to strengthen the coherence of your draft as whole
- On a local, or surface, level, check for grammar, punctuation, and capitalization errors.

After you have done a thorough check of your own work, you are ready to share the draft of your literacy narrative with a peer review partner or group. Depending on the guidance of your instructor, you may use a peer review activity such as the one provided in Table 3.4 to evaluate the literacy narrative and provide feedback to your partner or group members.

Guided Peer Review Activity

Essay Criteria	Evidence	Suggestion for Revision
The narrative engages the identity of the writer.	List evidence of the writer's identity in the narrative: 1. 2. 3.	The writer could strengthen the ways in which identity is represented in the narrative by making the following changes: 1. 2. 3.
The narrative is written from a particular viewpoint or perspective.	List evidence that indicates the viewpoint or perspective of the narrative: 1. 2. 3.	The writer could develop a (stronger) viewpoint or perspective in the narrative by making the following changes: 1. 2. 3.
The narrative has moments that are centered on either a past or present literacy experience.	Provide evidence from the narrative of past or present literacy experience(s): 1. 2. 3.	The narrative could be better developed if the following literacy experience(s) were included or expanded: 1. 2. 3.
The narrative has a literacy experience that is the focus of the writing.	Identify the literacy experience that is the focus of the narrative:	The focal literacy experience would be stronger with the following details and/or development: 1. 2. 3.

TABLE 3.4

Essay Criteria	Evidence	Suggestion for Revision
The narrative identifies social, cultural, or environmental influences on the literacy experience(s).	List the ways in which the narrative includes social, cultural, or environmental influences on the literacy experience(s): 1. 2. 3.	The literacy narrative would be stronger if the experiences included these details about social, cultural, or environmental influences: 1. 2. 3.
The details of the narrative include descriptions of people, places, things, and events.	Identify examples within the narrative that provide details about people, places, things, and events: 1. 2. 3.	The narrative would be stronger if the following details about people, places, things, and events were more fully developed: 1. 2. 3.
The elements of the rhetorical situation—author, message, audience, purpose, means, context, and culture—are addressed and included in the essay.	List elements of the rhetorical situation included in the narrative: • Author • Message • Audience • Purpose • Means • Context • Culture	The narrative would be more effective if the following elements of the rhetorical situation were more fully developed and provided greater details (list all that apply): • Author • Message • Audience • Purpose • Means • Context • Culture

TABLE 3.4

After you and your partner have completed the written guided exercise, spend some time talking about the elements of the essay and the feedback that you are giving one another. Talk through the suggestions, and ask questions about issues that arise during your assessment of one another's writing.

Revising: Adding and Deleting Information

After you have completed the peer review exercise and received the related constructive feedback, you are ready to revise your literacy narrative in preparation for submission to your instructor for grading and a possible publication venue. (See "Spotlight on . . . the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN).") The peer review exercise guided you and your partner or group members through a thorough assessment of your narratives. If you are not able to participate in peer review, make an appointment with your campus writing center to receive similar feedback. After getting responses from peers or the writing center, the next step is to take that feedback and make changes to your draft.

Look at the criteria in the first row of the peer review chart above, and then look at the evidence for that criteria that your partner listed. *Does your reviewer's understanding of the parts of your essay match your own? Where*

are the disconnects between what you intended for a section of your writing and what your reviewer has read and understood? These points of disconnect are good places to begin your revisions. Your peer reviewers represent your audience, so if they experience some misunderstandings in the reading of your narrative, you will want to make changes to clarify your writing.

Imagine you have written a literacy narrative in which you discuss the difficulty of learning to read music. Imagine the opening paragraph contains the following sentence: "I have always had a hard time reading music." Your peer reviewer might list in column 2, for the first criterion on engaging identity, that you read music, and that is all. Such a brief and limited assessment might lead your partner to suggest in column 3 that you strengthen your identity by answering the following questions:

- When and why did you begin trying to learn to read music?
- Do you come from a musical background?
- Did you have a music reading teacher, or are you self-taught?
- What are your specific challenges in reading music?

During the discussion after the written peer review, you might share the details of your learning to play the piano: that you were five years old and that your grandmother was your teacher. Your revision for this opening paragraph might then include a sentence such as the following: "I have struggled to read music since I began playing piano at five years old, when my grandmother, our church musician, gave me my first lesson." This process demonstrates the way in which the peer review should lead to substantive change and revision in your writing.

You will want to read and discuss the details of the evidence (column 2) and suggestions (column 3) for each of the above criteria (column 1) with your peer review partner. On the basis of your partner's assessment—and your own judgment, of course—make any necessary revisions before submitting your literacy narrative for grading. The more time you take to go through this process, the more developed and comprehensive your writing will be. Some people may feel anxious about having others read their work, but the scenario provided above demonstrates the valuable ways in which a preliminary reading audience can help improve the narrative.

3.6 Editing Focus: Sentence Structure

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Use language structures, including multilingual structures, grammar, punctuation, and spelling, during the process of editing.
- Develop flexible strategies for drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, and editing.
- Use composing processes and tools as a means to discover and reconsider ideas.

After writing a draft of your literacy narrative and revising it to strengthen the overall structure and content of the text, you are ready to pay closer attention to individual sentences within it. This section offers several strategies for improving your sentences to communicate meaning more effectively to your audience and to make the reading experience more engaging.

Sentence Combining

Sentence combining is an often-used revision strategy that can completely transform a narrative. When writers compose early drafts with many short sentences rather than more sophisticated efforts at varied or complex sentence construction, the writing appears choppy and disjointed. Once you have a complete draft of your essay, consider combining sentences to provide your audience with more effective and nuanced ways of reading your work. You can combine short, repetitive sentences into a simple sentence with a compound predicate or subject, as in the first example below. Or you can combine the shorter sentences into a complex sentence with a dependent clause, as in the second example. See Clear and Effective Sentences for more

information about effective sentences and sentence structure.

1a. I learned to play piano. I was five years old. Learning to play piano is my literacy experience. Memorizing the location of the keys is also my literacy experience.

1b. Learning to play piano at the age of five and memorizing the location of the keys are my literacy experiences.

2a. I learned to read in first grade. Learning to read made me want to be a teacher. I want to share my experience with reading with future first graders.

2b. Learning to read as a first grader made me want to become a teacher so that I could share my experiences with future first graders.

Read through the draft of your essay, and look for sentences that are closely related enough that they can be combined for richer meaning. However, keep in mind that short sentences can be effective in your writing, especially when you want to create realistic dialogue or show action. Strive to create a balance among sentence lengths and types to engage your audience. Remember, too, that the best test of whether words are pulling their own weight and providing rhythm, balance, and emphasis is to read the passage aloud. Let your ear tell you what is sharp and clear and what could benefit from editing.

Revising Common Sentence Patterns for More Effective Communication

If you have often been told to make your sentences clearer, less wordy, or both, but you do not know where to start, this section offers some quick strategies to address some of the most common issues that contribute to unclear or wordy writing.

***Defining* You *and* This.** One common pattern that makes writing less clear is the use of *you* to mean "a random person" rather than "you," the audience. Here is an example, followed by a revision.

1a. You must plan your document carefully to connect with your audience.

1b. Writers must plan their documents carefully to connect with their audiences.

This sentence is stronger with the revision clearly indicating who needs to plan their writing. You might be writing a piece addressed directly to the audience, as this textbook is. If so, be careful to distinguish between the use of *you* to mean your specific audience—appropriate when directly addressing an audience—and a hazier use of *you* that needs clarification. Use the "find" function to search your document for the word *you*, and then replace every unclear *you* with a definite noun.

Another pattern affecting the clarity of written work is using the word *this* on its own without an explanation of what "this" is. Here is an example, along with its revision.

1a. This can be confusing to the reader.

1b. This lack of explanation can be confusing to the reader.

In the first sentence, the audience wonders, "This what?" In the second sentence, the writer simply adds a noun phrase to explain, and readers will appreciate the clarification. Use the "find" function to search your document for *this*, and make sure you have defined or explained *this* in all cases.

***Revising Sentences to Change* There are / There is *or* It is.** Readers relate better to sentences that feature a "doer"—someone or something performing an action—and an "action"—the activity of the doer. For this reason, writing that overuses the sentence patterns *There are . . . / There is . . .* and *It is . . .* in place of a doer and action can seem unclear, remote, or dull for the reader. As you revise such sentences, you may find at times that you need to insert a doer or an action; one or both may be missing from the first version of the sentence. Here is one example, with a suggested revision.

1a. There are many strategies to revise written work.

1b. Authors employ many strategies to revise written work.

In the first sentence, the doer ("authors") is implied, but the second sentence includes a doer for a more reader-friendly version.

Sentences using the *It is . . .* pattern need similar attention to present a doer and an action to the reader. Here is one example and revision.

1a. It is challenging and rewarding to revise a composition.

1b. I feel challenged and rewarded when revising a composition.

Again, the first sentence needs an agent to do the sentence's actions. Use the "find" function to search your document for "there are," "there is," and "it is," and replace these weaker sentence constructions with doers and actions wherever possible.

Eliminating Wordiness. To begin, look at the sentences below to get a sense of what wordiness is. Eliminating wordiness should not alter or omit information. In these sentences, the information remains the same, but the edited sentence shows a trimmed-down version. *There was* and *that* are eliminated, as is the unnecessary adverb *really*; *was shining* becomes *shone*; and the phrase *waves in the ocean* becomes *ocean waves*.

1a. There was a really bright light that was shining on the waves in the ocean.

1b. A bright light shone on the ocean waves.

In general, try to cut out words that do not add meaning, rhythm, or emphasis. Sentences clogged with unnecessary words often cause readers to lose interest, patience, and comprehension. Edit sentences to include concrete nouns and action verbs—or "doers" and "actions," as described above. Additionally, choosing modifiers carefully will help you weed out unnecessary words. Look at the following sentences, which all say essentially the same thing. However, you will see some changes and omissions.

- In almost every situation that I can think of, except with few exceptions, it will make good sense for you to look for as many places as possible to cut out needless, redundant, and repetitive words from the papers and reports, paragraphs and sentences you write for college assignments. (49 words)
- In most situations, it makes good sense to cut out needless words from your college papers. (16 words)
- Whenever possible, omit needless words from your writing. (8 words)
- Omit needless words. (3 words)

The 49-word sentence is full of early-draft language; you can almost visualize the writer finding their way while writing. The 16-word sentence says much the same thing with far fewer words. Most of this editing simply cut out unnecessary words. Only at the end were several wordy phrases condensed: "from the papers and reports, paragraphs and sentences you write for college assignments" was reduced to "from your college papers." That 16-word sentence was reduced by half by rephrasing and dropping the emphasis on college writing. And that sentence was whittled down by nearly two-thirds to arrive at the core three-word sentence, "Omit needless words."

The first sentence is long-winded by any standard or in any context; each of the next three might serve well in different situations. Thus, when you edit to make language more concise, think about the overall effect you intend to create. Sometimes the briefest construction is not the best one for your purpose. For example, the three-word sentence is more suited to a brief list than to a sentence of advice for this book.

Editing for More Effective Sentences

This paragraph from a student's first draft of a narrative contains sentences that need editing. On a separate sheet of paper, revise the sentences to eliminate *There are . . . / It is . . .* , unclear *you* and *this*, and wordiness. For better flow, combine sentences that are repetitive or choppy.

It is now hours later. I think it is almost midnight, in fact. I have finally managed to get my paper started and

studied for my exam. My eyes are very tired. I get up and leave my comfortable chair. Next, I walk out of the library. You have to walk through a glass door. I retrace the path that goes back to my apartment, where I came from earlier.

Revision: _____

Since it is midnight, it is dark, and I nervously listen to footsteps. They are coming up behind me. Then they get too close for comfort. This is really making me very, very nervous. I am really very scared, but I step over to the sidewalk's edge. I am trying to be calm, and I let a man walk briskly past. Phew!

Revision: _____

When I am finally at my door to my apartment, I fumble for the key to the door. I insert the key in the lock. I open the door, put my hand on the switch to turn on the hall light, and step inside the door to my apartment. There are two slices of pizza left in the box that is on the kitchen counter. They are really cold and very congealed.

Revision: _____

Possible edited version. Hours later—my paper started, my exam studied for, my eyes tired—I leave my comfortable chair in the library, go through the glass door, and retrace the path to my apartment. It is midnight now. I listen closely when I hear footsteps approaching behind me, their steady rhythm making me nervous. Scared, I step to the sidewalk's edge to let a man walk briskly past. Phew! At my apartment door, I fumble for the key, insert it in the lock, open the door, tum on the hall light, and step inside. On the kitchen counter, I see the box with its two slices of cold, congealed pizza.

3.7 Evaluation: Self-Evaluating

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Gain experience negotiating variations in genre conventions.
- Learn common formats and design features for different kinds of texts.
- Identify how genre conventions for structure, paragraphing, tone, and mechanics vary.

The section below provides a rubric that your instructor will use to evaluate the aspect of your literacy experience that you have chosen to explore in a full essay. Refer to it frequently throughout the writing process to make sure that you are fulfilling the requirements of the assignment.

Rubric

Score	Critical Language Awareness	Clarity and Coherence	Rhetorical Choices
5 **Skillful**	The text always adheres to the "Editing Focus" of this chapter—combining independent clauses appropriately, as discussed in Section 3.6—and employs a variety of complex sentence structures. The text also shows ample evidence of the writer's intent to consciously meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The text always maintains focus on the central narrative and provides detailed description and thorough development of characters, setting, and sensory details, and it demonstrates a clear and organized sequence of events.	The text always demonstrates an awareness of the rhetorical situation: author, message, audience, purpose, means, context, and culture.
4 **Accomplished**	The text usually adheres to the "Editing Focus" of this chapter—combining independent clauses appropriately, as discussed in Section 3.6—and employs complex sentence structures. The text also shows some evidence of the writer's intent to meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The text usually maintains focus on the central narrative and provides detailed description and development of characters, setting, and sensory details, and it demonstrates an organized sequence of events.	The text consistently demonstrates an awareness of the rhetorical situation: author, message, audience, purpose, means, context, and culture.
3 **Capable**	The text generally adheres to the "Editing Focus" of this chapter—combining independent clauses appropriately, as discussed in Section 3.6—and employs complex sentence structures. The text also shows limited evidence of the writer's intent to meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The text generally maintains focus on the central narrative and provides detailed description and development of characters, setting, and sensory details, and it demonstrates some organization in the sequence of events.	The text generally demonstrates an awareness of the rhetorical situation: author, message, audience, purpose, means, context, and culture.

TABLE 3.5

Score	Critical Language Awareness	Clarity and Coherence	Rhetorical Choices
2 **Developing**	The text occasionally adheres to the "Editing Focus" of this chapter—combining independent clauses appropriately, as discussed in Section 3.6—and employs complex sentence structures. The text also shows emerging evidence of the writer's intent to meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The text occasionally maintains focus on the central narrative and provides detailed description and thorough development of characters, setting, and sensory details, and it demonstrates an attempt at organization in the sequence of events.	The text occasionally demonstrates an awareness of the rhetorical situation: author, message, audience, purpose, means, context, and culture.
1 **Beginning**	The text does not adhere to the "Editing Focus" of this chapter—combining independent clauses in meaningful ways, as discussed in Section 3.6—or employ complex sentence structures. The text also shows little to no evidence of the writer's intent to meet or challenge conventional expectations in rhetorically effective ways.	The text does not maintain focus on the central narrative or provide detailed description or thorough development of characters, setting, or sensory details, and it does not demonstrate a clear and organized sequence of events.	The text does not demonstrate an awareness of the rhetorical situation: author, message, audience, purpose, means, context, and culture.

TABLE 3.5

3.8 Spotlight on … The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences.
- Match the capacities of different environments to varying rhetorical situations.



FIGURE 3.15 Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom (credit: "The Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom" by Garrett/

flickr, CC BY 2.0)

An archive is a collection of artifacts, often historical, that serve to document a time period, location, or group of people. Archives may be located far from cities, accessible only in person, and they typically house rare documents that visitors view or handle with particular care. When an archive is digitized, however, visitors are allowed to view the document in virtual spaces, thus creating an open and accessible environment. The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN) "is an open public resource made up of stories from people just like you about their experiences learning to read, write, and generally communicate with the world around them." People who have diverse identities, lived experiences, and engagement with literacies have uploaded their literacy narratives and given permission for their stories to be read and shared with public audiences.

Using the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN)

The DALN is completely keyword searchable, so if you are looking to read literacy narratives on particular subjects—such as music or dance as literacy, or any other concentrated subject about which one can demonstrate knowledge—you can search for shared narratives with these literacies. As the website states, "The DALN invites people of all ages, races, communities, backgrounds, and interests to contribute stories about how—and in what circumstances—they read, write, and compose meaning, and how they learned to do so (or helped others learn)." Sharing your literacy narrative in the DALN can be a rewarding way to celebrate the completion of this writing milestone. The DALN welcomes literacy narratives of all kinds and in all formats, including diaries, blogs, poetry, music, videos, letters, stories, chat rooms, and so on.

Publish Your Literacy Narrative

After you have completed and revised your literacy narrative, consider sharing it with the DALN (https://openstax.org/r/daln) You may also want to consider reimagining your literacy narrative in the form of a podcast or a TED Talk–type video. The TED in TED Talks is an acronym that stands for the phrase "Technology, Entertainment, and Design." TED (https://openstax.org/r/ted) is a nonprofit organization devoted to the distribution of ideas; the website is keyword searchable and provides an archive where you can find short talks about just about any topic. The criteria (https://openstax.org/r/criteria) for a TED Talk can be found on the organization's website. To prepare for this publication alternative, take an opportunity to watch the following sample TED Talks that fit the genre of literacy narrative:

- Luvvie Ajayi (https://openstax.org/r/luvvieajayi) discusses how blogging and creating a post that went viral led to her identifying as a writer.
- John Trischitti (https://openstax.org/r/johntrischitti) talks about how reading literally saves lives and advocates for providing young people with books to secure their futures.

3.9 Portfolio: A Literacy Artifact

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Reflect on the development of composing processes.
- Consider how those processes affect your work.

Your instructor may require a portfolio as a part of the composition course curriculum. A portfolio is a collection of your work, gathered in a single place for the purpose of assessing your growth and achievement as a writer. A portfolio allows you not only to include writing artifacts but also to reflect on the process of composing those artifacts. In this section, you will have an opportunity to compose a reflection on the process of writing your literacy narrative.

Reflection Prompt

One of the most valuable writing exercises is to reflect on work you have completed or experiences you have had. Reflection supports learning by allowing writers to articulate the impact that experiences have had on

various aspects of their lives. In responding to the ideas in this section, take some time to reflect on your experiences, as well as the experiences of others, with literacy and learning. Using the guidelines your instructor provides, compose a reflection that responds to the following questions:

- How has your understanding of literacies been affected by the opportunity to reflect on your engagement with literacy practices, the practices of those in your composition course community, or the practices of people beyond your immediate community?
- How will this experience and reflection affect your future engagement with various literacies?

Literacy Narrative Revision

Submitting the best version of your work is an important part of preparing a portfolio. After you have received a graded essay with comments from your instructor, use those comments as a resource to revise the essay for a final time. You will want to use this revised essay for your portfolio submission.

Further Reading

The digital and hard-copy texts and other materials listed below can provide additional models and context for your work in reading and writing in the literacy narrative genre.

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Unit 2

Bridging the Divide Between Personal Identity and Academia

Unit Introduction

Unit 2 is about **academia**, a term for the world of education. The challenge in this part of your journey is learning to showcase your identity and your viewpoint within an exploration of traditional writing genres. You will learn that academia is defined in part by its traditions. In the writing classroom, expect to be asked to write in a variety of narrative and academic genres. Each of these genres is characterized by a defined set of structures and expectations. However, because writing is also a creative art form, you will find more than enough room in academia to develop your individual voice and to challenge conventions and expectations as you write about different subjects. As you approach the assignments in this unit, consider ways to infuse your writing with your personality and identity—your unique voice.