* **Purpose and Audience**

Personal narratives allow you to share your life with others and vicariously experience the things that happen around you. Your job as a writer is to put the reader in the midst of the action letting him or her live through an experience. Although a great deal of writing has a thesis, stories are different. A good story creates a dramatic effect, makes us laugh, gives us pleasurable fright, and/or gets us on the edge of our seats. A story has done its job if we can say, "Yes, that captures what living with my father feels like," or "Yes, that’s what being cut from the football team felt like."

* **Structure**

There are a variety of ways to structure your narrative story. The three most common structures are: chronological approach, flashback sequence, and reflective mode. Select one that best fits the story you are telling.

* **Methods**
* *Show, Don’t’ Tell*

Don’t tell the reader what he or she is supposed to think or feel. Let the reader see, hear, smell, feel, and taste the experience directly, and let the sensory experiences lead him or her to your intended thought or feeling. Showing is harder than telling. It’s easier to say, "It was incredibly funny," than to write something that is incredibly funny. The rule of "show, don’t tell" means that your job as a storyteller is not to interpret; it’s to select revealing details. You’re a sifter, not an explainer. An easy way to accomplish showing and not telling is to avoid the use of "to be" verbs.

* *Let People Talk*

It’s amazing how much we learn about people from what they say. One way to achieve this is through carefully constructed dialogue. Work to create dialogue that allows the characters’ personalities and voices to emerge through unique word selection and the use of active rather than passive voice.

* *Choose a Point of View*

Point of view is the perspective from which your story is told. It encompasses where you are in time, how much you view the experience emotionally (your tone), and how much you allow yourself into the minds of the characters. Most personal narratives are told from the first-person limited point of view. If you venture to experiment with other points of view, you may want to discuss them with your teacher as you plan your piece.

* *Tense*

Tense is determined by the structure you select for your narrative. Consider how present vs. past tense might influence your message and the overall tone of your piece.

* *Tone*

The tone of your narrative should set up an overall feeling. Look over the subject that you are presenting and think of what you are trying to get across. How do you want your audience to feel when they finish your piece? Careful word choice can help achieve the appropriate effect.