



**Secondary Tutor**  
**English Language**  
**Fiction**

## Skill 5 – Understanding the features of a successful narrative

### What will you be able to do by the end of this section?

Understand features that you should include in your own narrative writing, to engage the reader.

### How does this link to the exam?

Although every piece of creative writing is different, there are many features that writers use to engage their reader. Having an awareness of these features, and understanding how to use them in your own writing, will help you to write a successful and enjoyable piece of narrative or description that scores highly in the exam.

Assessment objective 5 and 6, which focus on the writing section of your GCSE English, are worth 50% of your overall marks no matter which exam board you're doing!

### Activity one (20 minutes)

**Most stories can be divided up into five sections. Using this format helps to ensure that your own writing has a clear structure, and that the narrative progresses to a suitable ending.**

**Read the story below, and try to divide it up into the five sections in the table.**

Part	What happens?
Part 1	Opening/setting
Part 2	Fiction trigger
Part 3	Building momentum
Part 4	Climax
Part 5	Resolution

### Childhood Memories (600 words)

Imagine the perfect home: a quaint cottage with views of a lake, and a charming garden alive with sprawling, colourful plants. This was my home; my lovely home – full of family memories and happiness. I'd spent fifteen years of my life here and never for one moment imagined it would be my last...

Grey, oppressive clouds were ready to burst in the April skies, spreading more darkness to my already depressing situation. "*Hannah love,*" mother pleaded, before trying to convince me about our new house.

-----end of part one-----

She looked into my eyes apologetically, hoping to persuade me about the move – not that I had a choice. The removal van was booked and my stripped-back, bare home had been drained of

any life. It echoed with emptiness. My heart cracked as I gazed outside, knowing I'd never see another sunset over the lake from my window. "Twenty miles is only a thirty-minute drive in the car," she added, whilst holding back her tears. "You know I took the job for us Hannah."

-----end of part two-----

Approaching sixteen, I should have known better than to take this out on my mum. To me though, I was being uprooted from school, and my life was being turned upside down.

Everything about the new building, I hated. This was *not* a home. For a week I tried to settle but I felt like a stranger in my own life. Not even my birthday, two days away, could put a smile on my face. Usually, I'd have something planned with my friends but where were they now?

The 17th of April arrived and Mum seemed more distant than usual. I know she'd been pre-occupied with the move and had her new job to think about, but she'd not even wished me happy birthday. Maybe she'd left that tradition along with everything else at our old home!

As I slumped down the stairs, I could smell coffee and toast being prepared, and spotted two places set at our much-reduced-in-size dining table. She smiled brightly as I walked in – so perhaps she hadn't forgotten my birthday after all. Maybe now over breakfast she was going to bring me an expensive gift to make up for ruining my life.

"Here you go love," she smiled (at which point I assumed she'd hand over my present), but passed only my toast and caffeine fix. She'd genuinely forgotten. I ate in silence. After picking at my food, I shut myself away in my room...

I must have nodded off as I was abruptly awoken by the sound of the door-bell ringing.

"Hannah, can you get that love?" Mother yelled.

Still half asleep, I trudged down the creaky stairs and opened the door.

-----end of part three-----

"Surprise! Happy birthday!" sang a chorus of voices. To my sheer amazement, I was greeted unexpectedly by my best friends from back home. They were laden with gifts, plump balloons and banners. As my grinning mum welcomed them in, she led us to the living room which she'd decorated especially for me. I threw my arms around her and sobbed.

"Thanks Mum," I snivelled – the first thing I'd said to her all day.

-----end of part four-----

Yes – I'd been through upheaval but I was so ashamed of my behaviour, thinking about myself, my presents and my problems. Mum had lost her home too, my dad and even left the job she loved to earn more for the two of us. After everything, she'd still arranged a surprise party. Realising the lengths she would go to was the best gift I could have wished for and a childhood memory I'll never forget.

-----end of part five-----

In your exam, it is crucial that you spend the first 5 minutes writing a brief plan. The plan for this story is below:

Part	What happens?	
Part 1	Opening/setting	Describes old house positively
Part 2	Fiction trigger	Makes negative feelings clear about the move
Part 3	Building momentum	She thinks her mum has forgotten her birthday
Part 4	Climax	She has a surprise party (planned by her mum)
Part 5	Resolution	She realises that she has been selfish and appreciates her mum

### Activity two (20 minutes)

Now identify an example of each of the features below in the narrative. Write each example in the table below.

1)	Ambitious vocabulary	Quaint, oppressive, sprawling, laden, pre-occupied, apprehension
2)	Adverbs (a word or phrase which modifies a verb or an adjective)	apologetically
3)	Sentences starting with verbs	approaching sixteen
4)	Short, simple sentence for effect	– it echoed with emptiness
5)	Personification (giving something that is non-human human qualities)	my home had been drained of any life
6)	Use of <i>italics</i> for emphasis	this was <i>not</i> a home
7)	Onomatopoeia (sound words)	my heart cracked
8)	Direct speech	"Thanks Mum," I snivelled
9)	Rhetorical questions	... where were they now?
10)	Simile	I felt like a stranger in my own life
11)	Sarcasm	maybe she'd left that tradition along with everything else at our old home!
12)	Rule of three	gifts, plump balloons and banners
13)	Description of the weather	clouds were ready to burst in the April skies, spreading more darkness to my already depressing situation
<p><b>Extension (5 minutes): Which do you think are the most effective sentences in the narrative and why do you think the writer has included them?</b></p>		

### Activity three (15 minutes)

Read the eight top tips for narrative writing below. You will then be given 5 minutes to try to memorise them. Quiz someone in your group and help each other practise learning them off by heart.

After the 5 minutes, hide this page and make a mind map on the next page, detailing as many of the top tips as you can remember.

1)	<b>Write about something from experience</b> , or something you are very knowledgeable about.
2)	<b>Be a teenager</b> – don't try to be a business person, mum, grandad etc. as it is difficult to sound authentic.
3)	<b>Keep the time span short</b> – anything from half an hour to one day but no longer than this.
4)	<b>Avoid:</b> murders, drugs, alcohol, vampires, aliens, plane crashes, hostage situations etc. <b>Focus on more believable and ordinary situations</b> but write about them with emotion and energy.
5)	<b>The key issue needs to be resolved at the end.</b> Cliff-hangers make it seem like you have run out of time and not planned properly.
6)	<b>It doesn't necessarily need to be more than two sides of A4.</b> It is better to have two sides of ambitious vocabulary, imagery and language techniques than three sides of dull writing.
7)	<b>Develop your ideas.</b> You can't include detailed ideas if all of your paragraphs are four lines long and made up just of simple sentences.
8)	<b>Don't fill up your story with direct speech.</b> Use a small amount, to show the examiner that you can use it accurately, but don't include too much.

**Top tips for  
narrative writing**