

ALOE

A LESSON ON ENGLISH

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Essay vs Narrative

Short written pieces can be classified as essays or as narratives.

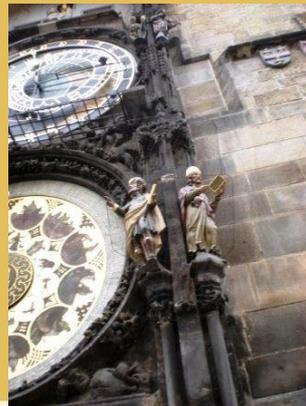
ESSAY: the word “essay” is from the French word for “little try.” Essays are short (typically no more than 3000 words), focused and informative. Most essays are non-fiction (see November 2011 *ALOE*). Major types of essays are argumentative (proving a point by careful reasoning); persuasive (using rhetoric to convince someone); compare/contrast (listing attributes that are the same, or different, between two things); definition (providing a clear set of criteria and/or characteristics for something); descriptive (giving a vivid description of something); and process analysis (telling how to do something, in detail).

NARRATIVE: a short written piece which primarily tells a story. Narratives are generally fiction (see November 2011 *ALOE*), but sometimes are factual retellings of real events involving real people.

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Essays and narratives are both short written pieces, but they have different content, styles and purposes.



ALOE newsletter
International Leadership Institute
Sara Tusek, Editor
Florida and Prague
Email: publications@ili.cc

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Narratives, like essays, are short (no more than 3000 words) and focused, but are not meant to be strictly informative. Narratives are usually entertaining. Some narratives may underline a moral principle; these essays may be called fables or parables.

The line between essay and narrative is quite blurred. Many essays read like narratives—indeed, one type of essay is the narrative essay; some narratives are as full of fact and information as an essay. Most writing assignments will be labeled, essay or narrative. To decide whether to use the essay or the narrative mode, ask these questions:

- What is the purpose of the written piece?
Essays usually persuade or inform.
- Are there any instructions given?
- Where will the piece be published?

Although most people love a good story, essays have their fans as well. Both types of writing serve a purpose in literature.

Sara Tusek, with more than 26 years of experience in education, directs the American English Language Institute. Currently based in Prague, Czech Republic, the Institute provides courses in English for academic purposes. www.ili.cc



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