READING A NARRATIVE WITH A CRITICAL EYE

Once you have drafted a narrative, it’s always a good idea to ask someone else to read it. And, of course, you yourself will want to review what you have written from the standpoint of a critical reader. Here are some questions to keep in mind when checking a narrative.

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE. Does the narrative serve the purpose it is intended to serve? Is it appropriate for its intended audience? Does it need any additional background information or definitions?

THE STORY. Does it consist mainly of actions and events? Do they constitute a plot, with a clear beginning, middle, and end? Is every action in the narrative necessary to the plot? Have any essential actions been left out?

THE POINT. Does the narrative have a clear point to make? What is it? Is it stated explicitly in a thesis? If not, should it be?

ORGANIZATION. Is the story line easy to follow? Are the events in chronological order? Are there any unintentional lapses in chronology or verb tense? Are intentional deviations from chronology, such as flashbacks, clearly indicated?

TRANSITIONS. Are there clear transitions to help readers follow the sequence of events? Have you checked over each transition to see that it logically connects the adjoining parts of the narrative?

DIALOGUE AND POINT OF VIEW. If there is no dialogue in the narrative, would some direct speech help bring it to life? If there is dialogue, does it sound like real people talking? Is the narrative told from a consistent, plausible point of view?

DETAILS. Does the narrative include lots of concrete details, especially visual and auditory ones? Does it show as well as tell?

THE BEGINNING. Will the beginning of the narrative get the reader’s attention? How? How well does it set up what follows? How else might the narrative begin?

THE ENDING. How satisfying is it? What does it leave the reader thinking or feeling? How else might the narrative end?

OTHER METHODS. Look again at the people and places in your narrative. Are the motives of the people clearly explained? Are the physical attributes of the setting clearly delineated? If not, use cause and effect, description, and other methods of development to fill in these gaps.

COMMON ERRORS. Are any verb tenses in the narrative needlessly complicated? For example, does the narrative use the past perfect (had been) when the simple past (was) will do? If so, change to the simpler form.