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Are you ready to write Touchstone 1?

The narrative below provides an example of an advanced level composition. As you read through the narrative, notice the techniques that the author used to make the story more interesting and draw you, the reader, into the experience. Although, as with most writing, there remains room for improvement, this sample narrative is focused, organized, and engaging. The answers to the reflection questions that follow the narrative show insight into the author's intended audience and purpose.

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English Composition

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Why I Believe in Sharing Good Food

I believe in sharing meals with loved ones. Food is obviously an important component in keeping us alive, but in America today we have lost the importance of food in connecting with those around us. We're all just grasping for the next Big Mac or soda and moving on with our day. I used to think that food was just something delicious or filling, but then I learned how good food can be at connecting people.

My mom has always been a great cook. When I was a kid, we had a home-cooked dinner almost every night. She calls herself a “peasant cook” because what she makes is not usually fancy. But still I remember crispy fried chicken alongside creamy mashed potatoes smothered in rich gravy or pots of spaghetti sauce that filled the house with an herby, tomato smell as they bubbled throughout the day. Our house was often full of my

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Comment [CS1]: This opening paragraph does a great job of communicating the overall significance behind the story you're about to tell.

Comment [CS2]: Good use of narrative language here.

parents' friends, particularly after church on Sunday afternoon. "It's a sin to not have enough food for people," my mother would say, only half joking, so peasant food or not, there was always a lot of it. In hindsight, I see the importance in these meals and a house full of friends and family, but at the time I just thought it was a part of normal life.

Everything changed when my grandfather died. I was only 20 years old. He had always been very healthy but then cancer struck and he died far too soon, at the age of 67. I drove with my mom, brother, and sister from Utah to Oregon where all my extended family was gathering for his funeral.

Comment [CS3]: This is a good signaling phrase to show the reader that there will now be a shift in the tone and timeline of the story.

"I can't believe he's actually gone," said my brother, Samuel.

"Yeah, I can't believe that when we get to this end of this trip we're not going to hear Grandpa telling a bunch of crazy stories or teasing jokes," my mom replied.

Our drive seemed dotted with memories as much as with trees, hills, and semi-trucks. All of us were quiet with our own memories of spending time with Grandpa. My grandpa was only the second significant death in my life and it felt very strange to lose that important link in my family chain. At his funeral, everyone talked about him with love and laughed over his terrible puns, but I was too sad to laugh.

A couple of days later, most of the extended family had gone home and my grandparents' house, which had been crammed to capacity, started to have more breathing room. We were down to just my immediate family, my uncle Joe and his son, Luke, and my grandmother. During this period, our huge clan had not given much thought to eating, and we had just been eating out or snacking as we were all so busy and stricken with grief. But on this last night, my uncle offered to make a big, home-cooked dinner. As I sat down at my

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Comment [CS4]: I really like how you combine different narrative techniques in this paragraph. You include dialogue, explain your emotions, use concrete detail to describe your surroundings, and figurative language to enhance your descriptions. This really helps the reader experience the action along with you!

Comment [CS5]: You do a great job of focusing on only the relevant events, glossing over the "filler" so that your narrative doesn't get off track. This really helps with the flow of your story.

grandparents' family-sized table, I heard the ocean crashing softly outside the open window. I then noticed the crisp green salad, loaded with fresh lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, green onions, and olives. Then I saw the crusty bread with white butter and the fluffy mashed potatoes, whipped with butter, salt, and pepper. I felt my mouth fill with saliva almost immediately. And then there was the fish. We were on the coast, after all, so my uncle baked halibut filets that were lightly crispy and perfectly flaky. They smelled of rich butter and just a bit of the Pacific and almost melted in my mouth when I took a bite.

After my first bite of fish I couldn't help groaning. "This is so, so good."

"Mmm hmm," said others, diving in from places around the table.

"You know your grandfather loved fresh fish," my grandmother added. "It was one of his favorite things about living here."

Unlike the memories at the funeral, this comment felt like it was both true to my grandfather's memory and a recognition of the greatness we had lost.

But the thing I remember even more than the food was the connection I felt to my family. I looked around the table and saw people that I loved, my uncle Joe, Luke, my mom, my little brother and sister, and, most importantly, my grandmother, who had just lost the love of her life. Even though we had just suffered a huge loss, the meal felt like it was healing us and connecting us. I remember so strongly how the meal, the "breaking of bread" as they say, seemed like the perfect ending to this hard experience. This is a lesson that I have never forgotten and now I love to share meals with friends and family in times of happiness and sadness. This is why I believe in sharing meals with loved ones.

Comment [CS6]: I can almost visualize this exchange. This is great.

Comment [CS7]: This is a really strong conclusion to the story, as it ties back to the purpose of the narrative.

Think About Your Writing:

1. What narrative techniques did you use to bring your story to life? (2-3 sentences)

Sophia says: Did you use vivid description, sensory details, and/or dialogue to pull the reader in? Provide two examples from your essay in which you “show” the reader rather than “tell” the reader. EXAMPLE: I was running late for the meeting vs. I glanced at the clock, grabbed my briefcase, and sprinted for the elevator.

I really enjoy the fact that narrative writing uses figurative language and sensory details to make a point. It allows me to feel more creative in my writing and allows me to have fun with the words and phrases I use to paint a picture for the reader. For example, I used sensory details and vivid language in this passage to describe some of the food: “Then I saw the crusty bread with white butter and the fluffy mashed potatoes, whipped with butter, salt, and pepper. I felt my mouth fill with saliva almost immediately.” I also used figurative language in the following sentence to bring it to life: “Our drive seemed dotted with memories as much as with trees, hills, and semi-trucks.”

2. How did your purpose and audience shape the way in which you wrote your narrative? (3-4 sentences)

Sophia says: The hypothetical audience goes beyond the individuals evaluating your composition. What groups or individuals did you have in mind when you wrote your narrative and how did consideration of your audience and purpose influence the way you wrote?

Because of my purpose, which was to tell about how I learned to value sharing food with loved ones, I tried to make sure I made the food sound delicious because that would draw the audience in. I also wanted to tell a story that was meaningful to me, not only in that it involved the loss of my grandfather, who I loved, but also an important realization for me

about the power of food. When I was writing this narrative, I imagined my audience as young adults who have probably experienced the loss of a grandparent as well.

3. Provide a concrete example from your narrative that shows how you have directed your writing towards this audience and purpose. (3-5 sentences) *Sophia says: Consider including a quotation from your essay and explaining how it is intended to appeal to your audience and purpose. Alternatively, you may want to describe a theme, tone, or narrative technique that you used and explain how it is intended to appeal to your audience and purpose.*

One concrete thing I did to appeal to this audience was to mention my age when this happened, which was 20, which is probably close to the same age as my ideal audience. I also included related details from when I was a child to show how I developed from my experiences then with the events of the narrative up to now. I also appealed to my broader audience by telling an experience that was important but also common so that probably a lot of people can relate. "And then there was the fish. We were on the coast, after all, so my uncle baked halibut fillets that were lightly crispy and perfectly flaky. They smelled of rich butter and just a bit of the Pacific and almost melted in my mouth when I took a bite." In this example, I wanted my reader to experience the sensations of tasting freshly caught fish served in a traditional way. It reinforces the idea that although we had suffered a major loss that we could still find comfort in food and family.

SCORING APPEARS ON THE NEXT PAGE

SCORING for Sample Touchstone 1

The sample narrative was scored according to the Touchstone 2 Rubric, which includes Narrative Focus, Narrative Structure, Narrative Language, Conventions, and responses to the “Think About your Writing” questions. This Touchstone is worth a total of 100 possible points. The area scores are explained below.

Narrative Focus (5 possible points)

The narrative clearly sets the scene and relays the significance of the events described, which meets the requirements of the prompt. The writer has made a connection between experiencing the death of a loved one and the family gathering to share a meal together.

The details provided are relevant to the story line and support the writer's purpose to create a link between a loss and a greater understanding of the bonds that are formed at a dinner table.

Area Score: Advanced 5/5

Narrative Flow (5 possible points)

The narrative is arranged in a logical manner in which the sequence of ideas flows naturally and is easy to follow.

Area Score: Advanced 5/5

Narrative Structure (15 possible points)

The narrative has a logical flow to the events described. The writer refers to her distant past and moves smoothly toward events in her more recent past, and the reader can easily follow the action. The reader moves with the writer through her childhood memories, to her young adult experience with loss, and then to her eventual understanding of the importance of “breaking bread” together.

The beginning and ending paragraphs serve as effective bookends to the story because they reiterate the importance of family and the connection of family to food.

Area Score: Advanced 15/15

Narrative Language (15 possible points)

The writer uses sensory language to effectively describe the food, which adds vitality to the narrative. Many details provided are concrete and specific – “crispy fried chicken alongside creamy mashed potatoes smothered in rich gravy” and “They smelled of rich butter and just a bit of the Pacific” - which draw the reader into the story by appealing to the senses.

The reader feels a vague sense of loss at the grandfather’s death but doesn’t really “see” him, nor sense what he meant to the narrator. Why was he such an important link in the family? Sharing a specific memory - allowing readers to hear his voice or glimpse his personality - would have “shown” rather than “told.” Use of dialogue was minimal though effective.

Area Score: Proficient 12/15

Conventions (5 possible points)

The writer made very few capitalization, usage, or punctuation errors and the errors did not impede the reader’s understanding of the essay.

Area Score: Proficient 4/5

“Think About Your Writing” Responses (5 possible points)

The writer has reflected thoughtfully on the process of writing the narrative. The writer shows insight into her purpose in writing and demonstrates an understanding of her intended audience as well. Response length guidelines were met or exceeded.

Area Score: Advanced 5/5

TOTAL SCORE: ADVANCED 46/50

Overall, this narrative effectively tells a story that draws the reader in. The writer remains focused throughout the narrative, including relevant details while using a logical progression to tell the story. The use of figurative language, concrete description, and dialogue contribute to the sense that the story is being “shown” rather than told, though the narrative would benefit from more of all of these elements. The reflection question answers show that the writer has thoughtfully considered her audience and purpose. All assignment requirements have been met, and the narrative contained very few errors.



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