



Handy Handouts®

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Narrative Stages

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for language intervention with students struggling to meet grade-level academic standards in language and reading comprehension.

Classification Systems for Narratives

There are several classification systems for narratives and narrative development. The following system adapted from Applebee (1978) has been modified and expanded by Klecan-Aker and Keltly (1990); Paul, Lazlo, and McFarland (1992); Wallach and Miller (1988); and Westby (1984).

The following information, as taken from Language LAB™ by JoAnn Wiechmann, M.A., CCC-SLP; Judy Rudebusch, Ed.D., CCC-SLP; and Nancy Kuhles, M.S., CCC-SLP, provides an overview of classification systems for narratives.

Research on Narrative Stages

Students' narrative skills progress through a series of stages (Applebee, 1978). Research shows that by first grade, students with normal language development produce at least chain narratives, if not true narratives. By the end of fifth grade, students should be able to produce detailed, multiple-episode stories containing complex sentences, well-developed characters, mental state verbs, temporal adverbs, and comment statements on causal relationships between motives and actions (Gillam & Pearson, 2004). Students with low levels of narrative development may be at risk for academic problems (Paul, Lazlo, & McFarland, 1992; Paul, Hernandez, Taylor, & Johnson, 1996). In primary grades, students convey the most information through narrative formats including the content areas of science and social studies; therefore, narratives provide a reasonable context

Narrative Stages:

- Stage 1** **Heap Stories**
Heaps consist of labels and descriptions of events or actions. There is no central theme or organization. There is no real high point.
- Stage 2** **Sequence Stories**
Sequences consist of labeling events about a central theme, character, or setting. There is no plot. The events could be listed in any order without changing the meaning.
- Stage 3** **Primitive Narratives**
Primitive narratives contain three of the story grammar elements: an initiating event, an action, and some result or consequence around a central theme. There is no real resolution or ending to the story.



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(cont.)

Stage 4

Chain Narrative

Chain narratives include four of the story grammar elements: an initiating event, a plan or character motivation, an attempt or action, and some result or consequence around a central theme. There is usually either cause-effect or temporal relationships, but the plot is weak and does not build on the motivations of the characters.

Stage 5

True Narrative

True narratives have a central theme, character, and plot. They include motivations behind the characters' actions and include logical and/or temporally ordered sequences of events. Stories at this stage include five story grammar elements: an initiating event, a plan or character motivation, an attempt or action, a consequence, and a resolution to the problem.



Resources:

- Applebee, A. (1978). *The child's concept of a story: Ages 2 to 17*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gillam, R., & Pearson, N. (2004). *Test of narrative language*. Greenville, SC: Super Duper Publications.
- Klecan-Aker, J., & Kelty, K. (1990). An investigation of the oral narratives of normal and language-learning disabled children. *Journal of Childhood Communication Disorders*, 5(3), 46–54.
- Paul, R., Hernandez, R., Taylor, L., & Johnson, K. (1996). Narrative development in late talkers: Early school age. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 39, 1295–1303.
- Paul, R., Lazlo, C., & McFarland, L. (1992, November). Emergent literacy skills in late talkers. Mini-seminar presented at the annual convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, San Antonio, TX.
- Wallach, G., & Miller, L. (1988). *Language intervention and academic success*. Boston, MA: College-Hill Publications.
- Westby, C. (1984). Development of narrative language abilities. In G. Wallach & K. Butler (Eds.), *Language learning disabilities in school-age children* (pp. 103–127). Baltimore, MD: Williams & Wilkins.

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