

in the analysis section. Overall, you should have a better picture of the Autoethnography's expectations and should feel more confident moving further in your own drafting process.

### *How do I best tell my story?*

## DRAFTING ACTIVITY

### Finding the right details

Once you've chosen a productive moment on which to focus, you can utilize some strategies from the genre known as creative nonfiction, which offers essays that are factually accurate, often research-based, but with an attention to literary style. What do we mean by literary style here? Mostly this: show us more than you tell us. You want to create dramatic tension by using important sensory details. Compare the following examples:

The ceramic bread bowl that has been in my family for five generations has a **nice, reassuring** feel to it that I realize my foremothers must have felt as well.

- These “**tell**” words interpret the scene without describing it. “**Tell**” words deliver **prepackaged ideas** to the reader (pleasant, happy, depressing, annoying, pretty, etc.). Try to keep these words in balance within your narrative.

As the bowl's **smooth, solid, ceramic** interior guides my hands back to a **forming ball of dough**, I imagine my great-grandmother's hands brushing against the sides of this **same bowl** as she spent hours **kneading dough** that would be made into countless **zwiebach, bierrocks**, and **verenike** for her family's sustenance.

- These “**show**” words describe a scene through sensory details and repetitious phrases. The description itself **evokes the desired effect** without requiring the writer to state it overtly.

You should notice, too, how the second example demonstrates a sense of pacing. Effective narratives center on just one moment, rather than a string of events, and provide readers with temporal details—that is, there is a beginning, middle, and an end. As you plot your experience, remember that something has to happen, even if it's not an actual physical occurrence (an accident, for example, or an argument). That “something to happen” is often what we think of as a point of learning—an aha! moment—when we realize a powerful truth or recognize an unexpected flaw.

## DRAFTING ACTIVITY

### Writing the plot

At this point, you should have tested a few ideas through freewriting and peer conversation, and chosen your best idea for the Autoethnography. You have also discussed the role of sensory details in your narrative. Now it's time to focus on the plot itself. There are many strategies that can help you move forward with your ideas. For example, you could diagram the plot using a storyboard, a visual representation of the scenes or events that make up a story.



A storyboard uses sketches and words to present an outline of the story. Writers use them to map out the plot of their stories and to help them decide what details to include. Making a storyboard can also help you decide the best place for the point of learning in your story.

1. For practice, make a storyboard for the narrative portion of one of the student examples, either in this text or from the personal ethnography section of *Prairie Lights*. Follow the steps below to make the storyboard.
  - Read the narrative portion carefully, looking for the point of learning.
  - Divide the story into sections based on where the action is taking place and what is happening. You will likely have four or five sections.
  - Divide a sheet of paper into sections or boxes and draw one sketch for each section of the story, using captions as necessary to support a more complex drawing.
2. Make a storyboard for your own personal ethnography narrative. Be sure to include a point of learning (an “aha!” moment) as you outline your plot. If you find that your storyboard has more than five sections, you may be trying to include too many details in your story. Don’t worry about the quality of your artwork. Instead, focus on using the visual structure to help you better see the arch of your narrative.

You could also create a linear outline to diagram your narrative, following much the same pattern as the storyboard but without the sketches.

1. For practice, return to the student example for which you created the storyboard and briefly summarize the major plot sections within the narrative.
2. For your own draft, capture the most important plot features in the order they happened, and begin to assess where the point of learning takes place.

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## WRITING ACTIVITY

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### Testing your narrative

Once your narrative is planned, through either the storyboard or linear outline, you should feel ready to put more words on the page by filling in the gaps between your sections. These questions might help you as write:

- What is the beginning, middle, and end of my story? How am I guiding my readers along this path? Am I using words like first, next, then, for example?
- What are the *most* important moments within my narrative? Am I including enough detail in those moments to help draw a reader’s attention to them?
- If part of my narrative recalls a conversation, do I include dialogue? How can I make that dialogue sound realistic? [Note: it’s almost impossible to remember conversations verbatim; you should aim for recreating the truth of the scene.] When using dialogue, keep in mind the following conventions:
  - Start a new paragraph each time a different character speaks.
  - Place periods and commas inside the quotation marks.
  - Be clear about which character is speaking.

- Where does the point of learning best fit in my narrative? Do I want that aha! moment to be implied or made explicit? Why? What's the impact of either choice?

After you have completed a rough draft of your narrative, 1–1.5 pages, your instructor might ask you to bring a copy to class in order to workshop it with your peers.

