

## GPS Personal Narrative Presentation: Overview & Guidelines

One of the most difficult tasks you will face after you graduate (or even just before) is successfully presenting yourself. No matter what your plans are (job, internship, graduate school, entrepreneurship, etc.), your success depends on your ability to present yourself. It is not easy to synthesize who you are, your key competencies, your achievements, your interests, and your goals into a short, concise narrative.

During the **TELL: Designing Your Narrative** workshop, we begin to explore how you might answer the most common and most difficult interview prompt: *Tell me about yourself*. The Personal Narrative is your chance to flesh out how you would answer that question in the context of an objective that you yourself define.

### THE OBJECTIVE:

Your Personal Narrative begins with your objective. Your objective could be to get accepted to a specific master's degree program at a specific university. Or your objective might be to win seed money for your startup company. Your objective might be to get hired as an event planning coordinator in the fashion industry. Or possibly your objective is to obtain funding for your research project.

Possibly you have more than one objective. Possibly you are not ready to fully commit to one. For the purpose of this activity, simply select one. The goal is to practice how to create a Personal Narrative to achieve a specific objective. Once you have gone through the process of crafting a Personal Narrative for one objective, you'll be well prepared to craft a Personal Narrative for other objectives. In reality throughout the course of your life, you will set, chase after, and achieve many different personal and professional objectives.

### WHAT MAKES A GREAT NARRATIVE:

**Great Personal Narratives start with a clear objective.** As described above, the objective helps you decide how you should present yourself (who you are, your skills, your experiences, your interests, etc.) because it gives your presentation context. For example, if your objective is to get hired as a research assistant at a non-profit advocacy organization, what aspects of you and your experience will be the most relevant for that hiring manager?

**Great Personal Narratives usually have some sort of theme.** Three theme types we often see are:

1. A theme that is effectively a personal brand. Like [Rama Al Nakib's](#) take on being a (slightly rebellious) woman in tech.
2. A theme that is a tagline or baseline that underpins the student's personal journey. Like [Marie Anselmi's](#) theme of being a bold initiative-taker.
3. A theme where the student highlights two or three key competencies. Like [Sarah Sturman's](#) submission that highlights her three greatest strengths.

**Great narratives are memorable.** The rule of three is something you should keep in mind. If you stick to three main ideas in your presentation, you will be more memorable. During the Designing Your Narrative workshop, you learn the STAR technique for telling short compelling stories about your achievements. Taking the time to share a few impactful STAR stories is a good way to focus on quality over quantity in your Personal Narrative. You may want to show how your "Reflect" exercises have proven helpful in addressing an issue you have faced during one of your GPS activities.

**Great narratives are well-structured.** You want your presentation format to be simple, clear and easy to follow. Consider this structure: Say what you're going to say, say it, say what you said. Similar to writing a paper for a class, you want to open with the main idea, follow with the support, and end on the main idea again. In the context of a Personal Narrative, that often means opening with your objective, following with some information about you and your achievements (those experiences that have prepared you to attain your objective), and closing with your objective.

**Great narratives use an appropriate and clean format.** You can get creative (PowerPoint, video, website, etc.) but consider keeping it simple. For example, we will accept a well-crafted LinkedIn profile with a cover sheet where you essentially write out a brief answer to the question: *Tell me about yourself*. Check out an example below.

### **PRESENTATION REQUIREMENTS:**

GPS Personal Narrative presentations must include three things: an objective, a written narrative, and something visual.

1. Objective:
  - Your objective should be as specific and as realistic as possible. It's ok if, in reality, you have more than one objective; for the purpose of this exercise pick one. Try to focus on a short-term objective, something you plan to tackle in the next 6-12 months.
  - **Stop by the ACE Center for one-on-one coaching sessions (for GPS presenters only).**
2. Written narrative delivered orally:
  - The written narrative should read like an answer to the *Tell me about yourself* question. Imagine you've entered into a conversation with someone who is capable of helping you achieve your objective (a hiring manager, admissions counselor, investor, research grant committee, etc.), and that person has just said, "Thanks for coming by today, why don't you begin by telling me/us about yourself". What would you say? How would you say it? Your written narrative should be something you could deliver orally in 5 minutes maximum, which means it should **not** exceed one page.
  - **Attend a Public Speaking Prep Session (for GPS presenters only). RSVP on Engage.**
3. Something visual:
  - Your visual submission can take a variety of forms, however frequently used formats include PowerPoint, Prezi, LinkedIn profiles, personal websites/portfolios, well-crafted resumes, and videos. The visual submission should be something that serves you in real life and that has the potential to actually help you achieve your objective as something that you can potentially share with decision-makers. The visual submission can capture the full variety of your accomplishments; it is a place where you can highlight experiences that you may not have time to address in your written narrative.
  - **Attend a Visual Presentation Prep Session (for GPS presenters only). RSVP on Engage.**

See below for a sample personal narrative.

## EXAMPLE PERSONAL NARRATIVE by Troy Obernolte ('23):

Visual Presentation: [GPS Presentation.pptx](#)

Objective: To provide the world with clean energy.

Narrative:

I was born in Big Bear Lake, a small mountain town in Southern California. I would travel often, both within the United States and abroad. Although I had visited all seven continents by the age of thirteen, I never felt that I really had known other cultures apart from just seeing. Similarly, I had diverse experiences in High School such as SCUBA diving, earning my pilot's license at the age of seventeen, and performing in both the Sydney Opera House and Carnegie Hall. When I graduated top of my High School class, I matriculated at the California Institute of Technology, an elite STEM university that primarily focuses on chemistry and rocket science to pursue my interests in quantitative studies.

At Caltech, I was very challenged academically, although I wasn't stimulated. My friends and colleagues were content to spend their lives in a lab working on one technology, but I wasn't. I wanted to study how many different technologies worked together to solve problems on a global scale. When the world was at a standstill due to COVID, I transferred to the American University of Paris.

At AUP, I was able to pursue many of my interests at once. Double majoring in International Business Administration and Mathematics and Computer Science has taught me how to develop technology and effectively deploy it on a global scale. There is no better illustration of this than my two senior theses on Machine Learning and Energy Systems analysis. Additionally, living in Paris has allowed me to learn different cultures while cultivating a third language. I have spent my Summers working for the Congress of the United States with the Energy and Commerce Committee working on energy policy.

I had come to the crossroads: what would I do with my life? When I reviewed my passions, the common theme from designing rockets to making harmonies to flying planes was energy. I knew that my future would not be confined to any country. I want my future career in energy to be without disciplinary or national borders.

This May, I will be graduating Summa Cum Laude with Honors in both my academic departments. My academic experience will be continued at the University of Oxford in their Masters in Energy Systems program, where I will learn about the science behind energy generation, economics of distribution, and political science behind decision making. Upon graduation, I plan to continue my work in crafting clean energy policy in Congress or potentially pursue a role in an international energy infrastructure company. By combining my diverse experiences, academic passion, and natural curiosity, I am confident that I will be able to achieve my goal of providing the world with clean energy.