

Student Model 1

Personal Narrative Read the narrative. Evaluate it for focus and unity.

Party of One

My parents used to call me a social butterfly. I was always socializing. I would call my best friends, Delores and Katya, every morning before school. We would text message after school and get together several nights a week to hang out. Sure, I got my homework done, but I wasn't really happy unless I was with people.

Then Dona moved in next door. The first day, I noticed her sitting alone on the bench in her backyard. I thought she looked lonely, and I wondered what her problem was. At school the next day, though, she seemed to fit in fine. She ate lunch with us, and she was funny and interesting and generally cool. She went to the mall with us on Saturday, and we all had a good time.

The next time I saw Dona sitting alone in her yard, I text messaged her: "Lonely? Wanna catch a movie?"

She texted back, "No thanks. See you tomorrow?"

That sounded weird to me. I thought of all the after-school specials where the kid who's sitting alone is wrestling with some deep, dark tragedy, and I decided Dona must be sad about something. I would save her! So I went outside and walked across to the hedge between our yards. I called out, "Hey, Dona! Are you okay?"

Dona looked confused. "Hi, Jeri. I'm fine. Why wouldn't I be?"

I walked over and sat down next to her. "Well, you're alone. I thought maybe there was something wrong."

She laughed out loud. "Not at all. I'm just enjoying some peace and quiet."

I was still confused. "But—you're not even reading. What are you doing?"

"Well, right now I'm watching that squirrel." She pointed at a big brown squirrel that was trying to raid a birdfeeder on a pole.

I watched for a while. It was kind of entertaining, but I was still puzzled. "Aren't you lonely out here all by yourself?"

Dona shook her head. She said, "By myself is one of my favorite places to be."

"What do you do?"

"I watch squirrels, I read, I sit and think. If I didn't have time to myself, I'd go crazy."

We chatted for a few more minutes. Then I went home. When Katya called me, I told her I was staying home that night. I talked to my parents at dinner, I read for pleasure instead of homework, and I got enough sleep for the first time in a while.

I felt so peaceful that I decided to spend a little time alone every day. I enjoy my friends even more now that I'm not talking to them every minute.

Student Model 2

Personal Narrative Read the narrative. Evaluate it for focus and unity.

Playing Like Cats and Dogs

I've always loved dogs. In fact, I have two dogs, a chow and a border collie. They like walks and games and, of course, chew toys. What they don't like are cats. Maybe that's why I've never liked cats either. I always thought cats were standoffish and sneaky. They didn't seem big enough to play rough or affectionate enough to cuddle.

Then we moved to a smaller house with a much smaller yard. Suddenly both Shep and Ella seemed twice as big and twice as noisy as they used to be. Getting enough exercise meant walking them at least ten city blocks because there just wasn't room for them to run free. Walking is a good cardiovascular exercise. It burns calories and is good for your heart, but it's not as hard on your joints as running is.

My mom became friends with our neighbor, Kathy, and she invited us to use her yard. The only catch is that she has cats, and they're often in her yard. I wanted Shep and Ella to have more room. Our two fenced-in yards have a gate between them, so it would be safe. But we'd have to put up with a pair of snooty cats.

We decided to give it a try. The first time we let the dogs into Kathy's yard, she kept the cats inside. Luna and Sol sat in the window and watched the dogs. I swear they were teasing Shep and Ella. The second time, the cats stayed up a tree. The third time, they started out on the ground but the dogs chased them up the tree. I thought Kathy might tell us the dogs couldn't come over any more, but she just said, "Give it time."

She was right. Eventually, the two species got used to each other. They even became friends. Just yesterday, after an exciting game of catch, Ella collapsed for a nap in Kathy's yard. Luna curled up against her to sleep. I couldn't believe it! They actually seem to like each other. Shep isn't quite that evolved, but he doesn't chase the cats any more. Sol doesn't play with the dogs, but then he's old. He doesn't play much, period.

Sol is a gray cat with white spots and white paws. He's big; he must weigh 15 pounds. He has long fur and a plume of a tail. He spends most of his time sleeping and the rest grooming that fur.

I've learned from spending time with these cats that I was wrong. Cats *are* affectionate enough to cuddle—and they fit onto your lap. They're not so much standoffish as independent, which means they need less of your time than dogs. They don't eat as much as dogs or slobber nearly as much. I still love my dogs, but I can picture living in an apartment someday with cats. I've learned that they do make good pets. My cousin Leroy has one dog and one cat, and they get along all right.