

PREPARING YOUR PERSONAL NARRATIVE FOR THE PSR

Why the Narrative Matters at This Stage

Many people think of their personal narrative only in terms of sentencing—something the judge reads shortly before imposing a sentence. But the narrative plays an important role earlier, during the PSR process.

Probation officers are tasked with writing a comprehensive report under time pressure. When a person provides a clear, well-prepared narrative, it often becomes one of the most useful tools the officer has. I've seen probation officers cut and paste entire sections of a narrative directly into the PSR.

That only happens when the narrative is prepared with the PSR in mind.

I encourage you to work through the free course we prepared on writing sentencing narratives.

What Probation Officers Look for in a Narrative

Probation officers are not looking for legal arguments. They are not looking for excuses. They are looking for information they can rely on.

A PSR-ready narrative helps the probation officer:

- » Understand your background and life history
- » See how you explain your conduct without minimizing it
- » Identify factors that affect classification, programming, and risk
- » Document acceptance of responsibility where appropriate

The clearer and more organized the narrative, the easier it is for the probation officer to incorporate it accurately.

How to Write With the PSR Audience in Mind

When preparing a narrative for PSR purposes, you should assume it may be read by people you will never meet. That means tone and clarity matter.



A PSR-ready narrative should be:

- » Written in the first person
- » Respectful and factual
- » Free of legal argument
- » Consistent with other records and statements
- » Focused on explanation, not justification

Strive to inform accurately.

Avoiding Language That Creates Problems

Certain types of language can unintentionally create problems in the PSR.

Avoid:

- » Blaming others or the system
- » Minimizing your role in the offense
- » Speculating about motives, dates, or amounts
- » Using emotionally charged or defensive language

Even statements that feel harmless can be interpreted negatively when summarized by someone else. Preparation helps you remove that risk.

Using the Narrative to Support Accuracy

A well-prepared narrative gives the probation officer a reference point. Instead of relying solely on the government's description or memory of an interview, the officer can refer to your written account.

This increases the likelihood that:

- » Timelines are accurate
- » Background details are complete
- » Mitigating factors are documented
- » Inconsistencies are reduced

Accuracy is the most valuable contribution you can make at this stage.



Submitting the Narrative Thoughtfully

Your attorney should always be involved in decisions about when and how to submit your narrative. In many cases, providing the narrative through counsel is the most appropriate approach.

When the narrative is shared responsibly, it can help shape the PSR in ways that benefit you not only at sentencing, but throughout your time in custody.

Looking Ahead

In the next lesson, I'll explain how to prepare your family members and supporters for contact with probation, including what they may be asked and why inconsistent statements can create problems.

Preparing yourself is essential. Preparing the people around you can be just as important.

