

SAMPLE SENTENCING NARRATIVE: SARAH STEVENS (APPEAL VERSION)

Section 1: Intro

Dear Honorable Judge,

My name is Sarah Stevens. I am 31 years old, a mother of two young children, Bobby (7) and Cindy (4), and I come before this Court with humility. I write this letter with a clear understanding that the jury has convicted me and that I face sentencing. On the advice of my counsel, I will not be discussing the details of the case itself, as we are preparing an appeal. Still, I do not want to miss this opportunity to share with the Court who I am as a person, the challenges I have faced, and my desire to be seen as more than the charges against me.

This letter is not an attempt to challenge the jury's verdict. That is a matter for the appeals court. My purpose is different. I want to show that, regardless of the outcome of litigation, I am a mother, a daughter, and a woman who has tried to do her best under difficult circumstances. I want to give the Court a fuller picture of my life, my struggles, and my capacity for positive contribution.

I am the sole caretaker for Bobby and Cindy. Their father abandoned us years ago, leaving me with the full responsibility of raising them. I have worked tirelessly to provide for them, often juggling multiple jobs and late-night shifts while arranging childcare and trying to keep a roof over our heads. Life has been a constant balancing act of exhaustion, financial strain, and the desire to shield my children from hardship.

I know that when the Court looks at me now, it sees someone convicted of a serious crime. But I ask that you also see the human being behind that judgment: a woman who has made sacrifices for her children, a woman who has known hardship, and a woman who still hopes to live a life of dignity and contribution.

Whatever the Court decides at sentencing, I am committed to continuing my personal growth and to preparing myself to be a better mother and citizen. Thank you for allowing me to share a part of myself with you.



Section 2: Background

I was born in Spokane, Washington, into a working-class family. My father worked as a mechanic, and my mother worked part-time at a grocery store while raising me and my younger brother. They did not have advanced education, but they modeled the values of discipline, honesty, and perseverance.

As a child, I grew up in a modest but stable home. We did not have luxuries, but we had the essentials. My parents emphasized work ethic and responsibility. I was an average student in school, graduating with decent but unremarkable grades. I worked small jobs—babysitting, cashiering—but never had a strong sense of career direction.

At 21, I married my high school boyfriend. Two years later, Bobby was born, followed by Cindy three years later. For a time, I thought I was living the life I had dreamed of: a family of my own. But my marriage collapsed when my husband left, leaving me with full responsibility for our children.

Those years after he left were marked by constant struggle. Childcare was expensive, and my income barely covered rent and utilities. I took jobs wherever I could find them—waitressing, working retail, cleaning houses. I often worked late into the night, then woke early to get Bobby to school and Cindy to daycare.

One vivid memory still haunts me. It was a bitterly cold winter night. After finishing a double shift at the diner, I picked up my children from a neighbor's apartment. Both were asleep. I carried one in each arm through the snow, my feet numb and my arms aching, praying I would not slip. At that moment, I felt the crushing weight of responsibility, but also the fierce love that drove me to keep going.

My pride kept me from asking for help, even from family. I wanted to prove I could manage on my own. That pride, combined with exhaustion and financial desperation, shaped many of the decisions I made in those years.

Eventually, I was offered an administrative job at ABC Roofing. For the first time, I felt like I had found stability. My employer trusted me, and I was proud to be working in a role that gave me dignity. I now know that trust is the most valuable thing one person can give another.



My background does not excuse where I stand today. But I want the Court to see the full picture: not just the conviction, but the life of a woman who has tried to carry immense responsibilities with limited resources, who has stumbled, but who remains committed to her children and to becoming better.

Section 3: Influences that Led to the Case

Because of my appeal, I will not discuss the facts of the case or the verdict. But I can share the pressures and influences that shaped my life during the years in question.

The most consistent theme of my life as a single mother has been financial stress. Rent, utilities, food, medical bills, and childcare often exceeded my income. I lived with a constant sense of fear: the fear that I would not be able to provide for my children, the fear of losing our apartment, the fear of failing as a mother.

That pressure weighed on me every day. After long shifts, I often returned home too exhausted to do anything but collapse into bed. I worried about Bobby's schoolwork and Cindy's development, knowing that I was giving them less attention than they deserved because I was stretched so thin.

I also fell into unhealthy coping habits. I drank more than I should have, not socially, but to numb the stress and to quiet the fear that I was not enough for my children. Instead of seeking counseling or help, I tried to push through alone.

The combination of exhaustion, financial pressure, and isolation influenced every decision I made. These were the conditions that defined my life in the years leading up to this case.

Had I been stronger in those moments, I would have sought help. I should have reached out to family, to community resources, or to counseling programs. I should have relied less on pride and more on support. Those safeguards might have prevented me from standing here today.

Missed safeguards I wish I had implemented:

- » Asking for family support when I became overwhelmed.
- » Seeking counseling for stress and alcohol misuse.



- » Finding a financial advisor or mentor to help me manage debt.
- » Building accountability through healthier relationships and community ties.

Section 4: Lessons Learned

Even though I am appealing my conviction, I cannot ignore the lessons this experience has already taught me. The past two years have forced me to see my life differently, to reflect deeply, and to recognize where I need to grow.

The first lesson is that I must take better care of myself to care for my children. Working constantly, neglecting my health, and drinking to cope were not signs of strength—they were signs of denial. I now know that true strength comes from seeking help when it is needed.

The second lesson is the value of trust. Whether in family, employment, or community, trust is fragile. It takes years to build and only moments to lose. I want my life moving forward to be defined by actions that rebuild trust—with my children, with those who have supported me, and with society.

The third lesson is about resilience. I cannot control everything that happens to me, but I can control how I respond. Even in the face of conviction and the possibility of prison, I can choose to grow, to remain sober, to continue developing myself, and to prepare for a better future.

I do not claim to have all the answers. I am still learning, and I will continue learning throughout this journey.

Section 5: Steps to Reconciliation

My circumstances do not change the fact that I want to reconcile with society and live a productive life. Even as I appeal, I am working on myself and preparing for the future.

I currently work as a waitress. From my tips, I contribute what I can toward restitution. These payments are modest, but they represent my commitment to making amends.



I also attend counseling sessions for stress and alcohol use. These sessions have helped me see the importance of accountability and sobriety. Staying sober has improved not only my health but also my ability to be present for my children.

My children remain my greatest responsibility. I attend parenting support groups, learning healthier ways to guide them. I want them to grow up with a mother who models integrity, perseverance, and humility.

Looking forward, my plan is based on three priorities:

1. Education and Skills — I want to complete vocational training in bookkeeping so I can return to administrative work, this time with honesty and accountability at the center of everything I do.
2. Sobriety and Discipline — I will remain engaged in counseling and support groups to ensure I never fall back into unhealthy coping mechanisms.
3. Restitution and Service — I will continue making restitution payments and seek opportunities to serve others, whether through mentoring or community involvement.

Section 6: Conclusion

I know that I stand before the Court convicted of a serious crime. On the advice of counsel, I will not discuss the facts, as I am pursuing an appeal. But I ask that you see me not only through the lens of a conviction, but as a whole person—a mother, a daughter, and a woman who has faced challenges and is striving to grow.

I have made mistakes in my life. I have carried stress poorly, relied too much on pride, and neglected to ask for help when I needed it most. But I am also someone who is working to learn, to stay sober, to provide for my children, and to reconcile with society.

Whatever sentence this Court imposes, I will use it as an opportunity for growth. My children deserve a mother who lives with integrity. Society deserves a citizen who contributes honestly. I am determined to become both.



I ask respectfully for mercy, not to escape accountability, but so that I may have the opportunity sooner to return to my children, continue restitution, and demonstrate through my actions that I can live a life of dignity and responsibility.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my words.

Respectfully,

Sarah Stevens

PARALLEL LESSON PLAN: SARAH STEVENS – ACCEPTANCE VS. APPEAL

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Understand how sentencing narratives differ depending on plea status (guilty plea vs. trial/appeal).
2. Recognize how to present oneself respectfully to the Court even when not admitting guilt.
3. Compare the credibility challenges and opportunities in each version.
4. Draft their own narratives consistent with their legal posture (acceptance or appeal).
5. Build profile materials that demonstrate growth, regardless of verdict.

Overview

This lesson presents **two fictionalized narratives** of the same character, Sarah Stevens, convicted of fraud.



- » Version A: Sarah self-reported, pled guilty, accepted responsibility, and emphasized remorse.
- » Version B: Sarah denied wrongdoing, went to trial, was convicted, and appealed. She could not admit guilt in her letter but still wrote to humanize herself and show capacity for growth.

By comparing both, students see how **tone, content, and strategy** change depending on the circumstances.

Core Teaching Points

1. Narrative Structure Remains the Same

Both versions follow the six sections: Intro, Background, Influences, Lessons Learned, Steps to Reconciliation, Conclusion. The difference is in *how* responsibility and growth are expressed.

2. Acceptance vs. Appeal

- » In acceptance, remorse and full ownership are the centerpiece.
- » In appeal, the defendant cannot discuss facts of the case, but can still:
 - ◇ Share personal background,
 - ◇ Highlight challenges,
 - ◇ Emphasize personal development,
 - ◇ Show commitment to reconciliation.

3. Credibility with the Court

- » Version A: Judges value candor and remorse.
- » Version B: Judges value respect, tone, and evidence of character—even when direct responsibility isn't acknowledged.

4. Practicality for Students

- » Students must align their narrative with their legal posture. Writing the wrong way could harm an appeal.
- » Even without admitting guilt, they can—and should—show positive qualities, plans, and capacity to contribute.



Practical Exercise

Assignment 1: Compare the Two Sarahs

- » Read both narratives side-by-side.
- » Identify three major differences in tone and content.
- » Identify three similarities that remain constant in both (e.g., respect, humility, focus on family).

Assignment 2: Draft According to Your Posture

- » If you pled guilty: Write a one-page Intro accepting responsibility and remorse.
- » If you went to trial and are appealing: Write a one-page Intro that avoids discussing case facts but emphasizes your humanity, challenges, and capacity for good.

Assignment 3: Safeguards Reflection

- » Both versions include “missed safeguards.” Write your own list of at least 3 safeguards you should have implemented.

Reflection Journal Prompts

1. Why is accountability powerful in Version A?
2. Why is humility still important in Version B, even without admitting guilt?
3. What do you think judges look for in each posture?
4. If you were in Sarah’s shoes, which version would you prefer to present, and why?
5. How can you show growth even if you are appealing a conviction?

Profile-Building Assignment

Regardless of plea or trial:

- » Biography: Share your background story (like Sarah’s).
- » Journals: Weekly entries on stress, growth, and lessons learned.



- » Book Reports: Report on books that influenced your thinking (as Sarah reflected on reading memoirs and philosophy).
- » Release Plan: Document your goals (education, sobriety, restitution, service).
- » Testimonials: Gather support from family, mentors, or community members.

This way, your **public profile shows growth** whether or not you admitted guilt.

Key Takeaways

- » Sentencing narratives are flexible but must align with your legal strategy.
- » Acceptance of responsibility can lower sentences and build trust.
- » Appeal posture does not prevent you from humanizing yourself, showing growth, and offering a plan for the future.
- » Judges want to see effort, sincerity, and forward-looking responsibility in both scenarios.

Self-Directed Exercise

Write two **Conclusion sections** for your own narrative:

1. One as if you pled guilty and accepted responsibility.
2. One as if you went to trial, were convicted, and appealed.

Compare the tone and ask: *Which one would better serve your current reality?*

