

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Name/Code

Date

College Narrative Essay Example: "Control Group"

The title uses scientific language ("Control Group") but hints at a personal story underneath. Strong college narrative essays often blend technical or academic concepts with lived experience, signaling both intellect and reflection.

The experiment required a control group, and I volunteered to be in it, which meant I got the sugar pill and spent six weeks of junior year not getting better at anything.

[This opening immediately introduces both context and irony. The writer explains the situation while also hinting at the central conflict: choosing not to change while others do. College narrative essays often start with a striking contradiction or unexpected choice.]

The study was my AP Psychology teacher's, a legitimate IRB-approved project looking at whether structured self-reflection journaling improved academic performance. Half the class journaled every night using a provided protocol. The other half (my group) wrote nothing and changed nothing. At the end of six weeks, both groups were retested on everything: grades, mood, stress markers, and sleep quality.

[This paragraph provides necessary academic context. In college-level narrative writing, background information is often more detailed and formal, especially when the story involves research or structured studies.]

I joined the control group because I wanted the experiment to have a clean result, which is a strange reason, but it was genuine. I'd read enough about research design to understand that a control group that wanted to be in the experimental group would contaminate the data. Somebody had to just exist normally for six weeks. I figured it might as well be me.

[Here, the writer explains motivation and shows analytical thinking. College narrative essays often highlight reasoning and self-awareness, showing not just what happened but why decisions were made.]

What I didn't expect was how uncomfortable it would be to watch the other group improve.

[This short sentence acts as a transition into emotional conflict. Strong narrative essays often use short, simple sentences to emphasize turning points.]

By week three, the journaling group was visibly different, calmer, and more organized, sleeping better by their own report. Two of my friends in the study were getting higher test scores than I'd ever seen from them. Meanwhile, I was doing what I'd always

done: staying up too late, studying in anxious bursts, losing track of things. I was the unchanged variable, which was the point, but it didn't feel useful. It felt like watching everyone else get on a boat while I stood on the dock holding a clipboard.

[This section contrasts change vs. stagnation. The metaphor of the boat and dock helps readers understand emotional separation. College essays often use layered metaphors to express internal conflict clearly.]

The study concluded that journaling had a statistically significant effect on stress management. My teacher published a paper. The result mattered because the control group existed. I know this.

[This paragraph returns to academic framing. The writer acknowledges the scientific outcome while subtly separating personal experience from statistical results.]

But I learned something the paper didn't capture, which is that watching other people change is its own uncomfortable education. It's one thing to believe theoretically that habits matter, that small daily practices compound. It's another to spend six weeks being the empirical proof of their absence. I was a living demonstration of my own unchanged patterns, and because I was paying attention to the study, I couldn't pretend I didn't see it.

[This is the central insight. College narrative essays often move from story → reflection → abstract understanding. The writer connects personal experience to a broader psychological idea about behavior and awareness.]

I started journaling on week seven. Not because my teacher asked me to; the study was over. I started because I had six weeks of data on myself that I couldn't ignore. I'm not evangelizing. I don't think everyone needs a structured reflection protocol. But I do think that one of the underrated benefits of research is what it does to the person who runs the control: it makes the status quo visible in a way it usually isn't.

[This section shows delayed change. Narrative essays often include a "after-effect" moment where transformation happens after the main event has ended, reinforcing authenticity rather than forced resolution.]

I want to study behavioral science. I am interested in the question of why people change, and why they don't, even when they can see the data on themselves. That question became personal for me in a classroom study on journaling, while I was sitting in the group that got nothing, watching and not changing, taking notes on the gap between knowing and doing.

[Here, the writer connects experience to academic and career interests. College narrative essays often use personal stories to justify intellectual curiosity or future study goals.]

Being in the control group was the most instructive six weeks of my education.

[The ending is concise and definitive. Strong narrative conclusions often avoid exaggeration and instead make a calm, confident claim about meaning or impact.]