Professionals who work with students with disabilities may not be aware of a student’s thoughts about his or her experiences in the classroom or how the student may have felt about the impact of his or her disability on his or her academic, functional, and social performance.

As discussed earlier, for the first time, the student can make these experiences known to the IEP team. Creating a narrative in writing, using text-to-speech, or an interpreter is the starting point for the student to self-determine the best fit for future work environments. This process is the foundation for the future, and educator input should not stymie the information provided by the student in this first self-reflective activity.

Team members should look at the narrative not as a source for developing goals for the student but rather as the student’s example of what he or she may need for the transition services, education, training, and the beginning of employment. In the narrative, the student can include how he or she wants his or her needs addressed, and the examples of student contributions for the IEP in this chapter can guide him or her.

Giving the student the IEP process as a forum to describe his or her school experience can help the student end what has not worked for him or her. Through this process, the student can begin to know themselves, their disability-related needs, and their hopes and dreams.

The Transition Planning Specialist’s Role

In the following review of a written narrative, the transition planning specialist begins the balancing act of guiding, encouraging, and structuring the process so this student can design her goals. Once this narrative is completed, the transition planning specialist should go over it and use the interviewing techniques described in Chapter 10, not to change the story, but rather to probe for further self-perceptions that will help guide the first IEP and the transition section. This narrative was written by a student with bipolar disorder who was in an emotional and behavioral disorder program. The diagnosis and history makes this a narrative with significant complexity. This report was partially included in Chapter 5 about medical assessments.