

NONFICTION

READING AND WRITING FOR A SPECIFIC PURPOSE



A Guide for Readers and Writers, Part I

What Makes Nonfiction Text Different from Fiction?

NONFICTION	“Using Facts to Make Up a Form”
FICTION	“The Art of Making Up Facts”

Nonfiction writing is made up of components, or parts, that are quite different from those that make up fiction.

When we are familiar with the components of both nonfiction and fiction, we can better understand what we are reading. Also, knowing these components helps us organize our own writing when we compose our own stories or factual pieces.

Nonfiction is usually written with specific, or specialized, text **features** and text **structures**. These text **structures** usually include helpful **text cues** or **signal words**. In contrast, fiction usually has a text **structure** made up of a beginning, middle and end.

Another difference is nonfiction often includes specialized vocabulary, whereas fiction does not.

TEXT FEATURES of Nonfiction

Text **features** have an impact on how nonfiction text looks on the page and are important to guide us in reading through the text. This is a list of common text **features**:

- | | |
|---------------|------------|
| ■ Subheadings | ■ Charts |
| ■ Bullets | ■ Diagrams |
| ■ Fonts | ■ Labels |
| ■ White space | ■ Pictures |
| ■ Layout | ■ Captions |

Unlike nonfiction, the appearance of fiction, or the way it looks, is not quite as important. However, illustrations are sometimes used as part of the idea development.

TEXT STRUCTURE and TEXT CUES/SIGNAL WORDS

Text **structure** of nonfiction refers to the organization patterns used within the text. Writers use **text cues** or **signal words** to help us figure out those organizational patterns - see explanation that follows.

In contrast, text **structure** of fiction includes literary elements such as characterization, setting, plot, and theme, as well as organizational devices such as foreshadowing and flashback.

- **Text features**
determine how nonfiction text looks
- **Text structure**
determines how ideas are organized

COMMON PURPOSES

Whereas the common purposes of nonfiction text are

- to explain
- to inform
- to teach how to do something
- to express an opinion
- to persuade readers to do or believe something
- to entertain

the most common purpose of fiction is to entertain.

Understanding an Author's Purpose

Writers of nonfiction usually have one of the following purposes for writing:

- To explain
- To inform
- To teach how to do something
- To express an opinion
- To persuade readers to do or believe something
- To entertain

Sometimes the writer may have more than one purpose in mind when writing a particular piece. However, one purpose is usually the most important.

TYPES OF NONFICTION

Letters
Articles
Editorials
Speeches
Brochures
Biographies
Essays
Academic Journals

Text Structure/Idea Development/Organization

In order to find out important information when reading nonfiction, it helps to identify the text structure, i.e., how ideas have been developed and organized within the text.

COMMON TEXT STRUCTURES:

- Cause and effect
- Problem and solution
- Question and answer
- Compare and contrast
- Description
- Sequence or time order
- Exemplification (using examples)
- Combination of the above

Common Text Cues/Signal Words

CAUSE AND EFFECT - Why something happens is the *cause*.
What happens because of the cause is the *effect*.

Because
Since
Therefore
Consequently
As a result
This led to
So that
Nevertheless
Accordingly
If...then
Thus
One reason for that
For this reason

PROBLEM AND SOLUTION - the author's purpose is to write about a *problem* and give a *solution*.

QUESTION AND ANSWER - the author asks a *question* and then gives an *answer*.

How
When
What
Where
Why
Who
How many
The best estimate
It could be that
One may conclude

COMPARE AND CONTRAST - a comparison tells how things, people, places or events are *alike*. A contrast tells how they are *different*.

However
Like
Unlike
Likewise
Both
As well as
On the other hand
Not only...but also
Either...or while
Although
Unless
Similarly
Yet
Nevertheless
In contrast
Too
As opposed to
Whereas

Some examples

Cause/Effect

"Drug abusers often start in upper elementary school. They experiment with a parent's beer and hard liquor and they enjoy the buzz they receive. They keep doing this and it starts taking more and more of the alcohol to get the same level of buzz. **As a result**, the child turns to other forms of stimulation including marijuana. Since these are the initial steps that usually lead to more hardcore drugs such as Angel Dust (PCP), heroin, and crack cocaine, marijuana and alcohol are known as "gateway drugs." **Because** of their addictive nature, these gateway drugs lead many youngsters who use them to the world of hardcore drugs."

Problem/Solution

"The carrying capacity of a habitat refers to the amount of plant and animal life its resources can hold. For example, if there are only 80 pounds of food available and there are animals that together need more than 80 pounds of food to survive, one or more animals will die - the habitat can't 'carry' them. Humans have reduced many habitats' carrying capacity by imposing limiting factors that reduce its carrying capacity such as housing development, road construction, dams, pollution, fires, and acid rain. **So that** they can maintain full carrying capacity in forest habitats, Congress has enacted legislation that protects endangered habitats from human development or impact. As a result, these areas have high carrying capacities and an abundance of plant and animal life."

Compare/Contrast

"Middle school gives students more autonomy than elementary school. **While** students are asked to be responsible for their learning in both levels, middle school students have more pressure to follow through on assignments on their own, rather than rely on adults. In addition, narrative forms are used to teach most literacy skills in elementary school. **On the other hand**, expository writing is the way most information is given in middle school. "

DESCRIPTION - all the *facts* and *details* make up the description part of nonfiction writing. There aren't any specific text cues/signal words. Strong description depends on *sensory details*.

Sensory details:
what we
see,
hear,
taste,
smell,
and feel

SEQUENCE or TIME ORDER - all the facts are arranged in a *special sequence* or are listed in *chronological* or *time order*.

On (date)
Not long after
Now
As
Before
After
When
Since
Until
First
Following
At the same
time
Finally
During
At last

To begin with
First
Second
Next
Then
Finally
Last
Most important
Also
In fact
For instance
For example
With
In front
Beside
Near
In addition

EXEMPLIFICATION - using *examples* to explain or elaborate an idea.

For instance
In fact
Specifically
To illustrate
Such as
For example

LIST, ENUMERATION - all the facts/details are listed or enumerated

COMBINATION - Authors sometimes use a combination of text structures

More examples

Time Order

"Astronomy came a long way in the 1500s and 1600s. In 1531, Halley's Comet appeared and caused great panic. Just twelve years later, however, Copernicus realized that the sun was the center of the solar system, not the Earth, and astronomy became a way to understand the natural world, not something to fear. In the early part of the next century, Galileo made the first observations with a new instrument - the telescope. A generation later, Sir Isaac Newton invented the reflecting telescope, a close cousin to what we use today. Halley's Comet returned in 1682 and it was treated as a scientific wonder, studied by Edmund Halley."

Enumeration

"The moon is our closest neighbor. It's 250,000 miles away. It's gravity is only 1/6 that of Earth. This means a boy weighing 120 pounds in Virginia would weigh only 20 pounds on the moon. In addition, there is no atmosphere on the moon. The footprints left by astronauts back in 1969 are still there, as crisply formed as they were on the day they were made. The lack of atmosphere also means there is no water on the moon, an important problem when traveling there."

Adapted from "Coming to Know Through Writing," Rick Wormeli, rwormeli@erols.com, September 2004

Common Writing Structures

Every paragraph usually needs a **topic sentence**. The **topic sentence** is usually the first sentence of the paragraph. It gives the reader an idea of what the paragraph is going to be about. However, the topic sentence may not always be so clearly stated, and it can come in the middle or end of a paragraph, not just its beginning.

Regardless, all **topic sentences** are supported by sentences that give details to develop the idea presented in the **topic sentence**.

For example:

"My brother and I had a great vacation at the beach. We didn't have to get up early in the morning, but we often did because we enjoyed swimming in the ocean before the sun became too hot. Our hotel had a pool too, but that was nowhere near as inviting as the ocean. Some nights we stayed up really late and watched scary movies. Those nights it was hard to get to sleep, but it was still fun. I love vacations and hate it when they end!"

"My brother and I had a great vacation at the beach" is the topic sentence. Everything else supports that idea.

Here is an example of a paragraph that has a sentence that is out of place:

"Regardless of what some people may think, the desert is a beautiful place. The blossoming wildflowers in the spring are a joy to see. Spectacular sunsets delight the eye. Sometimes I go swimming. The occasional quail or roadrunner dart across the sandy roads. It is a unique experience."

What doesn't belong?

"Sometimes I go swimming" has nothing to do with the topic sentence that states that the desert is a beautiful place.

Adapted from: http://www.geocities.com/fifth_grade_tpes/longfellow.html

The Reading/Writing Connection -- Feature Articles

From a reader's perspective

- ◆ Understanding writer's purpose
- ◆ Constructing meaning through
 - ◆ Predicting
 - ◆ Questioning
 - ◆ Clarifying
 - ◆ Summarizing

From a writer's perspective

- ◆ Writing from the perspective of an informed writer to a less informed reader
- ◆ Presenting new information or a new perspective on old information (e.g., facts, examples, reasons, anecdotes, comparisons)
- ◆ Making it clear what the reader should know, do, and/or believe as a result of reading the piece
- ◆ Supporting ideas with facts and opinions demonstrating knowledge of the difference
- ◆ Using subheads, pictures, captions, charts and graphs, headings, etc., as appropriate

Read the following article about "*Magic: the Gathering*" for an example of *descriptive* nonfiction/writing to inform that gives many specific details.

"Magic: the Gathering" is a game of 1,200 cards

Imagine yourself as a wizard fighting on a plain in a battle for your life. And your opponent throws a lightning bolt at you. What do you do? I know what I would do. I'd send my dragon at them.

This is the setting in the world's hottest selling Collectable Card Game (CCG) on the market. Magic: the Gathering is a trading card game produced by Wizards of the Coast since 1993. The game combines the collectibility of traditional sports cards with a game rich in strategy, problem solving, and imagination (plus none of that stale pink gum in the card packs). No board, no joystick - just you and a friend locked in an intellectual battle.

Sold in 15-card "booster packs" and 60-card "starter decks" Magic is played by two or more players, and an average game takes about 20 minutes. The cards themselves are illustrated by top fantasy and science fiction artists, and the art helps detail the dimensions of Dominia (the game's setting).

Each player represents a powerful wizard battling for control of a magical plane of existence. Players construct their individual decks from a library of over 1,200 cards, creating a unique play environment. It's a different game every time you play. And with 1,200 cards it's almost impossible to have the same deck as your opponent.

Magic is based on the FIVE colors of magic, Blue, Green, Red, Black, and White. Each color has its own special abilities.

Blue magic draws power from islands for energy. Blue Magic is mental in nature. Its powers are illusion and deception, as well as the elementals of water and air.

Green magic draws energy from the forest. Many magicians have been lulled into complacency by Green magic's peaceful exterior, the magic of life, and have been caught unaware by the vast destructive capability of its nature.

Red magic is a destructive magic, the magic of earth and fire. It draws its energy from mountains. Red is also the magic of chaos and war.

Black magic stems its powers from swamps, it is the magic of death and plague.

Last but definitely not least is white magic, which draws its energy from the plains. It is the magic of healing and protection. Though known for healing, it is far from unfamiliar to war.

If you want more information on "Magic: the Gathering" go to Ms. _____ room (last room on the left on the 8th grade floor) and leave me a note or E-mail me (see humor column).

Also there is a Magic club forming at _____ for those interested. Remember, it's just a game but have fun.

"Magic: the Gathering" - a feature article

Purpose: to inform
Idea development: specific details
Text structure/organization: description/list

Examples:

"Blue magic draws power from islands for energy. Blue Magic is mental in nature. Its powers are illusion and deception, as well as the elementals of water and air."

"Green magic draws energy from the forest. Many magicians have been lulled into complacency by Green magic's peaceful exterior, the magic of life, and have been caught unaware..."

"Red magic is a destructive magic, the magic of earth and fire. It draws its energy from mountains..."

"Black magic stems its powers from swamps, it is the magic of death and plague."

"Last but definitely not least is white magic, which draws its energy from the plains. It is the magic of healing and protection..."

Read the following article about *Balto* for an example of nonfiction/writing to inform that is organized *chronologically or in time order* and whose method of idea development is *cause and effect*.

BALTO

In 1925, a life-or-death race to rescue the children of Nome, AK, from disease made an international hero of one sled dog - and eventually led to the creation of Alaska's Iditarod sled dog race, the subject of NATURE'S SLED DOGS: AN ALASKAN EPIC.

In January 1925, doctors realized that a potentially deadly diphtheria epidemic was poised to sweep through Nome's young people. The only serum that could stop the outbreak was in Anchorage, nearly a thousand miles away. But the lone aircraft that could quickly deliver the medicine had been dismantled for the winter. In desperation, officials turned to a much lower-tech solution: moving the medicine by sled dog.

Soon, a musher embarked from Anchorage on the first leg of a remarkable dog-sled relay aimed at delivering the needed serum to Nome. More than 20 mushers took part, battling temperatures that rarely rose above 40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit and winds that sometimes blew strong enough to knock over sleds and dogs. Reporters brought news of the race to a world suddenly transfixed by the drama in the far north.

Incredibly, just six days later, on February 2, 1925, Gunner Kaassen drove his heroic dog team into the streets of Nome. In the lead of his team was a husky named Balto, whose furry face soon became known around the world. A year later, in honor of the epic trek, admirers erected a statue of Balto in New York City's Central Park.

Balto was suddenly a world-famous celebrity; for two years after the serum run, the dog and some of his teammates traversed the continental United States as part of a traveling show. After Balto died in 1933, his body was preserved and displayed at Cleveland's Natural History Museum. In 1995, a popular animated movie about Balto was released, adding to his fame.

Long after his death, Balto's popularity lives on. Today, some Alaskan schoolchildren are campaigning to bring Balto back to his home state. The students want his body moved to the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race museum in Wasilla. But Cleveland officials aren't ready to give Balto back, noting he spent more than half his life in their city. There are plans in the works, however, for Balto to return to Alaska as part of a temporary exhibit at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art - a testament to the strength of Balto's memory and a fitting memorial to his indomitable spirit.

(reprinted from www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/sleddogs/balto.html)

BALTO - a feature article

Purpose: to inform
 Idea Development: cause/effect
 Text Structure/Organization: chronological/time order

Cause	Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children were sick in Nome, Alaska 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medicine was needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aircraft dismantled for winter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sled dogs used instead to transport medicine from Anchorage to Nome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Husky named Balto heroically led team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balto became famous around the world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balto died in 1933. His body was preserved and displayed at Cleveland's Natural History Museum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alaskan schoolchildren are campaigning to bring Balto back to his home state

The following is the general guide that will be used to evaluate your answers to the open-response question that follows.

KENTUCKY GENERAL SCORING GUIDE

SCORE POINT 4

- You complete all important components of the question and communicate ideas clearly.
- You demonstrate in-depth understanding of the relevant concepts and/or processes.
- Where appropriate, you choose more efficient and/or sophisticated processes.
- Where appropriate, you offer insightful interpretations or extensions (generalizations, applications, analogies).

SCORE POINT 3

- You complete most important components of the question and communicate clearly.
- You demonstrate an understanding of major concepts even though you overlook or misunderstand some less-important ideas or details.

SCORE POINT 2

- You complete some important components of the question and communicate those components clearly.
- You demonstrate that there are gaps in your conceptual understanding.

SCORE POINT 1

- You show minimal understanding of the question.
- You address only a small portion of the question.

SCORE POINT 0

- Your answer is totally incorrect or irrelevant.

BLANK

- You did not give any answer at all.

As you approach your high school years, you will be reading more and more nonfiction. When you read nonfiction, you should read in a way that is different from the way you read fiction. The article below presents some strategies for reading nonfiction. Read the article. Then answer the questions that follow.

Nonfiction can be read as a piece of literature or as a source of information. Use the following strategies when you read nonfiction.

1. Preview a selection before you read. Look at the title, pictures, diagrams, subtitles, and any terms in boldfaced print or italics. All of these will give you an idea of what the selection is about.

2. Figure out the organization. If the work is a biography or autobiography, the organization is probably chronological, that is, in the order that events happened. Other articles may be arranged around ideas the author wants to discuss. Understanding the organization can help you predict what to expect next.

3. Separate facts and opinions. **Facts** are statements that can be proved, such as "There are several autobiographies in this book." **Opinions** are statements that cannot be proved. They simply express the writer's beliefs, such as "Boy is the best autobiography in this book." Writers of nonfiction sometimes present opinions as if they were facts. Be sure you recognize the difference.

4. Question as you read. Why did things happen the way they did?

How did people feel? What is the writer's opinion? Do you share the writer's opinion, or do you have different ideas on the subject?

5. During your reading, stop now and then and try to **predict** what will come next. Sometimes you will be surprised by what happens or by what the author has to say about an issue.

6. As you read, **build** on your understanding. Add new information to what you have already learned and see if your ideas and opinions change.

7. Continually **evaluate** what you read. Evaluation should be an ongoing process, not just something that is done when you have finished reading. Remember that evaluation means more than saying a selection is good or bad. Form opinions about people, events, and ideas that are presented. Decide whether or not you like the way the piece was written. Finally, it is important to recognize that your understanding of a selection does not end when you stop reading. As you think more about what you have read and discuss it with others, you will find that your understanding continues to grow.

(CATS Released Item Spring 1999)

Circle your answer choices for multiple-choice questions 1 through 4

1. According to the article, one strategy you should use **before** you begin to read nonfiction is to

- A. separate facts from opinion.
- B. evaluate the material.
- C. question and build an understanding.
- D. preview the selection.

2. The conclusion of the article suggests that the reader

- A. should reread the most important parts of the piece of writing.
- B. will continue to develop understanding of the piece of writing.
- C. should write a response to the piece of writing.
- D. will want to reread a favorite detail.

3. What is the meaning of the word chronological?

- A. statements that can be proved
- B. understanding the organization
- C. the sequence in which events occur
- D. an ongoing process

4. Which statement does **not** describe the evaluation strategy?

- A. Evaluation is an ongoing process.
- B. Evaluation includes forming opinions about the ideas presented.
- C. Evaluation ends when you finish reading.
- D. Evaluation helps with decisions about the quality of writing.

OPEN RESPONSE

5. Information in a nonfiction passage may be organized using a variety of methods, depending on the purpose of the passage.

- a. Describe the methods used by the author to organize his strategies for reading nonfiction.
- b. Explain how these methods help the reader better understand the purpose of the passage.

Support your answers with details from the passage.

SCORING CRITERIA FOR ON-DEMAND WRITING	
PURPOSE/AUDIENCE: The degree to which the writer maintains a focused purpose to communicate with an audience by	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrowing the topic to establish a focus • Analyzing and addressing the needs of the intended audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhering to the characteristics (e.g., format, organization) of the form • Employing a suitable tone • Allowing a voice to emerge when appropriate
IDEA DEVELOPMENT/SUPPORT: The degree to which the writer develops and supports main ideas and deepens the audience's understanding by using	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical, justified, and suitable explanation • Relevant elaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related connections and reflections • Idea development strategies (e.g., bulleted lists, definitions) appropriate for the form
ORGANIZATION: The degree to which the writer creates unity and coherence to accomplish the focused purpose by	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging the audience and establishing a context for reading • Placing ideas and support in a meaningful order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding the reader through the piece with transitions and transitional elements • Providing effective closure
SENTENCES: The degree to which the writer creates effective sentences that are	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied in structure and length • Constructed effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and correct
LANGUAGE: The degree to which the writer demonstrates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Strong verbs and nouns → Concrete and/or sensory details → Language appropriate to the content, purpose, and audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concise use of language • Correct usage/grammar
CORRECTNESS: The degree to which the writer demonstrates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct spelling • Correct punctuation • Correct capitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate documentation of ideas and information from outside sources (e.g., citing authors or titles within the text, listing sources)

WRITING ON-DEMAND

SITUATION:

Incoming 6th grade students often feel anxious about their new learning environment. One of their concerns is about having to read more complex texts than they are used to in subjects like science and social studies.

TASK:

To help these incoming students feel more at ease, write an article for your school newspaper that targets new students and gives information about specific strategies to understand nonfiction text. Be sure to give specific examples of how you have applied these strategies to different subjects.