

Nonfiction Writing: Characteristics and Types

Distinguishing Fact from Opinion (*Reading Kit* p. 134) .

A **fact** can be proved to be either true or false. In contrast, **opinions** are personal feelings, attitudes, or evaluations. They cannot be proved true or false.

EXAMPLE: To many people in the Indoor Soccer League, the New York Stars must surely be an embarrassment because of poor crowd attendance at games.

Since this sentence cannot be proved true or false, **it is an opinion**. Even if it contained a phrase such as "It is a fact" or "The truth is," it would STILL be unprovable. (How many is "many people"? What defines "an embarrassment" and to whom?)

Evaluate the Author's Credibility (*Reading Kit* p. 244) .

***Credible** means "able to be believed or trusted." When you **evaluate the author's credibility**, you judge whether they are knowledgeable and fair—whether what they write can be believed or trusted.

***Knowledge:** Imagine that you are going to read a report on science by a 5th grade student. You will probably decide that the 5th grader is not as **credible** as an experienced scientist would be.

***Fairness:** A writer who has formed opinions *before looking at the evidence* is **not being fair**. That writer is **biased** and their opinion cannot be trusted.

A **credible author** has a good knowledge of their subject. A **credible author** avoids bias and presents a balanced view. To evaluate and **author's credibility**, ask yourself: "How much does the writer probably know about the subject? Does the author show bias?"

Expository Essays (*Reading Kit* p. 104) .

An **expository essay** is a short piece of **nonfiction writing**. A writer might write an **expository essay** for one or more of these reasons:

1. to present some information on a topic of general interest
2. to explain how something works or why something happens
3. to present an idea, such as a *suggestion* about how to improve something

Descriptive Essay (*Reading Kit* p. 174) .

A **descriptive essay** creates a picture in words of a person, place, or thing. In a **descriptive essay**, the writer shares a vivid experience. They make the readers *see what they saw, hear what they heard, and feel what they felt*. A **descriptive essay** should include:

1. **vivid sensory details:** details that help the reader imagine the sights, sounds, and smells of the scene, along with other sensations like taste or touch
2. a **main impression** of the scene: a single clear feeling or idea about the

- scene that readers will remember when they think about the scene
3. a clear and logical **organization** of details so that the readers can easily make sense of them

Comparison-and-Contrast Essay (*Reading Kit* p. 306) .

A **comparison-and-contrast essay** discusses the similarities and differences between two or more subjects. It should include these elements:

1. a topic involving two subjects that are both *alike (compare)* and *different (contrast)*
2. accurate facts and details about each subject
3. a presentation of each subject using either **subject-by-subject** or **point-by-point** organization. (A subject-by-subject organization presents *all the details* about one subject, then *all the details* about the next subject. a point-by-point organization discusses *one aspect of both subjects*, then *another aspect of both subjects*, and so on.)

Cause-and-Effect Essay (*Reading Kit* p. 100) .

A **cause-and-effect essay** shows a relation between events. It explains how one event or situation *causes* another. A good cause-and-effect essay has the following features:

1. a *description* of the event that is "the cause" that produces a result
2. an *explanation* of the results or "effects" of the cause
3. *facts* and *examples* that support the **relation between the cause and effect**

How-to Essay (*Reading Kit* p. 236) .

A **how-to essay** provides step-by-step instructions that tell readers how to accomplish a specific task. How-to essays should feature the following elements:

1. specific factual information presented logically and accurately
2. step-by-step directions for each stage in the process; steps are usually numbered, but sometimes use **signal words** such as: *first*, *next*, and *finally*.
3. examples and definitions that demonstrate key concepts
4. instructions that anticipate the readers' questions; other **signal words** clarify how the steps should be performed: *Gradually* add the flour.

Biographical Writing (*Reading Kit* p. 106) .

Biographical writing is nonfiction writing in which the writer tells the story of *another person's life*. Biographies contain:

1. **facts about the person's accomplishments** and the **important events** in their life.
2. an **interpretation of how events in the person's life have significant meaning**. For example, a biographer might report the fact that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave his memorable "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963. The biographer might then give an

interpretation of the meaning of this event: "With this speech, King clearly showed that he was a national, not just a southern, leader."

3. **support for their interpretations** by showing how the facts make the interpretation *reasonable*. For example, a biographer might explain that King was mainly active in the South at first. He then gave the "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C., the nation's capital. After the speech, he organized protests in the North. These facts support the idea that he had become a national, not just a southern, leader.

Autobiographical Writing (Reading Kit p. 24) .

An **autobiographical narrative** describes *real events in the writer's own life* and *shares the wisdom* that the writer gained from the experiences. A well-written autobiographical narrative includes:

1. a clearly identified span of time
2. descriptive details about the setting and other people
3. a conflict that the writer faced

An **anecdote** (Reading Kit p. 20) is a *brief narrative* about an interesting, amusing, or strange event told to entertain or make a point. A well-written **anecdote**:

1. is directed to a *particular audience*, such as friends or classmates
2. is about a *single topic*, which is usually stated at the beginning in the topic sentence
3. includes *descriptive details* that appeal to the senses

Narrative Essay (Reading Kit p. 2) .

A **narrative essay** is a short piece of nonfiction. It has these characteristics:

1. It tells the story about a *real person* or *event*, but because it's *telling a story*, it has the same PLOT features that a fiction short story has.
2. It includes *significant details* that help move the story forward, the same way the *rising action* details push a fiction short story forward.

Humorous Essay (Reading Kit p. 130) .

A **humorous essay** is a short piece of nonfiction that is *meant to make you laugh*. Humorous writing can use these **figures of speech**:

1. **hyperbole**: Hyperbole is *intentional exaggeration*.

EX. *When my sister stepped into the bathroom this morning, there were two babies living in the house next door. By the time she finished getting ready, the babies had grown up, moved out, and raised families of their own!*

2. **understatement:** Understatement is ***the opposite of hyperbole***. The writer talks about something as if it were *much less than it is*.

EX. *Your friend is making dinner. Suddenly, there's smoke pouring through the house. Your friend rushes into the kitchen and then returns with a plate holding a shrunken, blackened chicken with curls of smoke rising from it. You say, "That chicken looks a little overcooked." LOL!*

Persuasive Essay (*Reading Kit* p. 126 and 132) .

A **persuasive essay** is short nonfiction written to get people to take a particular side on an issue.

1. **Persuasive Appeals:** Persuasive appeals use *logic* (logos) or *emotion* (pathos) to bring about a response to the writer's argument. Persuasive writing may use words with either a *positive* or *negative appeal*, depending on what emotional reaction the writer intends the reader to have.

2. **Making appeals to reason:** Persuasive writers use *logical arguments* to show *why their ideas are good*. They use **facts, statistics, or other evidence**.

*OPINION: "Letting the town's movie theater close is a bad idea."

*APPEAL TO REASON: "90% of the townspeople said that they went to the movie theater at least twice this summer. If the theater closes, most people in town will miss it."

3. **Making appeals to emotion:** Persuasive writers try to stir up readers' feelings. They use **charged language** (words that call up strong feelings).

*OPINION: "Letting the town's movie theater close is a bad idea."

*APPEAL TO EMOTION: "It is a *crime* to *rob* our children of a chance to *munch* popcorn and watch movies at *Sid's Theater!*"

Editorial (*Reading Kit* p. 172) .

An **editorial** is a brief *persuasive essay* that **presents and defends an opinion**. Editorials usually present views on *issues of public interest*. An editorial includes:

1. a clear **thesis statement** (the opinion that is being argued)
2. **evidence** (facts, statistics, quotations, examples, logical reasoning)
3. **arguments** that anticipate and answer readers' reasonable objections
4. **persuasive language** that adds force to the opinion without being *antagonistic*