



Literacy at Hartford Public High School

April 3, 2006

Volume 3 Number 29

Reading Nonfiction

From Reader's Handbook, Great Source

Nonfiction is a record of real people, places, events, thoughts, and times. There are two basic types of nonfiction: **expository nonfiction** and **narrative nonfiction**.

Expository nonfiction is factual and informative writing. Articles, news stories, persuasive essay, and editorials are expository nonfiction. You probably read some factual and informative writing every day, either on the internet or in a newspaper or magazine. The desire to know what's happening and what people think about it is a powerful motive for readers.

Narrative nonfiction tells a true story. At some time, you've probably been curious about historical figures, movie and sports stars, or artists, writers, and musicians and their lives and times. Biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, and some personal essays are narrative nonfiction. They satisfy our curiosity about the lives of others.

When reading nonfiction, it is especially important that you read critically. As a reader, you must make judgments about what seems accurate, biased, or just plain wrong when reading a news story or an editorial. As a reader, you must try to discover a writer's intention when reading an autobiography, biography, or personal essay.

Reading an Essay

What is an essay? An essay is a short work that deals with one topic. The author follows a clear, logical plan. An essay generally contains three parts: an introduction, the body, and a conclusion.

As you read an essay, you should set yourself a purpose for reading. First, you will want to find out what the essay is about. That's the subject. Then, you want to find out what point the author is making about the subject. Finally, you need to describe how you feel about the main idea. These three points can help you think about your purpose as you read.

Setting a Purpose for Reading an Essay:

1. What is the subject of the essay?
2. What does that author say about the subject?
3. How do I feel about what the write says?

Previewing an essay gives you important information. It can alert you to the subject and perhaps even give you some clues about the author's message. When you preview an essay, look carefully at these four key elements.

Key Elements for Previewing an Essay:

- The title and author
- The first and last paragraphs
- Any key words or any words in boldface or italics
- Any repeated words or phrases

As you read an essay, you may find it useful to outline the ideas that you come across. Making an outline forces you to decide what information is important and how it is related to the subject and main idea—or message. More importantly, it requires you to express facts and ideas in your own words. Doing this allows you to process the information and remember what you've read.

Outlines come in many forms. Below is a typical outline that addresses the sections usually found in an essay.

- I. Introduction
 - A. detail
 - B. detail
 - C. detail
 - D. thesis statement
- II. Body
 - A. detail
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - B. detail
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - C. detail
 - 1.
 - 2.
- III. Conclusion
 - A. main idea
 - B. explanation of main idea
 - C. final comments or conclusion

Outlines are varied and adaptable. You can easily make them work for you. Whatever form you use is not so important as choosing one form that serves your purpose. An outline can help you to focus on the important ideas of an essay; it can also serve as a review sheet when studying for a test.

Sources for Information about Reading Essays

- <http://www.westmont.edu/~work/material/readingnotes.pdf>
- http://www.studygs.net/reading_essays.htm
- <http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/essays.html>
- <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/litlinks/essays/readessa.htm>
- http://www.aug.edu/writing_center/docs/reading.htm

