

NONFICTION – Information from textbook

Introductory Information about Nonfiction

NONFICTION

Looking Ahead

Nonfiction—writing about real people, events, and ideas—includes autobiographies, memoirs, biographies, diaries, letters, essays, news articles, and speeches. Through reading nonfiction, we find others who share our experiences, feelings, passions, and values. Our ideas, ideals, and causes are articulated and defended by the nonfiction writer.

GENRE FOCUS

What are the different types of nonfiction?

The motivations for writing and reading nonfiction are as diverse as writers and readers. Some writers seek to share the lives of others with readers to provide insight. Others share their own experiences.

Autobiography and Biography

Writing About Oneself

A literary work that tells the story of an author's own experiences can be an autobiography or a memoir. **Autobiography** usually refers to a work that attempts to tell a person's entire life. **Memoir** usually refers to a work that focuses on the author's personal experiences during a particular event or period.

Our father kept in his breast pocket a little black notebook. There he noted jokes he wanted to remember. Remembering jokes was a moral obligation. People who said, "I can never remember jokes," were like people who said, obviously, "I can never remember names," or "I don't bathe."

—Annie Dillard, from "An American Childhood"

Expository and Personal Essay

Essays are short works of nonfiction that focus on a single topic. Essays communicate ideas or opinions. **Expository essays** explain or inform, usually in an objective way. Expository essays may be formal, or they may be personal, or informal.

Formal and Informal Essays

Formal essays are serious and impersonal in tone, meaning the author expresses a serious attitude toward his or her subject matter. A formal essay typically develops a controlling idea, or thesis, in a logical and highly organized way. Many

persuasive essays are formal in style. For example, newspaper editorials—jointly authored, persuasive articles that give the opinion of the editors or publishers on a topic—are often formal in style.

Personal essays, also called **informal essays**, entertain while they inform. They are usually written in a light, conversational style, often in the first person. They can be written on any topic that the writer wishes to share with the reader. Informal essays often relate to an experience in the writer's life. Many magazines and blogs include informal essays.

Guide to Reading Nonfiction

- When reading nonfiction, first determine what type of work you are reading.
- Try to identify the author's purpose. Is he or she writing to explain, to inform, to entertain, or to persuade?
- If the author's purpose is to inform or explain, look for a thesis statement and support for the thesis.
- If the author's purpose is to entertain, look for literary elements, such as figurative language, dialogue, and suspense.
- If the author's purpose is to persuade, determine whether the author is presenting an argument, emotional appeals, or a combination of both.

Types of Nonfiction

- **Literary nonfiction** includes writing about literature and about real people and events.
- An **autobiography** tells the story of the writer's life.
- A **memoir** tells about an event or period in the writer's life.
- A **biography** tells the story of another person's life.
- An **essay** is a short work of nonfiction on a single topic. An essay can be **formal** or **informal**.
- Informal, or **personal**, essays are meant primarily to entertain. Formal essays may be intended to explain or persuade.

LITERARY FOCUS

EXPOSITORY AND PERSONAL ESSAY

What is an essay?

Essayists write for many reasons. They may wish to share an experience with their readers, or make them think about a new idea. Others are motivated by a political purpose or a passion for truth. In "The Tucson Zoo," Lewis Thomas seeks to share an experience with his readers. 1

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND BIOGRAPHY

How do nonfiction writers choose which details to include?

Nonfiction writing should be factual, and an autobiography or biography should tell the facts of the life of its subject. But which facts should be told? To write down all the facts of any life, or even of one day, is inconceivable. The art of autobiography and biography is in choosing interesting and telling facts and in explaining them in an engaging way.

Autobiography

When a person writes about his or her own life, it is called **autobiography**. *Auto-* is from the Greek word meaning "self." In an autobiography, the subject of the work is also the author. Authors have many purposes for sharing the stories of their lives. Some, such as Martin Luther King Jr., write to help others live satisfying and meaningful lives. Others, such as Mark Mathabane, write to explain the significance of their own lives.

Memoir: A memoir is autobiographical writing that focuses on a specific period or event in the writer's life. Memoirs are usually written from the first-person point of view. They often emphasize the writer's thoughts and feelings, his or her relationship with others, or the personal impact of historical events. Annie Dillard's memoir captures her mother's unusual personality.

Biography

The word *biography* comes from the Greek *bio-*, meaning "life," and *-graphy*, meaning "writing." In **biography** the author gives the reader an account of another person's life. The author uses the pronouns "he" or "she" to refer to the subject. Biographies can be book-length, but they can also be short pieces.

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The Essay

An **essay** is a short work of nonfiction that focuses on a single topic and that communicates an idea or opinion. The essays in this part were written to inform or to share experiences with the reader. Essays are generally categorized as **expository, personal, and persuasive.**

The Expository Essay

The word *expository* is derived from the verb *expose*, which means "to make known or to explain." Whenever you write to inform, to give directions, to explain an idea, or to make something clear, you are writing **exposition**. Writers of expository works sometimes weave narrative stories into their writing.

Many expository essays follow a general structure of introduction, body, and conclusion.

- 3 ■ The **introduction** serves to pique the reader's interest. It also often includes the **thesis**, or main idea, of the essay. Sometimes, though, a writer saves the thesis statement for the end of the work.
- The **body** develops the thesis with supporting details, such as facts, examples, sensory details, observations, or personal experiences.
- The **conclusion** typically restates the thesis and provides the reader with a final thought.

The Personal Essay

Personal essays are usually informal in their language and tone, and they often contain passages of expository writing. A personal essay often reflects on an incident in the writer's life. The writer may share a life lesson with the reader or perhaps shed light on a time or place long gone. Other personal essays can be written to please oneself or an audience of like-minded readers.

A personal essay can also be a kind of writing that is common on applications, such as those for college admissions. These essays should be more formal in language and tone. When you write a personal essay for a college application, your audience will be a selection committee.