

Types and Characteristics of Informative Writing

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about what separates informative writing from other types of writing, and the different methods of writing in the informative mode. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Purpose of Informative Writing

2. Types of Informative Writing

2a. Process Writing

2b. Analytical Writing

2c. Classification Writing

2d. Definition Writing

2e. Cause-and-Effect Writing

1. Purpose of Informative Writing

As you've learned, informative writing is a common form of essay writing. Some informative writing is also academic writing; some is not. Informative writing informs readers about something; it describes or explains something to them. It is intended to convey information without bias, unlike argumentative writing, for example, which is persuasive.

While the line between these two forms is sometimes crossed, informative writing usually refers to writing that's not meant to convince readers of anything.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Suppose a professor writes a short article for the campus website that describes careers for graduates of the program in which he teaches. It's likely that one of his goals is to persuade students to enroll in his classes, but his main purpose is to share information. This latter purpose is one of the primary signs of informative writing.

Because the goal of informative writing is to inform readers about something, it's important for writers to be as objective as possible when writing in this way. They should do their best to set aside personal feelings and

opinions and simply report information as clearly and as honestly as they can.



The best way to maintain objectivity is to use the rhetorical situation. Performing a meta-analysis of personal biases and assumptions, and addressing them accordingly, brings writers closer to an objective perspective, no matter the subject.

2. Types of Informative Writing

There are five main types of informative writing:

- Process writing
- Analytical writing
- Classification writing
- Definition writing
- Cause-and-effect writing

Pay attention to the fact that while these methods of informative writing differ in certain characteristics, the characteristic they all share is objectivity.

2a. Process Writing

Process writing describes the steps of a process in detail.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** A student is assigned to write an essay about conducting research. Her finished essay will detail the steps involved in conducting research (e.g., going to the library or searching online, locating sources, creating a list of citations, etc.).

Process writing is used in a variety of settings. Following is a paragraph that details the steps in a process that is quite different from the one involved in the previous example.

When brewing beer, the first task is sanitization. When all equipment has been thoroughly cleaned to remove bacteria, the next steps are cooking the barley (or other grain) and making the wort (i.e., the sugar mix that the yeast uses to make alcohol).

2b. Analytical Writing

Analytical writing is often used in academic essays, especially those pertaining to composition and literature. Analytical writing evaluates a written work, an image, or a set of data.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Students who are assigned to write an essay about the portrayals of masculinity, femininity, or class in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* would be expected to analyze the novel.

The following piece of analytical writing is an excerpt from a review of the 2012 remake of the 1990s sci-fi movie *Total Recall*.

I could complain that the newest version of Total Recall fails to invoke the beautifully ambiguous, surreal quality of the first movie, but if I did, I'd have to admit that the story from which the "original" got its material (i.e., Phillip K. Dick's "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale") is guilty of the same crime. This movie, like many before it, is another version of an older story, not the same story.

Note that this paragraph is not only about the surface details of the movie. It also considers the film's context and history, while informing readers about the current version. It's not a critique, which would require more judgment or argument than is provided in this excerpt.

2c. Classification Writing

Classification writing is used to divide or organize things into categories.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** The teacher of a music history class asks his students to write about the categories of instruments (e.g., woodwind, brass, string, etc.).

Read the following excerpt from an article about freshwater kayaks.

Many of those who have never tried it believe there's only one way to paddle a river: whitewater. But in places like South Dakota's Big Sioux River, you will see all kinds of watercraft during the summertime: touring kayaks loaded with gear, sporters strapped to their little six-foot boats, and longer, more stable, sit-on-top kayaks. There's a lot to choose from.

Classification writing does more than just list things in categories. It filters and interprets data, and accounts for readers' familiarity (or lack of familiarity) with the subject.

2d. Definition Writing

Definition writing characterizes and/or describes something. Good definition writing does so in new and thoughtful ways.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** A student in a composition class begins to write an essay about same-sex marriage but ends up redefining marriage as a legal, civil union, not necessarily a religious one.

The following example of definition writing could be an excerpt from a magazine or website devoted to ranching or rodeos, settings in which the quarter horse is commonly found.

Not everyone considers the quarter horse to be a distinct breed, like the Arabian or Appaloosa, but there are qualities that all quarter horses share, like their small, stocky build and ability to outrun other breeds over short distances. The name "quarter horse" refers to their ability to cover distances of a quarter mile or less faster than other breeds.

2e. Cause-and-Effect Writing

Cause-and-effect writing details why or how a cause produces (or will produce) a specific effect.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** A graduate student in a political science program writes a dissertation that demonstrates how raising the federal minimum wage impacts small communities.

The following paragraph is a less academic example of cause-and-effect writing. It is an excerpt from a fictitious letter to the editor about how city workers who paint over graffiti are less than effective.

Every time the city sends workers to repaint the underside of the bridge, the "artists" arrive right after they finish. Sometimes the walls remain gray for one night, as if the artists are waiting for the paint to dry so they can start again. From a graffiti-control standpoint, it's a waste of time, but maybe that's not the city's goal. Maybe this is how we fund the arts nowadays. I'll wait and see how long it takes for the art to reappear next time.

Although this passage does not identify graffiti as a problem, or specify a solution, it comes close to doing so. Simply stating a cause-and-effect relationship sometimes amounts to an argument about what should be done, even when the argument is only implied (as is the case in this passage).



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **purpose of informative writing** is to provide the reader with information in an objective tone. There are several main **types of informative writing** that you might encounter, both inside and outside of an academic context: **process writing, analytical writing, classification writing, definition writing, and cause-and-effect writing.**

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR [TERMS OF USE](#).