Types of Informative Writing

by Sophia Tutorial

:::: WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial addresses several types of informative writing — process writing, analytical writing, classification writing, definition writing.and cause-and-effect writing — and provides examples of each.

This tutorial examines the types of informative writing in five parts:

1. Process Writing
2. Analytical Writing
3. Classification Writing
4. Definition Writing
5. Cause-and-Effect Writing
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1. Process Writing

Process writing describes the steps of a process in detail.

> ↪ EXAMPLE A student is assigned to write an essay about conducting research. His or 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).

2. 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.

Here's another example — 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.

3. 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 (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.

4. 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 homosexual 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.

5. 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

This tutorial examined five types of informative writing: process, analytical, classification, definition, and cause-and-effect writing. Although these are not the only types of informative writing (in or outside an academic context), they are the main types.

Source: Adapted from Sophia Instructor Gavin McCall