



LIFE·PAC®

Language Arts

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Alpha Omega Publications®

LANGUAGE ARTS 1106

NONFICTION

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NONFICTION

Nonfiction is a form of prose that explains or expresses certain information or ideas. Nonfiction takes many forms and deals with many topics. The most important nonfiction book is the Bible. Most Christians have read the accounts of Abraham, Moses, and David. These nonfiction accounts explain the history of mankind. Other Biblical accounts describe man's daily existence and man's future. Some examples of nonfiction are textbooks, newspapers, magazines, lectures, and sermons.

In this LIFEPAK® you will learn more about nonfiction. You will learn the definition, the importance, the forms, and the types of nonfiction. Then you will read various outstanding examples of nonfiction. Most selections were written by American authors. The works of two English authors who greatly influenced American literature will briefly be studied in this LIFEPAK. You will also complete a topical study of nonfiction in preparation for the expository essays you will write.

By studying this LIFEPAK you should become more aware of the importance of nonfiction as a tool for expressing your own thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. Prose has the power to sway man's destiny. In truth, "the pen is mightier than the sword."

OBJECTIVES

Read the objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAK.

When you have finished this LIFEPAK, you should be able to:

1. Recognize and define nonfiction.
2. Differentiate between fiction and nonfiction.
3. Explain the importance of nonfiction.
4. Recognize the expository patterns of writing.
5. Recognize the elements used in descriptive writing.
6. Name and recognize the four major forms of nonfiction.
7. Identify the characteristics of the major forms of nonfiction.
8. Give examples of selections written about personal experience, biography and autobiography, ideas, and humor.
9. Write three expository compositions using each of the three basic patterns—illustrative, analytical, and argumentative.

Survey the LIFEPAK. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.



I. ELEMENTS OF NONFICTION

In this section you will be studying the elements of nonfiction—what nonfiction actually is and what forms it takes. You will learn the differences between fiction and nonfiction. The two forms of nonfiction you will study in this section are exposition and description. These two forms are closely related and are often combined in a single work. As you study these forms, you will become familiar with the characteristics of each. This section will provide a foundation upon which you may base your plans for expository writing.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Recognize and define nonfiction.
2. Differentiate between fiction and nonfiction.
3. Explain the importance of nonfiction.
4. Recognize the expository patterns of writing.
5. Recognize the elements used in descriptive writing.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

anti-Semitism
argumentative
corroborative

figurative language
vignettes

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAK appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF NONFICTION

To understand and to appreciate nonfiction, a reader should be aware of the meaning of nonfiction and be able to distinguish between fiction and nonfiction. The reader will appreciate nonfiction more when he realizes its importance, influence, and popularity.

Distinction between fiction and nonfiction. Nonfiction is a type of writing that attempts to present an actual situation as it really happened or as it now exists. Nonfiction writing is considered to be factual, truthful, real, and **corroborative**. Although some modern fiction can be described in those same terms, fiction generally is imaginative. The use of numerous characters and several plots or subplots is characteristic of fiction. Frequently, fiction is produced for the entertainment and the enjoyment of the reader. Nonfiction writing gives straightforward information, personal opinions, or reminiscences, which may be quite entertaining to a reader interested in that subject. Probably the only way to distinguish nonfiction writing from fiction is to consider the purpose of the author's writing, the genre, or form, he uses, and the presence or absence of an imaginative situation.

Nonfiction may present an author's opinions, feelings, thoughts, or experiences in a particular field. It may give factual information and definite explanations of processes or developments. Some nonfiction writing utilizes a formal, serious, straightforward, exact presentation or style. Other nonfiction writing follows an informal pattern—reminiscing, chatting, or joking. A nonfiction writer may try to convince the reader to adopt the author's viewpoint and act upon it. This pattern of writing is defined as **argumentative** or persuasive writing—sometimes called *propaganda*. Although propaganda can be either positive or negative, this word has gained a negative connotation. Warnings from the Tuberculosis Association, the National Safety Council, or the Kidney and the Heart Foundations are expressions of positive propaganda. These messages, as well as those given by doctors, ministers, or teachers, are helpful forms of persuasion. Negative or destructive propaganda can be exemplified by Hitler's **anti-Semitism**.

Humorous experiences at home, at school, at church, in the neighborhood, with friends, or on the job, provide a wide scope of subjects for nonfiction writing. **Vignettes**, or character sketches, make the delightful personalities of the author's favorite people come alive for others. Although fiction is often thought of as being the only exciting reading, nonfiction can be even more exciting, proving the old saying that "truth is stranger than fiction."

Nonfiction may appear in the form of formal essays, informal essays, sermons, letters, diaries, journals, biographies, autobiographies, magazine articles, and newspaper articles. Nonfiction writing is basically expository and descriptive in nature, although the narrative form may be employed occasionally.

Fiction on the other hand, is narrative prose. Although the plot may be based on real life experiences, the author uses his imagination to develop or to change these experiences into a suitable plot. The characters described in a story may be based on actual people, but the author adapts certain characteristics to fit his plot. A work of fiction can be quite long, such as a novel, or short, such as the short story. A continuous plot or a number of subplots develop from conflicts among the various characters. These conflicts rise to a peak, or a *climax*, and then are resolved in some plausible fashion as the story draws to a close. Modern fiction tends to have fewer solutions to the problems or conflicts of the story; nevertheless, the story does reach some type of conclusion.

Nonfiction aims to instruct or to inform. The fiction writer, however, wants to write a story that will hold his reader's interest throughout the book. The author hopes to create memorable characters. The author is not interested in convincing the reader to act immediately on information received. Frequently, the writer does want to challenge the reader to reflect upon life and human nature; but he wants primarily to entertain the reader with the story itself.

Fiction, then, can be defined as any literary work portraying imaginary characters and events, not to be accepted as true or factual. Fiction portrays life in a dimension different from ordinary daily routine—life as people might like it to be or as they dream about it. Fiction genres, or types, include the short story, the novelette, the novel, and the drama. Fiction uses narrative, descriptive, and expository writing in its genres but is primarily narrative or “storytelling” in nature.

Write true or false.

- 1.1 _____ Nonfiction writing is of little importance today because of the widespread use of computers.
- 1.2 _____ Truth can never be “stranger than fiction” because fiction involves the fantastic and unusual.
- 1.3 _____ Persuasive writers try to broaden the reader’s outlook so that he will accept all viewpoints about a subject.
- 1.4 _____ Propaganda is an unacceptable type of writing that promotes only problems and encourages a narrow viewpoint about things.
- 1.5 _____ Both the novel and the short story are genres of fiction.
- 1.6 _____ A propaganda writer hopes to convince the reader of his particular viewpoint by using argumentative prose.
- 1.7 _____ Nonfiction writing depends heavily upon the writer’s imagination to develop a formal style.
- 1.8 _____ Formal writing is usually more serious in tone, exact in form, and concrete in style than informal writing.
- 1.9 _____ Writing that distorts the truth for evil purposes is referred to as fictional.

Importance of nonfiction. Nonfiction has become especially popular in the twentieth century because few people feel that they have enough leisure time to settle down for a whole afternoon or evening of reading. A lengthy novel or even a short story can require the reader’s close attention to plot. Most people, however, are interested in the newspaper coverage of current events and in informative magazine articles. Various news media have brought far-away places, interesting people, and unusual events to the public’s attention. Frequently those who want to learn more about these people or events turn to nonfiction sources for information.

The widespread importance of nonfiction writing can be substantiated by the number of periodicals, newspapers, and nonfiction books published each year. The 1978 *BOWKER ANNUAL OF LIBRARY AND BOOK TRADE INFORMATION* indicates that over twenty-five thousand new nonfiction books and some sixty-eight hundred new editions of previously published nonfiction books were printed in 1971. The total number of periodicals printed in 1977 exceeded three thousand in twenty-four major categories, from agriculture through zoology. One branch of the Alexandria (Virginia) Library, serving a town of about one hundred twenty-eight thousand inhabitants, offers about three hundred seventy magazines to the public.

The United States produces about fifty major newspapers that range from two hundred thousand to over two million copies in daily circulation. *The Wall Street Journal* has a daily circulation of almost 1.5 million. The *Washington Post* has a circulation of 0.5 million in the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C. Smaller towns have their own newspapers, published daily or weekly. Many businesses and institutions print newsletters.