



USING NON-FICTION TEXTS IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM – A RESOURCE GUIDE

Blogs Lectures Letters
 Timetables Reports Diaries
 Advertisements Forms Questionnaires
 Essays Schedules Journals
 Articles Websites Manuals
 Charts Tickets Textbooks Digital
 Maps

Literacy development is a communal project, and the teaching of literacy skills is embedded across the Ontario curriculum. However, it is the English curriculum that is dedicated to developing the knowledge and skills on which literacy is based – that is, knowledge and skills in the areas of listening and speaking, reading, writing, and viewing and representing.

(Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 3)

Traditionally, Secondary English courses have focused on the critical study of narrative pieces of literature. This approach to instruction reinforces the “teaching of literature” rather than fostering the “teaching of literacy”. This lack of critical study of non-narrative texts contributes to situations where students struggle with the demands of content or disciplinary specific texts and related reading proficiencies (Allington, 2002; Au, Scheu & Carroll, 2000). When 85 percent of material read by middle school, high school, college and post-graduate students is non-fiction, English courses must include texts students find relevant, authentic and meaningful to their experiences. (Snowball, 1995).

Consequently, there is a need to expand the literary underpinnings of high school English courses to include the critical study of non-narrative texts. The critical study of non-fiction texts recognizes the need to instruct students in skill sets which allow them to access specialized vocabulary and visual depictions of information. Furthermore, critical exposure to informational texts will delineate a writing style with which many students struggle. As students better develop their skills as readers and writers of non-fiction, an inquiry-based approach to learning is fostered as observation, questioning and investigation are encouraged. It is also hoped that this approach to instruction will support the transferability of skills traditionally recognized as “English skills” and how essential these communication skills are to one’s personal and vocational activities.

Introducing Non-narrative Texts

In order to introduce non-fiction texts in a way that is meaningful, there is a need to first assess student familiarity with the genre. Students’ background knowledge can be assessed through a simple survey or textbook scavenger hunt. This information then can be used to define starting points for instruction. Starting points can include defining

general features common to many forms of non-fiction. Students then should be introduced to the types and features of texts which are significant to the course of study, recognizing the curricular expectations of both the grade and level of study. Once the key features of selected forms have been identified, reading strategies for the various print and non-print materials should be presented and linked to writing activities that further support student interaction with various non-narrative forms.

The following items have been included as starting points for the study of non-narrative forms:

1. A list of sample text forms.

This list has been designed to provide a sampling of text forms that can be considered when integrating non-fiction into course planning and development.

2. A chart of general textbook features common to non-fiction.

The chart has been set up to include a general listing of features that are common to many types of non-narrative texts (print and non-print). Included with the chart is a word chart with matching definitions. The word chart can be used for a classroom word wall or bulletin board display, personal word walls that can be kept in student binders, or for other activities that familiarize students with the vocabulary of the form (e.g. matching activities, labeling activities, bingo).

3. A student survey.

The survey has been designed as a formative assessment tool. The questions will provide some insight into students' prior experiences as readers of non-fiction, knowledge of text features and literacy strategies.

Starting Points in Non-fiction Sample Text Forms for Study

Print-based

- Advertisements
- Autobiographies
- Announcements
- Biographies
- Brochures
- Diaries
- Dictionary Entries
- Editorials
- Encyclopedia Entries
- Essays
- Forms
- Instructional Pages/Manuals
- Journals
- Labels
- Letters (formal and informal)
- Lists
- Maps
- Menus
- News Reports
- Magazine Articles
- Obituaries
- Pamphlets
- Posters
- Programs
- Procedures
- Questionnaires
- Recipes
- Reports
- Reviews
- Scripts
- Signs
- Technical Reports
- Textbooks
- Tickets
- Timetables
- Schedules

Oral

- Advertisements
- Interviews
- Lectures
- Presentations

Multimedia/Digital

- Blogs
 - Computer Games
- Digital Storytelling
- Slide Show/Video Presentations
 - Television Programs
 - Visual Essays
- Websites

General Textbook Features of Non-fiction Texts

Organizational	Typograhpy	Design
Table of Contents	Type Face or Font	Colour
Index	Size of Type or Font Size	Shape
Glossary	Bullet/Nugget	Line
Preface	Title	Placement
Legend	Heading	Balance
Key	Subheading	Focal Point
Sidebar	Italics	Symbol
Footnote	Label	
Pronunciation Guide	Caption	
Map	Boldface	
Chart		
Illustration		
White Space		

Word Wall Cards
Category: Organizational

Word		Definition
Table of Contents		A list of what is contained in a text
Index		An alphabetical list of names or subjects with references at the end of a book
Glossary		A brief dictionary defining words related to a specific text
Preface		An introduction to a book describing its subject matter
Legend		A key used to explain symbols used on a map
Key		A list that explains the symbols used on a map or table
Sidebar		A short statement, usually boxed, that accompanies a news or magazine article which gives additional information
Footnote		A note printed at the bottom of a page that comments on a marked part of the text
Pronunciation Guide		A reference to the way in which a word is pronounced
Map		A representation of the earth's surface, or aspects of it (e.g. cities, physical features, transportation routes)

Word Wall Cards

Category: Organizational – Part II

Chart		A table, graph or diagram that is used to present information
Illustrations		A drawing or picture that adds explanation to written text
White Space		Empty space that is used to organize text and other features visually on a page

Word Wall Cards

Category: Design

Colour		A substance (e.g. paint, dye, pigment) used to supplement presented information (e.g. to highlight)
Shape		The structure of text or its placement on a page
Line		A continuous mark connecting points on a page
Placement		The location of an object (e.g. map, illustration) on a page
Balance		The weighting of elements (e.g. light and dark) for effect or organization
Focal Point		The main point of visual interest
Symbol		A mark used to represent a quality or

		idea
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Word Wall Cards

Category: Typography

Type Face or Font		A set of letters, numbers and symbols of the same style and size
Size of Type or Font Size		The dimensions of a set of letters, numbers and symbols used
Bullet/Nugget		A small shape (usually a circle) used to emphasize information in a list
Title		The name of a piece of literature or other work
Heading		The title at the top of a page or other text form
Subheading		A secondary heading, caption or title in a chapter or article
Italics		A sloping type of letter used to distinguish text (e.g foreign words)
Label		A word or short phrase attached to an object to identify or describe it
Caption		A brief title attached to an illustration to explain the illustration
Boldface		Text printed in a thick black typeface

1. Brainstorm **five (5)** words you associate with the word “non-fiction”.
2. When I select non-fiction materials for personal reading, I select them because
 - a) the topic is interesting.
 - b) the photographs or illustrations capture my attention.
 - c) I have read other books on the topic.
 - d) I want to learn how to do something.
 - e) the item was recommended to me.
 - f) I want to become better informed.
 - g) Other:

3. For each of the forms of non-fiction listed below, list a title or example you have read in the last year.
 - a) Newspaper:

 - b) Magazine:

 - c) Biography or autobiography:

 - d) Textbook:

 - e) Recipe or directions:

f) Manual:

g) Website or other Internet-based source:

h) Pamphlet or Brochure:

i) Other:

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4. List four reading strategies you use when reading non-fiction. For each strategy explain how the strategy helps you to understand the material you are reading.

Name of Reading Strategy	Describe How the Strategy Helps Your Comprehension

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A Guide to Using the Non-fiction Templates

Part A: Reading the Templates

The non-fiction templates have been designed first, to define the features of selected* texts which are included within the genre of non-narrative literature. Once the key features have been identified, reading strategies are suggested and linked to a structured writing lesson that further supports student interaction with the selected form. The philosophy behind this instructional approach is one that recognizes and maintains the need for continued literacy instruction into the secondary environment as well as the interactive nature of reading and writing instruction.

* Due to the scope of this project, ten text forms have been selected.

Components of the Template

Component	Function
Form	Names the form being considered and identifies its context (print, visual or digital).
Description	Defines the form and explains its purpose.
Features	Outlines and defines the key conventions of the form.
Reading Strategies	Suggests reading strategies that can be taught to support student comprehension.
Graphic Organizers	Suggests planning models to help students organize writing within the form.
Resources	Includes print and/or Internet-based resources to support instructional planning and delivery.

Part B: The Lesson Plan*

The following chart illustrates how one could use a lesson template to integrate a series of strategic reading lessons with complementary writing lessons:

Reading Lesson	Writing Lesson
Modeled Reading Lesson: This lesson will prepare students for reading a selected text form by introducing the conventions that define the form. The focus is on making meaning of text through the modeling of appropriate reading strategies, cueing systems and introducing basic print features.	
Shared Reading Lesson: This lesson is structured as a “Think Aloud” to reinforce students’ abilities to select and apply appropriate reading strategies, make meaning and identify basic elements of the form.	Modeled Writing Lesson: Using the “Think Aloud” as a key strategy, students are encouraged to use known reading strategies to identify and label key elements of a form. This information then is recorded on a graphic organizer to introduce the beginning stages of the writing process.
Guided Reading Lesson: During this component, students are taught to utilize known reading strategies to identify elements or conventions of the written form with minimal teacher direction. The emphasis is on reading to understand the structure of the form (rhetoric) rather than reading for comprehension or literary analysis.	Shared Writing Lesson: During this stage of the writing lesson, students will apply their knowledge of the form to the analysis of other examples of the form being studied. Students will continue to break down the final piece into its planning stages to study how the author may have used appropriate graphic organizers to plan and/or research the piece. The emphasis at this stage is to begin “teaching” students to think like writers.
Independent Reading Lesson: At this time, students should be able to select an appropriate reading strategy and apply it to additional samples of the form being studied. Students should be able to complete a simple analysis of the form, recognizing both literary and rhetorical elements.	Guided Writing Lesson: Students, with teacher support, will take their knowledge of the written form and begin to develop a common writing sample, progressing through all stages of the writing process.
	Independent Writing Lesson: Students will use the writing process and their knowledge of a written form to develop independent writing samples modeled on a specific form.

*Please Note: It would be a monumental task to use this method for every form of writing considered for study. Therefore, it is recommended that this model be applied only to a few key forms. For example, in a Locally Developed Compulsory Course, the focus may be on building towards a series of connected paragraphs, the news report and a digital story.