

Non-Literary Texts

When you analyse a newspaper report please consider the following points:

	"the five w's": who, what, where, when, why
	how are facts and figures presented, which figures have been chosen (to which effect?)
	what has been left out?
	structure of the article ("the inverted pyramid structure" : all answers to the five w's are in the first paragraph, each paragraph that follows deals with one aspect
	choice of words, register
	syntax, complete sentences, incomplete sentences, simple or complex structure, questions
	pronouns ("you", "we" — function?)
	quotations (who is quoted?)
	stylistic devices such as rhetorical questions or repetitions

The following list of points to consider is to be found in:
Previews, Langenscheidt 50747

A Text Type

As with literary texts, the first thing we have to determine with non-literary texts is the text type. Possible non-literary text types are: newspaper or magazine articles, letters to the editor, brochures, advertisements, reports, and editorials. Normally it is not difficult to decide which type of text we are analysing; we have to look at the kind of information conveyed and the format in which it is presented.

Typical features of:

newspaper articles, magazine articles

- headlines, photographs, human interest stories, (frequently) colloquial or idiomatic language.

letters to the editor

- praise for a good article; criticism of opinions expressed by the newspaper; suggestions for improving the newspaper; criticism or praise of politicians.

brochures

- information about a product or service; glossy format; photographs and illustrations.

advertisements

- eye-catching pictures, illustrations or cartoons; humorous or witty remarks with a play on words; exaggerated praise of the product or service offered.

reports (quality press)

- factual information; objective style; diagrams or photographs to illustrate points.

editorials

- the opinion of the newspaper on a particular subject; rhetorical devices like metaphors, hyperbole, irony

B Content

Here we are interested in determining what kind of information the text conveys or what subject-matter it contains. Does it contain facts or does it express an opinion, for example? Is the text anecdotal (telling interesting illustrative stories) or is it analytical (presenting causes, reasons and effects)? What role does any visual material play? What is the relationship between the text and the visual material?

C Structure and Form

As with literary texts, it is important to define the structure of a non-literary text. Many formal, non-literary texts will follow the pattern described for essays with an introduction, main part and conclusion. It is a good idea to determine these main sections first. Sometimes it is difficult to say exactly where the introduction ends and the main part begins, so you will need to point out transitions that link the sections of the text together. Once you have determined the main sections, look at each section in greater detail.

introduction

Does the author tell the reader what the text will be about?
Does he or she begin with an example or anecdote?

main part

This section is usually more complex than the others. Try to find answers to the following questions:

What kind of information is presented - facts, arguments, opinions?

How are the facts and arguments or opinions arranged - as a numbered list, as examples, as pros and cons?

For this purpose it is a good idea to look at the individual paragraphs which make up the section that you are examining, since the authors themselves will already have arranged their ideas in paragraphs. Generally, each paragraph will contain one important idea, normally expressed in a topic sentence (which says what the paragraph is about) and illustrated by developers (which usually give examples). So try to summarise in perhaps one sentence what each paragraph expresses. If you then look at your list of sentences, you should get a fairly clear idea of the internal structure of the text.

If the text presents facts, try to determine how the facts are arranged:

as a list?

as a selection of examples?

as contrasts?

as comparisons?

[...]

If the text presents arguments, try to discover how the arguments relate to each other:

— all of the pro-arguments followed by all of the con-arguments, followed by a conclusion?

— the pros and the cons for each individual point, followed by a final conclusion?

Does the author try to take account of other opinions apart from his or her own? If so, where?

conclusion

— does the author give his or her own opinion?

— does he or she refer back to the introduction?

— does he or she draw a conclusion on the basis of the facts presented?

— if so, he or she will probably have used an inductive approach (presentation of facts from which a conclusion is drawn).

— how do the text and headline or title go together?

In non-literary texts formal aspects of presentation can play a very important role.[...]

D Function

For what purposes might a text have been written? Any conclusions that we draw are normally speculative, as we can never be entirely sure about an author's intentions. Possible functions are:

1. to inform

2. to amuse

3. to criticise

4. to satirise

5. to persuade

6. to praise

A text may also have as its purpose any combination of these functions.

E Style and Tone

Just as with literary texts it is important to analyse the style and tone of a non-literary text.