COMPOSING

TYPES OF WRITING STYLES

There are four main types of writing: expository, descriptive, persuasive, and narrative. Each of these writing styles is used for a specific purpose. A single text may include more than one writing style.

EXPOSITORY

Expository writing is one of the most common types of writing. When an author writes in an expository style, all they are trying to do is explain a concept, imparting information from themselves to a wider audience. Expository writing does not include the author's opinions, but focuses on accepted facts about a topic, including statistics or other evidence.

Examples of Expository Writing

- Textbooks
- How-to articles
- Recipes
- News stories (not editorials or Op-Eds)
- Business, technical, or scientific writing

DESCRIPTIVE

Descriptive writing is often found in fiction, though it can make an appearance in nonfiction as well (for example, memoirs, first-hand accounts of events, or travel guides). When an author writes in a descriptive style, they are painting a picture in words of a person, place, or thing for their audience. The author might employ metaphor or other literary devices in order to describe the author's impressions via their five senses (what they hear, see, smell, taste, or touch). But the author is not trying to convince the audience of anything or explain the scene – merely describe things as they are.

Examples of Descriptive Writing

- Poetry
- Journal/diary writing
- Descriptions of Nature
- Fictional novels or plays

PERSUASIVE

Persuasive writing is the main style of writing you will use in academic papers. When an author writes in a persuasive style, they are trying to convince the audience of a position or belief. Persuasive writing contains the author's opinions and biases, as well as justifications and reasons given by the author as evidence of the correctness of their position. Any "argumentative" essay you write in school should be in the persuasive style of writing.

> ### Examples of Persuasive Writing
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> - Cover letters
> - Op-Eds and Editorial newspaper articles
> - Reviews of items
> - Letters of complaint
> - Advertisements
> - Letters of recommendation

NARRATIVE

Narrative writing is used in almost every longer piece of writing, whether fiction or nonfiction. When an author writes in a narrative style, they are not just trying to impart information, they are trying to construct and communicate a story, complete with characters, conflict, and settings.

> ### Examples of Narrative Writing
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> - Oral histories
> - Novels/Novellas
> - Poetry (especially epic sagas or poems)
> - Short Stories
> - Anecdotes

UNDERSTANDING THE ASSIGNMENT

There are four kinds of analysis you need to do in order to fully understand an assignment: determining the purpose of the assignment, understanding how to answer an assignment's questions, recognizing implied questions in the assignment, and recognizing the disciplinary expectations of the assignment.

Always make sure you fully understand an assignment before you start writing!

DETERMINING THE PURPOSE

The wording of an assignment should suggest its purpose. Any of the following might be expected of you in a college writing assignment:

- Summarizing information
- Analyzing ideas and concepts
- Taking a position and defending it
- Combining ideas from several sources and creating your own original argument.

UNDERSTANDING HOW TO ANSWER THE ASSIGNMENT

College writing assignments will ask you to answer a *how* or *why* question – questions that can't be answered with just facts. For example, the question "*What* are the names of the presidents of

the US in the last twenty years?" needs only a list of facts to be answered. The question *"Who* was the best president of the last twenty years and *why?"* requires you to take a position and support that position with evidence.

Sometimes, a list of prompts may appear with an assignment. Remember, your instructor will not expect you to answer all of the questions listed. They are simply offering you some ideas so that you can think of your own questions to ask.

RECOGNIZING IMPLIED QUESTIONS

A prompt may not include a clear 'how' or 'why' question, though one is always implied by the language of the prompt. For example:

> "Discuss the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act on special education programs" is asking you to write *how* the act has affected special education programs.

> "Consider the recent rise of autism diagnoses" is asking you to write *why* the diagnoses of autism are on the rise.

RECOGNIZING DISCIPLINARY EXPECTATIONS

Depending on the discipline in which you are writing, different features and formats of your writing may be expected. Always look closely at key terms and vocabulary in the writing assignment, and be sure to note what type of evidence and citations style your instructor expects.

ASSESSING THE WRITING SITUATION

Before beginning the writing process, always establish the following:

- Is there an assigned topic or are you free to choose your own?

- What about your subject interests you?

- Why is your subject worth reading about?

- Double check that your subject is not too broad – narrow it down if necessary.

- Determine the purpose of the work.

- Determine the readers of the work and their level of knowledge about the topic.

- Determine where your evidence will come from.

- Decide what kind of evidence would best serve your argument.

- Identify the required style (MLA, APA, etc.) of the paper.

- Be aware of length specifications.

- Consider if visuals might be helpful in your paper.

- Will someone be reviewing drafts of your paper? Who?

- Note your deadline and how much time you have for each stage of the writing process.

TEST YOUR THESIS

You've come up with what you hope will be a great thesis for your paper. Want to make sure before you get started with it? Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does your thesis take a position, propose a solution, or answer a question?
2. Does your thesis give you enough material to write a full-length paper?
3. Can you come up with interpretations of your thesis that don't match your own?
4. Is there evidence to support your thesis?
5. Will readers want to read an essay with this thesis?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'no,' you need to revise your thesis.