

Writing english ch. 3 - Genres

The chapter outlines two major genres of writing and some of their sub-genres. with structures, alternatives and also a focus on different linguistic flair needed for different writing genres.

Most texts follow the same structure

1. Introduction
2. Body
3. Conclusion

Narrative

The telling of a story or the reporting of events.

A typical template for a full narrative could look like:

- Background
- Goal
- Problem
- The solution to the problem
- Evaluation

A narrative can deviate from this norm, but it is the most widely used, and dates back to old narratives and fairytales. Example:

Background:	Once upon a time there was a mighty king who ruled a harmonious and peaceful country. He was very proud of this
Goal:	and could never dream of changing his life or the life of his country.
Problem:	One day when relaxing quietly in his peaceful garden, a big, scary dragon suddenly appeared. The king, who was used to his peaceful life, didn't have any weapons. He got really scared and cried for help. Nobody answered. The dragon kept coming closer, and just when it was about to sink its sharp teeth into the king's throat,
Problem solution:	the clever monarch discovered a sharp branch on the ground. The king was a fast thinking man so he grabbed the branch and stabbed the dragon, who fell to the ground immediately.
Evaluation:	From that day on, the king never felt secure despite the fact that everything seemed peaceful on the surface.

Different functions of a narrative

When writing a narrative, we might want to do different things like:

- Describing characters
- Report on events
- Dramatise important episodes
- Etc.

When writing these different elements, we use different linguistic properties. These different functions can also be called "sub-genres"

Reporting events

We usually report in chronological order (although flashbacks are often seen), and thus this function of reporting exhibits temporal linguistic properties. We typically see:

Vocabulary

before, after, meanwhile, then, when, ...ago, the day after, once upon a time

Grammatical properties

verb tenses (e.g. past tense and progressive tense, present perfect, past perfect).

Dramatising an episode

when telling a story, one often tries to make it more vivid by dramatising a situation in the narrative.

The structures often used to dramatise an event are dialogues and dramatic present

Dramatic present

The dramatic present is the reporting of a past event by the use of the present tense.

An example from the text on coming to America.

Here in order to dramatise the living picture of the immigrants' coming to America, not only the present tense is used, but it is accompanied by very simple, active sentences.

E: Ellis Island

March 27, 1907. A ship bringing newcomers to America steams slowly into New York Harbor. People spill out onto the ship's deck. They push. They shove. They laugh. They point. They crane their necks for a still better look. Fathers lift their small children into the air so they can see the spectacular sight. Looming before them stands the Statue of Liberty. In her hand she holds high the torch of freedom. Some passengers burst into tears at the sight. Some freeze in complete silence, as if in prayer. Others sing happily in the language of their own country. At last they are in America.

(Ellis Island, New Hope in a New Land, William Jay Jacobs, Charles Schribner's Sons, N.Y. 1990)

Dialogue

In dialogues the reader gets a chance to experience the characters in action. Not only does this give him/her an opportunity to create his/her own views and opinions of the character, but it also lets him/her in on the spoken language.

the most important thing to remember about dialogues is that they have to be realistic.

The basic elements of dialogue are direct speech and reporting verb phrases.'

Point of view (functions of a narrative)

when narrating a story, one has to make up one's mind about perspective, i.e. from whose point of view the story is being told. there are at least the following possibilities:

1st person narrative
3rd person narrative
and different amounts of omniscience

Describing characters, places, things, etc.

Instead of simply describing the state of characters or other elements in your story, use more "painterly" descriptions.

This invites the reader to make up their own opinions and views of your characters, places etc.

So instead of:

"Mary is lonely"

Try:

"Mary sat in the big armchair watching the rain beat against the dark window. She had been sitting there now for days without speaking to anyone."

APPEAL TO THE READERS SENSES

Expository-argumentative writing

A piece of writing in which the author expresses her/his view or reasoned opinion about a topic or expresses her/his solution to some kind of problem. It's then the writer's job to convince the reader that the solution is a valid one.

A classical template for structuring a piece of expository-argumentative writing is:

- Introduction
- Explanation of the case under consideration
- Outline of the argument
- Proof
- Refutation
- Conclusion

As with the narrative genre, the expository-argumentative genre is very flexible. In fact even more flexible than the narrative, and the classical template outlined above is by no means the only possible one.

e.g. zig zag method of putting opposing views in front of the proofs

continuously contrasting the author's views with opposing views throughout the text.

It is also possible to omit differing views and opinions completely and solely focus on your own argument. (this is often viewed as less refined and less open-minded).

Different functions - Expository-argumentative writing

this variety of possibilities for presenting one's argument (exemplifying contrasting, etc.) reflects different functions (or sub-genres) within this expository-argumentative genre. Each of these functions are represented by different linguistic structures. We will treat some of these functions below.

Exemplifying and explaining

illustrating with the help of examples.

e.g., for instance, for example, as we can see in, take..., to exemplify, we see this exemplified in, this is seen in, to mention but a few, to illustrate this

Comparing and contrasting

by comparison, like, as, similarly, similar to

Giving reasons

as a consequence, the reason being, depends on

Conceding

although, even though, true that..., though, albeit

Modifying

Emphasising

in fact, indeed, certainly, clearly, of course

Generalising

generally speaking, in general, overall, for the most part, usually

Listing

moreover, furthermore, first, second, third, first of all, then, next finally, also, in addition, besides.

Concluding

Then, in conclusion, as a result, thus, consequently, so therefore, hence

Summing up

in short, to sum up, all in all, summa summarum