

Modes

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WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers four different modes of writing: narrative, descriptive, informative, and argumentative:

1. Narrative Mode
2. Descriptive Mode
3. Informative Mode
4. Argumentative Mode
5. Purpose

1. Narrative Mode



BEFORE YOU START

Recall that modes of writing can take various forms, depending on the *context* of the writer's purpose and audience. While most writing has a primary purpose, however, it may employ different modes to achieve that purpose.

We have described four modes in writing—narrative, descriptive, informative, and argumentative. Each has its own particular purpose and features.

The **narrative mode** is writing that is driven by a story; it tells what has happened, whether the story is fictional or true. This might be an opportunity for **reflecting** upon an event, which is when a writer is relating what he or she gets out of an experience, or just maybe a way to tell an entertaining story about something funny that happened.

When would you use this mode? You will definitely use narration when you tell the story of a recent vacation, but you might also use it academically or professionally.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** You're writing a paper for a political science class and want to imagine how a potential policy change might influence the country. You might use the narrative mode. Description provides details concerning a specific person, place, or thing, so it's used to add in details and really draw a clear and vivid

picture. For that reason, it is likely that you would use the descriptive mode while telling a story in the narrative mode.



TERM TO KNOW

Narrative Mode

Writing that is driven by a story.

Reflecting

Relating what the writer “gets out of” an experience.

2. Descriptive Mode

Description provides details that zero in on a specific person, place, or thing. It’s used to draw a clear and vivid picture. As seen in the example above, it can be used along with narration for an academic paper or in your professional career.

How else might you use the **descriptive mode**?

⇒ **EXAMPLE** In a business setting, you want to pitch a new product. Using the descriptive mode, you clearly describe its features and its use.



TERM TO KNOW

Descriptive Mode

Writing that provides details concerning a specific person, place, or thing.

3. Informative Mode

The **informative mode** is writing designed to inform, describe, or explain, so this is similar in some ways to narration and description and may use those modes. It’s also specifically used for **informing**, which is giving the reader facts without offering an opinion about them. This mode is written with as little bias as possible. Your feelings about the facts cannot change whether or not they’re true.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** You are writing a history paper, so you use the informative mode to inform your readers about past events. You cannot pick and choose which elements of the truth you’ll include.



TERMS TO KNOW

Informative Mode

Writing designed to inform, describe, or explain.

Informing

Giving the reader the facts without offering an opinion about them.

4. Argumentative Mode

The **argumentative mode** takes a clear position on a debatable question and backs up claims with evidence and reasoning. This is where you present a thesis statement, or a clearly-stated main point, which takes a side on a debate and presents supporting evidence, logical arguments, and reasoning to back up that position.

Obviously, you'll use this mode if you're assigned an opinion or argumentative paper, but you likely already use this mode all the time.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Your friends want to go out for Chinese food but you'd rather have a burger, so you try to convince them to head out for burgers. When you do this, you're in the argumentative mode.



TERM TO KNOW

Argumentative Mode

Writing that takes a clear position on a debatable question, and backs up claims with evidence and reasoning.

5. Purpose

You should always have a **purpose** for each text, and that purpose will guide which mode you choose. The purpose of a text is its intended goal or value.

To better select the appropriate mode when writing, it's important to practice identifying those modes. As you look at the following pieces of writing, think about what the purpose of each seems to be by examining the content. In addition, evaluate the **tone** of each piece, which is the writer's attitude toward the subject as conveyed through a piece of writing.

⇒ **EXAMPLE EVALUATING NARRATIVE MODE:** Take a look at this piece of writing. Does this tell a story? Is there a logical sequence of events? If you can answer yes, then this is a narrative.

In my first job, I tried hard to please everyone, so I often took extra shifts and stayed late. By the time I had been there a year, I was exhausted all the time and still wasn't promoted. So in my second job, I just tried to do the best work I could. Within a year, I had been promoted but didn't have any friends. So now in my new job, I have tried to balance being popular and being productive, and I am much happier.

What do you think? You've got a chronological series of events, which is the usual order that events are presented in, so this is a narrative.

Do you think this writing is meant to reflect or entertain? Look for the author's opinion on what the moral or

lesson of these events is. Do you see that? “I am much happier” is an opinion and indicates that this isn’t just meant to be an entertaining story.

⇒ **EXAMPLE EVALUATING DESCRIPTIVE MODE:** To see if this is descriptive, we need to ask if it provides vivid details about something in particular. If so, then you’ve got description.

My friend's dog is amazing. Her fur is so soft that it feels like she's made of velvet. And she is so friendly! The first thing you hear when you knock on the door is the click-click-click of her nails on the floor as she runs to greet you. Holding her in my lap, I always feel warm and loved.

So what do you think? You see sensory details, such as “feels like she’s made of velvet,” and “click-click-click of her nails,” and “holding her in my lap, I always feel warm and loved.” These are some of the main features of a descriptive paragraph, so this is written in the descriptive mode.

⇒ **EXAMPLE EVALUATING INFORMATIVE MODE:** To determine whether or not the writing below is informative, ask yourself if it offers information without appearing to be biased. If so, then it’s informative. However, if you see clear bias, you might be looking at argumentative mode.

Baseball is historically one of the most popular sports in American history. From the middle of the 1800s, baseball began to take hold of the public consciousness as an activity that was both fun to watch and fun to play. By the early 1900s, baseball was often called the American Pastime, and it has often been one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the country ever since.

Note that you see data presented here, but you don’t see the author offering a personal opinion on what this means. Therefore, this is written in the informative mode.

⇒ **EXAMPLE EVALUATING ARGUMENTATIVE MODE:** To figure out if the writing below is argumentative, ask yourself if it shows a debatable issue and if it takes a side. If so, then it’s definitely argumentative. Remember that when a text shows its bias (author’s personal opinion), it’s likely making an argument, whereas if it’s neutral, then it’s just informative. This is because the whole purpose of the argument is to convince readers of a particular perspective, so it can’t remain impartial.

Baseball is the most popular sport in America. Ever since the mid-1800s, baseball has been an activity that most Americans consider to be both fun to watch and fun to play. Baseball is the American Pastime, and it will remain one of the most popular forms of entertainment forever.

Do you see that bias happening here? The author moves from the facts presented in the last paragraph into

a much more opinionated presentation of that data. You can clearly see that this author loves baseball, and the author focuses more on personal opinions than on facts. So this is definitely an argument.



TRY IT

Here is one more piece of writing. What mode do you think it's in? Carefully look for tone, purpose, and authorial intent.

Whenever I think about my time in college, what I remember most is the satisfaction I felt when I accomplished a big challenge. When I would work all night, back aching from being hunched over the computer, I would know that even though I was tired, I was doing something important for myself. And it was a great challenge: I took dozens of classes, read hundreds of books, and probably wrote thousands of words. But I know that going to college was the right choice for me, and I think that everyone should have the chance to do the same.

What's your verdict? All of these sentences are designed to serve this final argument—that everyone should have the chance to go to college. That is just one possible opinion on an issue about which many people debate. The purpose of the text is argument, so this is overall in the argumentative mode.



TERMS TO KNOW

Purpose

The intended goal or value of a text.

Tone

A writer's attitude toward the subject, as conveyed through a piece of writing.



SUMMARY

This tutorial examined four modes of writing—narrative, descriptive, informative, and argumentative—and discussed how each helps serve a particular purpose that the author needs to assess.

Remember, **informative mode** offers no opinion, and **argumentative mode** uses opinion and reasoning to convince readers of something. **Narrative mode** is more of a storytelling approach, and the **descriptive mode** zeros in on details about a person, place, or thing. While most writing has a primary purpose, however, an essay may employ a variety of modes to achieve that purpose.



TERMS TO KNOW

Argumentative Mode

Writing that takes a clear position on a debatable question, and backs up claims with evidence and reasoning.

Descriptive Mode

Writing that provides details concerning a specific person, place, or thing.

Informative Mode

Writing designed to inform, describe, or explain.

Informing

Giving the reader the facts without offering an opinion about them.

Narrative Mode

Writing that is driven by a story.

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Reflecting

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