

Writing a Nonfiction Page

Students learn two goals at once: how to research and how to read nonfiction texts. By following the steps of an I-Search project (Ken Macrorie), students find interesting facts and create a one-page magazine article. In addition, students learn about nonfiction text features from bold print to sidebar by using them in their writing! I created a sample lesson plan, checklist, and model nonfiction page to help you get started.

A true I-Search gives the children the opportunity to select any topic. In the interest of time, you may want to narrow that topic to one from social studies or science and then let them select from within that topic. Giving your students choice still will have the benefit of generating enthusiasm and interest. You can make this a BIG or little project ☺ (See other ideas in *Nonfiction Matters* by Stephanie Harvey and *Making It Real*, Linda Hoyt.)

Lesson Plan (over 2-3 weeks)

Day 1: Students deconstruct a nonfiction page to learn the features of text.

Before students start researching, show a model of a magazine page you've created. Students deconstruct your page to make sure they understand concepts of print. I was surprised to find my fifth graders had a hard time with this step. Even though they might have recognized and even defined the words, they didn't know how to use Italics and parentheses, for example.

Materials

Run a copy of your own nonfiction page or the sample I provided (page 6) --- one for each student.
Run a copy of the features you require they incorporate into their page (page 8). I selected features from my state curriculum.
Run an overhead copy of each.

Teacher Input:

1. Generate excitement for the project. Tell students that they will be able to create a nonfiction page for a project (objective). They will choose a topic. They will learn about the topic PLUS about reading nonfiction pages by creating a nonfiction page.
2. Show copies of student's pages from last year if you have them, magazine pages, make one of your own, and/or show the copy of the nonfiction page I created as an example (page 6).
3. Make another overhead of the page to cut apart. Then, "build" the nonfiction page on the overhead. Show them each feature of text as you add it to your overhead sample. For example, is you're using page 5 you would point out the title and subtitles. Explain the sidebar. Point out that the bold words in the sample are titles and subtitles. Explain "northern" is written in Italics for emphasis. Point to the illustration and the caption under it. Explain that the summary box in the top, left corner gives an overview of the page. Quotation marks - in the caption - is not the author's words, but a direct quote copied from one of the consulted sources. Parentheses are used to explain that Taiwan is a country.

Student Practice:

4. Give each child a photocopied nonfiction page and the labels provided on page 8 of this lesson plan. Ask the children to cut the individual words apart and glue them to the feature on the sample nonfiction page. Let them work in groups so they can discuss what the words mean. Wander around so you can see where the children are having trouble and how you can answer questions.
5. Check their work by putting a transparency copy on the overhead. Label it and ask students to double-check their own. Be sure everyone understands the concepts of print for nonfiction text. (You could accomplish the same objective by having students search for the concepts of print in nonfiction texts.)
6. For individual accountability, ask each student to define each word in words he/she understands and draw a picture to symbolize what the word means, which helps students remember the meaning.

The students will now have only a literal understanding of the features of text after this activity. That is, they should be able to identify the different features. However, when they start to write they will still not understand how they are used. You will address those misconceptions later.

Distribute the Checklist

7. Give students a copy of the checklist you will use to grade the nonfiction pages. Have them glue it in their daybooks. Talk them through it so they understand what will be expected of them. Do not have them mark the checklist at this point. Take questions now! (Make sure you determine how many points each part of the project is worth before you run off the papers!)

"The best way to make sure students are successful, is to grade the project ahead of time."

Bob Tierney

Day 2: Students make a list of topics they want to know about.

Talk with your students about topics in which they are interested. Let students tell about their hobbies and the lessons they take. Make a list on the board to get the class started. Ask students to create a list in their daybooks of all topics in which they genuinely take interest.

After listing, tell them to select one topic for more study. You may want to give them time over night or over the weekend to think about the topic they want to study. (You might limit the search by posting a topic in your curriculum like "Canada." Then have students brainstorm everything they want to know about Canada.)

I read to the students to help them understand what an I-Search is from Ken Macrorie's book, *Searching Writing*. Ken is the creator of I-Search projects (often distilled to KWL in elementary schools).

"To scratch a genuine itch, until you've quieted it."

"Allow something to choose you that you want intensely to know or possess...for a change you're being asked to investigate something you're interested in that will fulfill a need in your life rather than a teacher's notion of what would be good for you to pursue. Walk around for a couple of days letting yourself think of what you feel you need to know. At night when you're beginning to slide off into sleep, and in the morning when you're coming out of sleep, let your mind receive possible topics. Keep a note pad and pencil beside your bed. Scientists have discovered that these periods are the most productive of good ideas, when one idea leads to another, and the connections between them are solid and real. Don't be satisfied with something you can do that seems proper for school. You're in command here, and the payoff must be for you."

Let ideas percolate overnight.

Day 3: Students write what they know about the selected topic in paragraph form.

To warm up, students talk with partners about what they already know about the topic. When they are ready, they write a paragraph in their daybooks detailing what they know. Then ask them to turn to their partners and have the partners read what is written. Together, the writers and the partners should add to the paragraph anything that student said but forgot to write down. I share my model paragraph I wrote before I went to teach there in 2004.

I know so little about Taiwan it is appalling. I know it is on the exact opposite side of the world. I know many of the people speak English and the government would like everyone to speak English by 2007. It is very small and of course, it is an island meaning that the island is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. It belongs to China but it is trying to be independent. I have many friends who go to Taiwan on business.

Day 4: Write why the topic is interesting.

Tell the students to write at least a paragraph telling why a topic interests them. Again, let students talk to one another before they write. For example, right now I am interested in Taiwan. Here is a sample of what I might write for this part. Sharing your writing engages the students.

I have an interest Taiwan right now. I am traveling to Taiwan from July 7th through 28th. Even though I am teaching school over there, I will have time to sightsee. I am visiting 2 cities: Taipei (on the northern part of the island) and Taschung, I think (in the south). Plus, my son is going with me and he needs things to do during the day.

What I hope to accomplish is to find places to visit. I need details about my trip like how much things cost. I want to know if Taiwan is a safe place. What kinds of foods will I find there? My mind is swirling with questions. So, I am doing this I-Search to help understand this truly foreign place I will be visiting!

Day 5: Study nonfiction writing

Most nonfiction texts start with engaging stories. Look at your science or social studies books or magazines as a nonfiction author would to find the stories! Plus, they have some great pages that use all the features of text the students are required to use in this project.

Read the selections ahead of time to be sure students will find stories. Tab the first paragraph or two you want your writers to read. Ask partners to investigate the writing to see what makes it appealing. If students look closely at the structure, they should find: lead, short story, and then facts. If partners examine one article, you should have at least 12 examples that follow that structure. Believe me, they're not hard to find!

Together, students will draw the conclusion that most authors pull the reader in with stories. From the story, the reader decides whether the topic is intriguing and whether she wants to read the facts. It takes a class period for students to read from an author's perspective in this way. However, if the students spend the time analyzing nonfiction writing, they write interesting papers. As one child said, "We wrote our papers in a storytelling way."

Day 6: Create a nonfiction page as a class.

I detour from *personal* nonfiction pages at this point. We create a page *together* as a class in order for students to understand the *writing part* of nonfiction. From the class model, students truly have a vision for what's possible as they write independently later. (See page 8 for an example.)

Choose a science topic in the textbook from your curriculum like "plants." Ask the students to read a small part in the textbook along with you. For example, I selected "roots." Take notes on the overhead to show them how to read a sentence in the text and write the important parts on sticky notes. I ask them to write one fact per sticky note, in their own words, with words like "fibrous roots" spelled correctly.

*roots are strong
take water from ground
desert plants need to take in whatever rainwater they can
forest trees have deep roots
some roots are so big they look like little branches --- called fibrous roots*

Demonstrate how to write one section of the nonfiction page, working *story* into the writing so it is interesting! For the purposes of the demonstration, the story may be true or made up like this example.

One time my friend and I were walking in the woods, and we found a huge tree with big roots above the ground. We started playing on the roots and her foot got caught on a lumpy root and she fell! We heard a crack. She broke her ankle.

The facts then need to be sequenced and put in sentences. They follow the interesting beginning.

Fibrous roots (like the one I tripped over) are like little tree branches. Root hairs take minerals and water from the ground to feed the plant. Desert plants take up large amounts of the little rainwater. Forest trees have deep roots. Roots are very powerful but then again they hold up all the plants and trees.

Divide the students into groups like a Jigsaw activity. Each group reads one small section of their science book and takes notes together. Then, they create one story that leads into the factual part. Combine each section into a total-group page –one page for the whole class. Even though the students write just a small section, the experience will force questions to surface about what is expected. Refer them to read other nonfiction writing so they can see what authors do to make it interesting. (See page 8 for an example.)

Teacher Homework: Combine the writings into a class nonfiction page to model how the writing is done.

Day 7: Analyze the class nonfiction page and add the features of text.

Make an overhead copy or photocopied copy of the nonfiction page the class wrote so everyone can see and read the page.

Critique the writing of the nonfiction page. Make sure it's not just a regurgitation of facts but is, in fact, interesting writing. If the writing is still dull, discuss what could make it interesting: adding a quote, more details in the story, taking out unimportant details?

Remind the students to use the checklist to remember which features to include. Model checking the list by asking children to locate their copy and assess the classes' nonfiction page. Do we have bold words, italics, and parentheses, for example? If not, where could we use them effectively? Do we have each feature required by the checklist? How many points would this page earn?

Day 8: Make a list of questions to research. Students collect interesting information using notes on sticky notes (or index cards). Students read more than one nonfiction source and keep a list of the names of the consulted sources.

Collect books for students to use. Or, take them to the library to find information. Or, select sites from the Web that work.

Remind students how to go from the text to notes or they will copy. It is very helpful if students record one fact on one sticky note or index card to be sequenced later. Also, copying the correct spelling of names, etc. is important to save editing time later!

Remind students to keep a list of the books' names and pages that they used. Show them how to collect the name of the book, the author, the pages, the date, and whatever else you would like them to include in the bibliography from the text they use for research.

Give students time to read and collect facts about their topic.

Day 9-10: Students create ONE nonfiction page similar to a page found in the search on construction paper or cardboard.

Review nonfiction features of text on the page again: *italic* type **bold** type, an illustration, caption, heading or title, subheadings or subtitles, sidebar and summary. Then, ask students to recreate the page using the information they learned from their search. You may want them to sketch it out on newsprint first. They can formalize it on construction paper.

Day 11: Write the name of the books you used and the page numbers on the back of your nonfiction page. Students will need to be shown how you would like the bibliography written.

OPTIONAL Day 12: Write a diary of how you conducted your search.

It's fun to write a diary of "the hunt." If students want extra points they can write down everything they did for the I-Search. You may decide to require this step. The important details of the search should be stapled to the rubric.

Review the checklist with the children one more time!

(Make a clean copy for grading.) Have them mark the column that says "student checklist" to be sure they have everything they're supposed to have. Give students an extra day or 2 to finalize their nonfiction pages. Make sure they turn in notebook pages, too.

Day 13: Edit papers with a partner.

Bring in dictionaries and word lists. Let children help one another with spelling. (I never can edit my own work!) Teach children how to get help from one another in this area. Let the children focus on using mechanics. Partners could double check that all the features of nonfiction text are represented. Editing grade will include using parentheses, spelling and quotation marks correctly.

Day 14 FINALLY! Let the children share their pages in groups of 4 or 5. Not everyone has to see every page. Sometimes it's better to be brief! Then collect the pages and make them into a nonfiction book or display the pages in the hall. Collect notebook pages for grading, too.

Day 15 TEST: See page 10-11 for a samples.

Nonfiction Page by Karen Haag April 6, 2004

Visit Taiwan: A Country on the Other Side of the World!

Summary

If you visit Taipei, there are many temples to see. Be sure to visit the zoo. Bring plenty of money. Be ready to shop and eat at some luscious places! If you're going in the summer, bring clothes for very hot weather.



"Built in 1738, Lung Shan Temple is one of the best temples to see in Taipei." Make sure you take time to see the carved stone, dragon pillars, roof and caves. Right nearby is the Huashi Street Night Market so visit that as well.

Travel To Taipei, Taiwan!

Taipei is in the *northern* part of Taiwan. (Taiwan is a small island off the coast of China.) Mountains surround the city. The people speak Mandarin Chinese. The average temperature is 84.9 degrees.

Prices

It costs around \$12 to \$24 to take a taxi around Taipei, depending on your destination. Waiters and hotel porters expect a 10% tip, but it is optional. The buses are air-conditioned and a trip costs around \$10. Taxis cost \$50 for the first kilometer and \$5 for each additional 350 meters. A newspaper costs \$12. For more information, keep this number handy: Tourist Hot Line (02) 717 - 3737.

Shopping

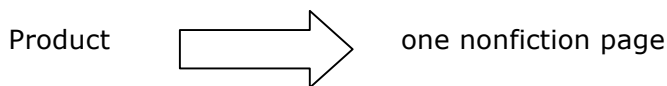
You can buy almost anything you can think of in Taipei. The prices are reasonable. There are night markets that are fun to shop. There are vendors in the streets that sell clothes and jewelry. Eating out is a pleasure! The restaurants are excellent and prices are fair. Tourists can find a good meal without too much trouble. There are even fast food places available! Visitors can find Chinese, European and American food.

Places to Visit

Taipei is safe and there is plenty to do, even late into the night. A must-see is all the beautiful temples. The Memorial is a memorable marble monument surrounded by gardens and easy to get to. The Taoist Pao An Temple is another place to see. The Taipei Zoo Mucha is a huge, new zoo and a worthwhile visit. It has a splendid Butterfly House and garden show. You can also see waterfalls, volcanic craters, hot springs, and natural wildlife in the Yangmingshan National Park. It's especially attractive in the summer because it's a cool place that you can escape to.

Name _____ Score _____

Nonfiction Page Checklist



STEPS	Student Checklist	Possible Points	Points Earned
1 - Label a nonfiction page with the features of nonfiction text.			
2 - Make a list of topics in your daybook that you want to know about.			
3 - Write a paragraph in your daybook telling what you know about the topic you chose as your favorite.			
4 - Write at least a paragraph in your daybook explaining why you will search this topic.			
5 - Write your section of the class' nonfiction page. 6 - Make your writing interesting.			
7 - Make a list of questions. Collect interesting information for your page using notes. Write your notes on sticky notes.			
8 - Create ONE nonfiction page similar to a page you found in your search on construction paper or cardboard or computer.			
9 - Use nonfiction features of text on your page:			
<i>italic type</i>			
bold type			
illustration			
caption			
heading or title			
subheadings or subtitles			
sidebar			
summary			
10 - Use more than one nonfiction book to do your research. Keep a list of the names of the sources you consult.			
11 - Write the name of the books you used and the page numbers on the back of your nonfiction page.			
12 - OPTIONAL: Write a diary of how you conducted your search.			
13 - Edit your paper. Use a partner to help. Be sure your name is on your page.			
Check spelling.			
Use parentheses (to explain).			
Use quotation marks to show the words someone said.			
TOTAL			

Use one side to cut and label a sample nonfiction page (see directions page 1, step 1, #5). Use the RIGHT side to glue in daybooks. Have each student define each word in word the students understand. The, draw a picture or symbol to remember the word.

Directions: Cut out the words on the left side. Glue them on the copy of the nonfiction page your teacher gives you, next to the nonfiction text feature.

Directions: Glue this list in your daybook. Write a definition in your own words. Draw a picture to help you remember each word.

Italic type

Italic type

bold type

bold type

illustration

illustration

caption

caption

heading or title

heading or title

subheadings or subtitles

subheadings or subtitles

sidebar

sidebar

summary

summary

parentheses

parentheses

quotation marks

Quotation marks

PLANTS

by Ms. Haney's Class



ALL Plants

Zach and Kevin

One day we drove past our house. We saw pine trees growing in the gutters. It is amazing that on the Earth, there are 1/2 million plants. *All* plants have roots, stems and leaves. They can grow anywhere, even in gutters!

Leaves

Alex, Jacob and Juan



I was driving around the mountains and came upon all these different kinds and colors of leaves. There were reds, golds, and oranges.

Do you know why these leaves turn colors? It's because leaves lose their chlorophyll when it's cold. Leaves are the "food factories" of plants. Leaves can make their own food. The leaves will store food for other plants. But did you know that leaves come in different shapes and sizes?

Stems

Lindsay, Margaret

Everybody knows that stems are on broccoli, asparagus, and other foods. They are not just food. Stems are really interesting. Did you know that stems hold up the plants and the leaves? Stems need food and water just like us so they carry food and water



to other parts of the plant. As you know most stems grow upward. During the day some parts turn toward the sun. I bet you didn't know that woody plants don't die after the season. They come back year after year.

Roots



Kayla, Courtney, Brittany

One time my friend and I were walking in the woods, and we found a huge tree with big roots above the ground. We started playing on the roots and her foot got caught on a lumpy root and she fell! We heard a crack. She broke her ankle.

Roots are very powerful but then again they hold up all the plants and trees. Root hairs take minerals and water from the ground. Desert plants take up large amounts of the little rain water. Forest trees have deep roots. Fibrous roots (like the one I tripped over) are like little tree branches. That's amazing about roots!

Food for Plants

Keyanna, Areliz and Ana



One day, I had a flower and it's leaves had turned yellow. My dad forgot to water it. I asked him if he forgot. When I went to check them they were still alive and I told my dad they did not die.

Plants produce *more* food than they need. Plants store food in their stems. Some plants store so much extra food in their roots. The reason why my plant didn't die is because it had stored extra food in it's roots and stem.

Nonfiction Features of Text Test Name _____ Date _____

Below, you will find 9 nonfiction features of text. Define each term. Tell *where* the example is on your page. Demonstrate that you know how to use each one by explaining what you were trying to accomplish by using each term. Read the example before you begin.

Here is an example:

bold	Bold print is print that is darker than the rest.	Look under “Places to Visit” to find The Memorial and Yangmingshan National Park in bold.	I wrote “Place to Visit” in bold to make it easier and quicker to find the names on my page.
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	+ 3 points for each	+ 3 points for each	+ 3 points for each
Term	Definition	Where to find an example on your page.	How it is used on your page.
Italic type			
bold type			
illustration			
caption			

Term	Definition	Where to find an example on your page.	How it is used on your page.
subheadings or subtitles			
sidebar			
summary			
parentheses			
quotation marks			

SAMPLE NONFICTION TEST

1. What does it mean to put your research “in your own words”?
2. What do you have to know before you can figure out a headline or a title of an article?
3. What is a **source**?
4. If you were going to do research on a topic, which sources would be the best and why?
5. Explain what these sources are best used for:
 - encyclopedia
 - almanac
 - atlas
 - dictionary
 - Internet
 - interview
6. What did you learn about doing research that you didn’t know before you did this project?
7. What did you learn about reading nonfiction that you didn’t know before doing this project?
8. List some new vocabulary words you learned from doing this project and what they mean.
9. What will you do better next time? In other words, what will be your goal?