

READ FOR INFORMATION ON THE WEB

Informational reading isn't confined only to paper resources! The Internet provides vast opportunities for informational reading. Web pages are designed to help readers quickly find the information that they want and need. Here's an example.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you'd like additional information on reading for information, the following Web sites may prove helpful:

Scholastic Instructor
http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/May04_FactBooks.htm
How to use informational trade books as models for writing.

http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/nov03_infotext.htm
Discusses informational text and how, when it is read aloud, it can dramatically boost comprehension.

Informational Texts by Dr. Brenda Parkes
http://www.pearsoned.com.au/schools/primary/pdf/pdArticles/Informational_texts.pdf
Discusses the benefits of including informational, or non-fiction, books in a balanced literacy program.

The screenshot shows the website www.ncpublicschools.org/. Callouts include:

- "I want to find out more information on North Carolina public schools. This looks like a good place to start." (pointing to the website URL)
- "I can go here and get a copy of the 5th grade curriculum." (pointing to the 'Curriculum' link in the top navigation bar)
- "This is a great place to go for quick facts on public schools." (pointing to the 'Did You Know?' section)
- "My teacher may find this an interesting place to visit." (pointing to the 'Parents & Public' link in the footer)
- "This would give me information of interest to students." (pointing to the 'Students' link in the footer)

MAKING the GRADE
 LEARNING TO READ FOR INFORMATION

One in a series of publications produced by North Carolina Newspapers in Education with support from the North Carolina Press Association and the Public Schools of North Carolina (State Board of Education | Department of Public Instruction). Watch for other tips for helping your child during the coming months.

North Carolina Newspapers in Education
 NC Press Foundation
 5171 Glenwood Ave., Ste. 364
 Raleigh, NC 27612
www.ncpress.com

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA
 301 N. Wilmington Street
 Raleigh, NC 27601-2825
 PHONE :: 919.807.3300
www.ncpublicschools.org

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LEARNING TO READ FOR INFORMATION

Can your children tell you how to find their best friends' phone numbers? Do they know how the local team fared in Saturday's big game or what movies are playing at the theater?

The information to answer these questions can readily be found by looking in your phone book or your local newspaper. But do your children know how to find this information quickly?

Reading informational text is different from reading fiction or literature. It's important for children to know and understand how to read for information. Having this skill can improve their success in middle and high school when students are expected to learn more independently. Parents can help foster their children's understanding of informational reading so that as they progress through school, they become pros at finding the information they need – when they need it.

WHAT ARE INFORMATIONAL TEXTS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

Simply put, informational text conveys facts and ideas about the world in which we live.

A great majority of what parents read on a daily basis is considered informational text. Newspapers, magazines, the Internet, road signs, receipts, and billboards are just a few examples of informational text routinely encountered.

Informational text should be included in your children's reading program. It's easier to get children excited about reading when they connect with the topic or are curious about the subject. In addition, informational text allows children to draw on their personal experiences so that they are more comfortable in asking questions, making comments and contributing to the conversation. This can be particularly helpful to children whose first language is not English.

By helping foster an appreciation of this type of reading early, parents can help their children build a foundation for lifelong learning and an understanding that reading is meaningful and purposeful.



To become effective readers of informational texts, students need to understand:

- the features that identify nonfiction writing;
- the selective way nonfiction is read according to the reader's purpose;
- the ways organizational features such as indexes, content pages, glossaries and headings help the reader access the text;
- the specialized language and language structures used to convey information;
- how visual literacy such as photographs, diagrams, maps and charts combine with written text to convey information;
- how information in captions and labels combines with running text to convey information; and
- strategies for using prior knowledge and experience to engage in inquiry.

- Dr. Brenda Parkes, "Informational Texts"

USING INFORMATIONAL TEXT

AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Children should ask themselves why the author is writing the story. Is the author trying to inform their readers by providing factual, balanced information or is he or she trying to persuade their readers to understand and agree with his or her point of view? Or, is the author trying to entertain, praise, or expose something? These questions also can apply to other sources of information, such as TV news programs, radio shows and Web sites.

Different writing styles found in a newspaper

Straight news stories answer the five W's. Who, what, where and when are usually answered in the first paragraph. The why and how often are found deeper in the story.

Feature stories vary as writers often use narrative techniques to tell stories about people and events in ways that offer maximum appeal to the reader.

Editorial writers introduce the topic in the opening paragraph, support their opinions and summarize in the closing paragraph.

Newspapers provide examples of all these purposes. When covering an event, reporters provide factual information to inform readers. However, a portion of the paper, the opinion or editorial page, is set aside to allow for the expression of opinion and for community dialogue about important issues.

Today's political events provide a wonderful opportunity to look further into the power of persuasion. Political candidates are placing

ads in addition to holding events covered by the local media. With your children, look at some of these stories and advertisements and talk about what how candidates try to persuade citizens to vote for them. Do newspapers, television stations and radio stations treat the story differently? You may want to discuss other sources of information about candidates and issues that you could use to provide a complete picture of the candidate, then take them to the polling place when you vote.

Parents also may want to have their children read a story in the paper and circle those words that show an opinion and underline others that convey a fact. Go further by asking them to draw a squiggly line under information they expected to find after previewing and to draw a box around other information they were surprised to find. They may also want to use a colored pencil or highlighter to mark anything they want to remember.

WHAT FEATURES OF INFORMATIONAL TEXT DO CHILDREN NEED TO RECOGNIZE, UNDERSTAND AND USE?

TEXT TOOLS

In order to help your children more effectively read informational text, make sure that they understand the text tools available to locate information.

Text tools are consistent features used by the author to attract the reader's attention. When children don't understand the purpose of text tools, they can miss flags that help them to focus their reading, understand what they read and quickly retrieve information for study purposes ("Tools for Teaching Content Literacy," Janet Allen).

As early as elementary school, children can be shown how to use a table of contents and scan a book for its overall organization. Make sure your child understands the purpose of a table of contents as well as a glossary, index, and heading. Why would the author use visual elements such as photographs, charts and pictures? To drive this lesson home, select a book and have your child tell you what page a specific chapter starts on, how current the information is by looking for the date by the copyright symbol, or the definition for a word found in the glossary.

Newspapers also are a great resource for reinforcing the value of text tools. Sit down with your child and skim through the various sections of the newspaper. Look at the headings for each section and show them how the news is separated. For example, national news and state news are usually in the first section of the paper; regional news and sports follow in their own sections. In smaller communities, all this information may be combined in one section but the information usually follows a routine order. Show them the index located on the front page of the newspaper and discuss how it can be used to locate the information they want. Ask your child to tell you where the comics and movies are located. Have your child point out articles with pictures and other types of visual elements such as graphs and sidebars. Can they find an article that uses bold print or italics? Why would the writer use a different style of type?

COMMONLY USED TEXT TOOLS

Table of Contents	Bold type	Glossary	Italics	Title	White space	Headings/Subheadings
Punctuation	Legends/keys	Diagrams/illustrations/maps			Photographs	Captions/labels

SKIMMING OR PREVIEWING

Products are designed to help us quickly determine our level of interest. For example, we can find out if a magazine interests us by looking at the headlines on the cover or whether we want to purchase a compact disc by looking at the songs listed on the back. By previewing the selected material, we can make sure that what we select meets our needs and expectations.

To help your children understand how previewing works, encourage them to select a magazine and try to guess what stories are about just by looking at the headlines. Does the article also have a subhead that provides additional information? Are pictures, graphs or sidebars included that provide additional information? Read the story together to see if you guessed correctly. Did previewing the story give an accurate picture of what it was really about?

Help your children understand that text tools such as headlines, subheads, pictures and graphs, when combined with skimming, help them locate information quickly. This is a skill they will depend on more frequently as they progress through school. For instance, research for projects and reports can be accomplished a lot faster and more accurately by first skimming the material to see if it is relevant to the topic they are studying.

SCANNING

Scanning is another tool children should develop as it also gains increasing importance throughout their school years. Whereas skimming looks at the whole text to get a general sense as to what the piece is about, scanning involves searching for specific information. When scanning, you may read the introductory paragraph, selected sentences in paragraphs, the conclusion or any bold print or other visual aids such as pictures or graphs. Parents may first want to read an article then ask their children to locate a specific detail by scanning the article as opposed to reading the article word for word.

