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## **Non-fiction in English**

### **Starters**

We looked at two starters during the course of the seminar, concerning both colons and semi colons. The first looked at semi colons and required us to fill in the punctuation gaps in a piece of prose from the Time Machine by H.G. Wells. It served to show the way in which semi colons can be used in a list of phrases, as well as the fact that commas can be used to create an aside within the text. This was an especially good starter as it used a real text, which opened up opportunities to talk about the way that both language and punctuation has changed through time.

The second starter built upon the first, looking at the use of colons. Again we looked at a real piece of text, and this time had to put in the punctuation without the gaps being signposted for us. This meant that the starter not only built on the grammatical knowledge of colons and semi colons, but also by necessity, made the decision on where to place the punctuation an extension of the grammar lesson.

When looking at these starters the question was asked as to whether a starter should link into the rest of the lesson. It was suggested that although it is useful to have a starter covering a topic or skill that will be used within your lesson, it does not have to. For example you may decide to give a series of starters on something that your class finds difficult, or that build up to a project for later in the term.

### **The four writing clusters**

When we look at the writing standards they are set into four clusters:

Imagine	Inform	Persuade	Analyse
Explore	Explain	Argue	Review
Entertain	Describe	Advise	Comment

Of these clusters it is only the first that really involves creative writing, the others are based in what is traditionally called non-fiction. From this it can clearly be seen that in today's teaching ideals there is a greater emphasis on non-fiction than fiction.

It can also be noticed that it is the fiction-based cluster that forms the basis of coursework for GCSE, and the non-fiction clusters that are addressed in the exams.

### **Newspapers**

The Sunday newspapers can be one of the richest sources of material for non-fiction work in the classroom. Newspapers are ideal to use for modelling non-fictional writing for many reasons. For example it gives a practical everyday application of English, as well as providing a wide range of topics and styles in one place. It should be noted though that for the lower part of the school it might be more appropriate to use only sections of articles, or to dilute them to allow a better understanding of the area being covered.

For the purpose of this seminar we looked at the Sunday Times and Sunday Observer. We looked for articles that could be used to illustrate and model the clusters of non-fiction standards. We undertook this exercise from the point of view of the students, in the respect that when we had found our models we looked at them to see what conventions were being used within them.

***Inform – News in brief; weather; football results***

These were brief and contained a great deal of facts and figures within them. They were written in a formal style with simple sentences and containing no emotive language. Graphs and charts as visual aids also frequently accompanied the articles.

***Explain – introductions; summaries***

These articles needed to contain a fair amount of evidence in order to warrant an explanation. The voice is usually passive and the articles are built up from complex sentences.

***Describe – news events; sports events; travel writing.***

These articles are almost always in the past tense, and contain complex sentences. They are organised in a chronological order and tend to be in a less formal language, frequently using adjectival phrases.

***Persuade – adverts; charity leaflets***

There is a high use of modality and imperatives within these articles. They also tend to rely on the physiological inadequacies of their readers.

***Argue – letters to the editor***

These articles are structured with bold short statements, and makes good use of rhetorical devices. They will usually contain opinions expressed as facts, and will often contain an alternative viewpoint.

***Advise – agony letters; financial pages***

These articles contain balanced arguments, and often use complex sentences. They must contain information in order to provide substantial advice.

***Analyse – Business articles; finance reports.***

These articles are heavy on statistics and factual information; they are structured with short sentences and never use personal pronouns. They often use juxtaposition, and end with a professional quote from a suitable expert.

***Review – cultural reviews; sports reviews; food reviews.***

These articles contain a mixture of fact and opinion. The facts tend to be written in the third person and in short sentences, whereas the opinions are in first person and longer sentences.

***Comment – editorial; readers letters.***

These articles are made up mainly of opinions with few or no facts at all. There is a frequent use of personal pronouns, and the articles are structured with the conclusion at the beginning rather than the end.