

writing that informs

Important questions to ask of your 'writing to inform' are:

- ▶ are you telling your reader just what he or she either needs, wants, or would like to know about the topic?
- ▶ have you provided a balanced range of facts and opinions?
- ▶ have you written in a form and style that is appropriate to the task?
- ▶ is the detail you have given clear, interesting and relevant?
- ▶ is your tone authoritative, i.e. do you sound as if you know what you are talking about?
- ▶ Have you given reasons why your writing can be trusted?
- ▶ have you answered the relevant so-called "journalist's '5W+H' questions"?
- who, what, where, when, why and how?

Informing vs. Persuading

Informing is very different from persuading even though yet much of what passes as information these days is, in truth, little more than 'disguised' persuasion. Some kinds of information we receive, we know to be biased or one-sided; but as long as we know, want or expect this, this is fine. A letter from a friend, or autobiographical writing is of this kind.

- ▶ Information that is biased can easily fail to do what information should do, which is to inform its readers and allow them to 'make up their own mind'. Information that is biased is sometimes a kind of propaganda.
- Where might you find information that is really 'disguised persuasion'?
- Why does it matter that you can see it for what it is?
- In what typical situations is information given that could be called 'propaganda'?

Thinking of the above, what sort of information would you expect to find in:

- a) A letter to your aunt in Australia updating her on your life?
- b) An answer from an MP on a national issue – say, the NHS?
- c) An editorial in a tabloid?
- d) A newspaper article in a broadsheet?
- e) An encyclopaedia or text book?
- f) This worksheet?
- g) A media advertisement?
- h) A school newsletter about a Year 11 trip to Wales?

What your teacher or the examiner is looking for

When you 'write to inform', your teacher or examiner will be asking the following questions of your writing:

- ▶ Have you provided your audience with what it needs, wants, or might like to know and nothing more?
- ▶ Have you given relevant details that are clear, fair and balanced – whether as facts or opinions?
- ▶ Are the details given in a straightforward and unambiguous manner?
 - Language that informs should rely on its **denotation** for meaning, i.e. its literal meaning, rather than connotation, i.e. suggested meaning.
- ▶ Are the relevant '5W+H' questions being answered, i.e. who, what, why, where, when and how?
- ▶ Is the writing engaging and interesting to its audience, i.e. is its style **lively**?
- ▶ Is the detail given sufficient (i.e. not too much or too little).

Be sure you have given information that is **balanced and fair**

- ▶ Information that draws on more than one source can achieve this.
 - For example, if you are writing about a school trip, you should give more than your own opinion of the event. Giving a friend's view, or a boy's if you are a girl and vice versa – perhaps in the form of a couple of interesting and lively anecdotes – will provide a more rounded, and thus, a more genuinely informative account of what happened, so allowing a reader to draw his or her own conclusion.
 - Remember that usually people prefer to decide for themselves about a topic rather than be told what to think.

Be sure your information is **relevant to your audience's needs**

- ▶ A reader of information in an article expects it to be clear, interesting and honest.
- ▶ A reader of information in an informal letter expects it to be personal, lively and interesting.
- ▶ A reader of information in a formal letter expects it to be clear, polite and interesting.
- ▶ A reader of information in a leaflet will expect it to be easy to follow, useful and interesting.
- ▶ A listener to information in a speech expects it to be entertaining, lively and useful.
- ▶ A reader of biographical information will expect it to be truthful, confiding, interesting and lively.

Is your information **clear, organised and easy to absorb**?

- ▶ Information needs to be structured to help its reader follow and absorb it easily.
 - Write in clear and varied sentences that never end with a comma. Always use a full stop or semicolon.
 - Write in single topic paragraphs of four to five sentences. Except for effect avoid overly short paragraphs.
 - Use bullet points, numbered lists, etc. whenever appropriate to the form of writing and audience.
 - Give small chunks of information at a time so as not to overwhelm your reader.
 - Use anecdotes whenever they will help make the information balanced, clear and interesting.

Be sure to use a **suitable manner and tone**

- ▶ A reader who seeks information expects to believe and trust what they are reading, so information needs to be given in ways that make it appear truthful, fair, reassuring and confident.
 - To be easily absorbed, information needs to be interesting, so a lively style is important but you must decide just how formal or informal you should be by thinking of the needs of your specific audience.