

Writing Workshop

Assignment

Write an informative report about a historical subject.

Audience

Teacher, classmates, other students in your school.

RUBRIC

Evaluation Criteria

A successful informative report

1. conveys factual information, not the writer's feelings
2. includes accurately documented information from several sources
3. presents clearly organized information
4. presents a thesis, or controlling idea, supported by examples and explanations
5. ends by summarizing ideas or drawing an overall conclusion

SKILLS
FOCUS

Writing Skills
Write an informative report.

EXPOSITORY WRITING Informative Report

Research frequently begins with a question about some subject that interests you. The answers to your question may be found in a variety of informational sources that you will need to locate and investigate. The success of your report will depend on how well you select and use evidence to support your **thesis**, the controlling idea of your paper. In this workshop you'll find, organize, and present information about someone or something from history.

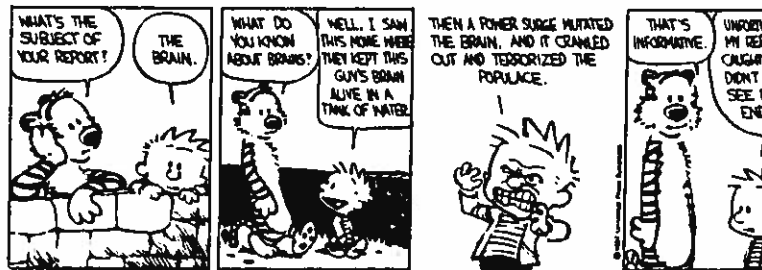
Prewriting

1 Choosing a Subject

Consider the following prompt:

The past is the key to the present. Through understanding people and events that have helped to shape history, we gain insight into our own times. Think of an influential individual or event to investigate as the subject of your informative report.

Brainstorm a list of possible historical figures or events to research. To keep your subject focused and manageable—not too broad—frame a question that will guide your research. For example, if you were to choose as your subject the Indian leader Mohandas K. Gandhi, you might ask this question: *How did Gandhi develop his philosophy of nonviolent resistance?* (See Student Model, pages 220–221.)



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Freewriting is a very good way to begin discovering your answer to this guide question. Remember, no one will see your freewrite but you, so you have complete freedom to explore your ideas. You'll find that you know more than you think you do about some aspects of your topic; you'll also find that you have gaps and lingering questions that will help you direct your research.

2 Finding and Evaluating Sources

Plan to use at least three sources of information for your report. Whenever possible, use **primary sources**, such as maps, diaries, and letters. **Secondary sources** are interpretations of primary materials. They include encyclopedia entries, newspaper articles, and documentaries. You can access both primary and secondary sources on a computer, and you may be able to get additional historical information from colleges, museums, government offices, and experts in the field.

Evaluate every source before you begin taking notes, using the following questions:

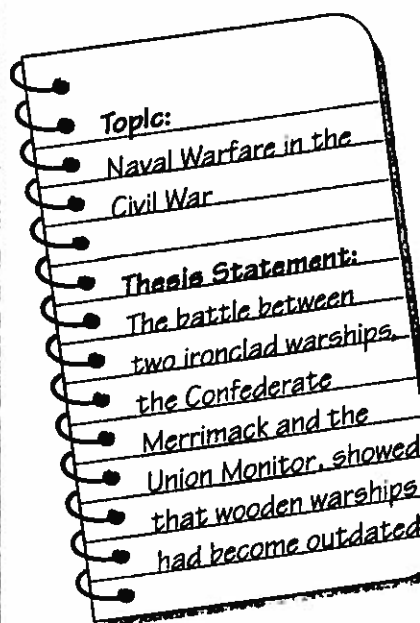
- Is the source factual (nonfiction)?
- Is the information up-to-date?
- Is the information trustworthy?

3 Taking Notes

- As you take notes, make a list of your sources, and give each source a number. Record each fact or idea on a separate note card or sheet of paper. Label every note with its source number and the page number(s) on which the information is located in that source.
- **Paraphrase**, or restate, information in your own words. If you wish to copy any material word for word, be sure to put quotation marks around it in your notes. You'll need to give credit to the original source for each quotation you use in your report and for each idea that is not your own.
- Keep your research question in mind as you write down facts, statistics, examples, and quotations that help answer the research question. Remember to stay focused on a very specific aspect of your subject area.

Questions to Guide Your Research

- How were our lives changed by a single individual or event?
- How did this individual contribute to or affect a moment in history?
- Why is this historical event important and memorable?



Framework for an Informative Report

- **Introduction:** Hooks reader's interest; clearly identifies subject of report
- **Body:** Discusses each main idea in one or more paragraphs; supports each main idea with facts, examples; and quotations
- **Conclusion:** Summarizes or restates main idea(s); draws conclusions
- **Bibliography:** Lists sources alphabetically



Communications
Handbook
HELP

*Listing Sources and Taking Notes
Summarizing, Paraphrasing,
and Outlining*



INTERNET

More Writer's
Models

Keyword: LE5 8-2

4 Writing a Thesis Statement

Your **thesis statement** tells what the point of the paper will be. It usually appears in your introductory paragraph. Your thesis should state both the topic of your paper and the most important conclusion you've drawn from your research.

5 Organizing the Report

Organize important information in an outline. Sort your notes into several major categories; then, divide them further into subtopics, each to be developed into a full paragraph. Decide how you will organize the information in your report—by order of importance or in chronological (time) order—and record your plan.

Your report should include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. In your conclusion, summarize and draw conclusions from the information you gathered. You may also raise unanswered questions.

Drafting

1 Getting Started

As you write, you may decide to rearrange your ideas, take out information, or add new information. Keep referring to your notes, and go back to your sources if you need more information.

Use your own words. If you quote from a source, be sure to give the writer credit. Using a writer's words without crediting the source is called **plagiarism**, or literary theft.

Student Model

This is an excerpt from a report about the Indian leader Mohandas K. Gandhi.

Gandhi was educated as a lawyer. Born in India, a country that was under British rule,

*Introduces,
describes
subject:
Gandhi.*

he became the principal leader of the drive for India's independence from Britain. Gandhi was a deeply religious man who believed in eliminating the oppression of his people by the British without the use of force.

According to the *World Book Encyclopedia*, Gandhi was educated in London and spent over twenty years practicing law in South Africa. During this period in South Africa, he chose to claim his rights as a British subject, but since he was Indian, he was discriminated against by the government. As was the custom, Gandhi was married at age thirteen to a wife chosen for him by his family. He was assassinated in 1948 at the age of seventy-eight.

The discrimination that Gandhi experienced during his life, and in particular the treatment he received while in South Africa, led him to believe that persons of all faiths, cultures, creeds, and beliefs should be able to live together equally. He used fasting to express this belief and once fasted for one week to get the Hindus and Muslims of India to stop fighting. As a result of that fast, the fighting stopped. Gandhi believed people could work out their disagreements through nonviolent confrontation, that is, without fighting.

— Spencer Duncan,
Topeka West High School,
Topeka, Kansas

States main idea: Gandhi's belief in non-violence.

Mentions source for more facts about Gandhi's life.

Tells what caused his beliefs.

Describes his use of fasting with a specific example and its results.

Restates main idea: Gandhi's belief in non-violence.

Strategies For Elaboration

In order to elaborate each main idea, look through your notes to find relevant:

- facts
- explanations
- specific examples
- quotations
- descriptions
- comparisons

Works Cited

Chatterjee, Patricia. Gandhi. New York: S.A.R. Publications, 1996.

Gandhi, Mohandas. Gandhi: An Autobiography. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

"Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand." The World Book Encyclopedia. 1998 ed.

2 Listing Sources

A **bibliography**—a list of works cited—should appear on a separate sheet of paper at the end of your report. You may use the Modern Language Association (MLA) style shown in