

Questioning Nonfiction

*Teaching Students How to Read and Write about Nonfiction
while Thinking Actively and Critically*

February 1, 2017—Nancy Steineke
SCIRA

- Personal Identity Webs**
- Interviewing: Key to Listening, Note Taking, and Academic Discussion**
- Content-Area Identity Webs**
- Picture Book Comparisons**
- Closely Reading an Image**
- Flip the Card: Before and After Thinking**
- Video Viewing with Note Taking**
- Written Conversation**
- What Makes Writing Easier?**

Notes

Partner Interview: Example

My Questions	Partner's Answers

Partner Interview

My Questions	Partner's Answers

Questioning Nonfiction

- How is the information different?
- How is the information the same, yet different?
- What information is left out?
- What does the artwork of a picture book convey about the topic?
- Why do some topics/subjects have lots of books/info while others do not?
- Who is the author/publisher?

Notes

Closely Reading an Image

As you view each section, observe the image details carefully and jot down what you see, think, or wonder.

The image shows a large rectangular frame divided into three equal horizontal sections by two dashed lines. This frame is intended for students to observe and record details from an image.

Avoiding gender bias in reference writing

Got a great student? Planning to write a super letter of reference?
Don't fall into these common traps based on unconscious gender bias.

Mention research & publications

Letters of reference for men are 4x more likely to mention publications and twice as likely to have multiple references to research. Make sure you put these critical accomplishments in every letter!

Don't stop now!

On average, letters for men are 16% longer than letters for women and letters for women are 2.5x as likely to make a minimal assurance ('she can do the job') rather than a ringing endorsement ('she is the best for the job').

Emphasize accomplishments, not effort

Letters for reference for men are more likely to emphasize accomplishments ('his research', 'his skills', or 'his career') while letters for women are 50% more likely to include 'grind-stone' adjectives that describe effort. 'Hard-working' associates with effort, but not ability.

We all share bias

It is important to remember that unconscious gender bias isn't a male problem. Research shows that women are just as susceptible to these common pitfalls as men. This is a problem for all of us - let's solve it together!

Keep it professional

Letters of reference for women are 7x more likely to mention personal life - something that is almost always irrelevant for the application.

Also make sure you use formal titles and surnames for both men and women.

Stay away from stereotypes

Although they describe positive traits, adjectives like 'caring', 'compassionate', and 'helpful' are used more frequently in letters for women and can evoke gender stereotypes which can hurt a candidate. And be careful not to invoke these stereotypes directly ('she is not emotional').

Be careful raising doubt

We all want to write honest letters, but negative or irrelevant comments, such as 'challenging personality' or 'I have confidence that she will become better than average' are twice as common in letters for female applicants. Don't add doubt unless it is strictly necessary!

Adjectives to avoid: Adjectives to include:

caring	successful
compassionate	excellent
hard-working	accomplished
conscientious	outstanding
dependable	skilled
diligent	knowledgeable
dedicated	insightful
tactful	resourceful
interpersonal	confident
warm	ambitious
helpful	independent
	intellectual

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Commission on the
Status of Women

Research from Trix, F & Psenka, C. Exploring the color of glass: Letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty. *Discourse & Society*, 2003; and Madera, JM, Hebl, MR, & Martin, RC. Gender and letters of Recommendation for Academia: Agentic and Communal Differences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2009.

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QUESTIONING NONFICTION
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TWO-COLUMN VIDEO NOTES

Information

(narration/dialogue/images)

Response

(thoughts and questions)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A WRITTEN CONVERSATION

- Form a group of four. Introduce topic, article, prompt, etc.
 - Each person please get a large blank piece of paper ready to use. Put your initials in the upper left-hand margin.
 - As we work, please follow these two rules:
 1. Use all the time for writing.
 2. Don't talk when passing.
 - Ready? Okay, write your thoughts, reactions, questions, or feelings about our topic. Keep your pen to the paper and keep writing until I call time. (*Keep time not by exact minutes and seconds, but by walking and watching kids write. When most students have filled 1/4 of a page, it is time to pass*).
 - Sign your name below what you wrote and pass your papers in a circle within the group. Decide which way the papers are going to go and stick to it. Now read the entry on the page, and just beneath it, write a response. Explain your reaction, make a comment, ask questions, share a connection you've made, agree or disagree, or raise a whole new idea. Just keep the conversation going!
 - Pass again, please. *Reiterate the instructions if needed. Especially about "no talking" while passing.* Remember, we are having a **silent** discussion here!
- Repeat and continue.*
- Now pass the papers back to the original owners. Read the whole thing over and see the conversation that **you** started.
As soon as kids are done reading and start talking – and they will – say:
 - Okay. Please feel free to continue the conversation out loud for a few minutes. Use your writings however they help you.
 - Let's gather as a whole class and see where this silent discussion took us. Will each group please share one highlight, one thread of their discussion? Something you spent time on, something that sparked lively discussion, maybe something you argued about or laughed about. Who'd like to share?
 - Now let's discuss this process. What worked for you and what made it hard? How could we make it better next time?

From Daniels, Zemelman, and Steineke: *Content-Area Writing: Every Teacher's Guide*
Heinemann, 2007.

WHAT MAKES WRITING EASIER

Classroom Conditions That Nurture Young Writers

1. Teachers often compose in front of students, explicitly modeling their own writing strategies.
2. Students engage in short, authentic writing tasks every day, in every class.
3. Students write to explore subject-matter content.
4. Writing topics are interesting, intriguing, significant, surprising, and/or discussable.
5. Writing assignments offer students choices in how to respond.
6. Students' writing products are used during class to advance the lesson.
7. Students regularly write for classmates, to get an immediate audience response.
8. Students use writing as a way to build working relationships with others.
9. Teachers withhold the red pen and focus on the writer's ideas.
10. Teachers assess short writings using the Good Faith Effort standard (see page 9).
11. Teachers periodically collect and review pieces to gauge engagement and thinking.
12. Teachers assign much more writing than they will read; they trust in unmonitored practice.
13. Students may write before, during, and after studying a topic.
14. Students write for purposes and audiences beyond the teacher's inbox.
15. Teachers break longer writing assignments into a series of doable steps.
16. Students recognize and emulate the craft techniques found in mentor texts.
17. Students write with an eye toward voice, creativity, originality, and humor.
18. Students use writing to explore and monitor their own thinking processes.
19. Students use writing to connect with peers.
20. Students use writing to take action in their communities—and around the world.

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