

Glossary of Nonfiction Terms

caption: A label or brief explanation that accompanies a photograph or an illustration.

central idea: A main point that the author is making (also called a main idea). In other words, it's what the article is about—similar to an objective summary, but even more basic. You can think of a central idea as a thesis statement: one sentence that states what the rest of the article is about. A text may have more than one central idea. A central idea can always be supported with details from the text, which can be in the form of a direct quotation or paraphrased (put into your own words). See also: *objective summary* and *supporting evidence*.

direct quotation: A report of the exact words of an author or a speaker. If you are writing an essay about a book that you read, for example, and you copy into your essay a phrase or sentence from the book, that is a direct quotation. Direct quotations often appear in nonfiction texts and are always surrounded by quotation marks (“ ”). See also: *paraphrase*.

headline: The title of an article in a newspaper or magazine or on a website. The headline is generally in larger type than the rest of the text on the page.

main idea: See *central idea*.

objective summary: *Objective* means “not influenced by personal feelings or interpretation” and a summary is a short statement that gives the main points or ideas of something. So an objective summary is a short statement or paragraph that tells what an article is about and does not include your opinions.

paraphrase: To reword or rephrase something written or spoken by someone else. When you paraphrase something, you are putting it into your own words. *Paraphrase* can also be used as a noun to refer to text that has been paraphrased. A paraphrase is *not* surrounded by quotation marks (“ ”). See also: *direct quotation*.

sidebar: A short article placed alongside a longer article and containing additional or contrasting information. Sidebars usually appear in a box.

subhead: The heading, or title, of a section of a text, sometimes called a subtitle. It's a title that comes after the headline and is usually in smaller print than the headline.

supporting evidence: Information used to support an argument or a claim (also called “supporting details”). If you are writing about something you have read, you need to use supporting evidence to back up or prove whatever point you are making. Most of your supporting evidence will be details from the text you are writing about, in the form of either direct quotations or paraphrases. Supporting evidence that comes directly from the text you are writing about is also called “text evidence.” See also: *direct quotation*, *paraphrase*, and *text evidence*.

text evidence: Supporting evidence that comes from the text you are writing about. It can be in the form of a direct quotation or paraphrase. See also: *supporting evidence*, *direct quotation*, and *paraphrase*.

text features: Parts of a newspaper article, magazine article, textbook, web page, or other type of text, beyond the main article or story, that help you better understand what you read. Text features may include information that is not included in the main text. Photographs, illustrations, captions, maps, sidebars, headlines, special types of print (such as print that appears in bold, capital letters, italics, or is underlined), subheads, tables of contents, sidebars, charts and graphs, bullet points, and glossaries are all examples of text features. See also: *caption*, *headline*, *sidebar*, *subhead*.

text structure: The way an author organizes information in a text. An entire text may have the same structure, but in many cases different sections or paragraphs of a text have different structures—in other words, one text may contain multiple structures. There are five main text structures:

1. **description:** The author provides a detailed description to give the reader a mental picture. If you see words and phrases like *for instance*, *such as*, *for example*, *including*, *is like*, *to illustrate*, and *characteristics*, those are clues that the text structure of what you are reading is description.
2. **sequence:** The author lists items or events in chronological order (in other words, in the order in which they happen) or presents the reader with step-by-step directions. If you see words and phrases like *first*, *second*, *third*, *next*, *then*, *before*, *later*, *finally*, *now*, *when*, *previously*, and *before long*, those are clues that the text structure of what you are reading is sequence.
3. **problem and solution:** The author presents a problem and explains one or more solutions to the problem. If you see words and phrases like *problem is*, *dilemma is*, *if . . . then*, *so that*, and *answer is*, those are clues that the text structure of what you are reading is problem and solution.

- 4. cause and effect:** The author presents ideas, events, or facts as a cause, and what happens as a result. If you see words and phrases like *so, because, since, therefore, if . . . then, this led to, reason why, as a result, effect of, and consequently*, those are clues that the text structure of what you are reading is cause and effect.
- 5. compare and contrast:** The author provides information about the similarities and differences between two or more people, events, ideas, objects, etc. If you see words and phrases like *same as, similar, alike, as well as, although, also, in the same way, either . . . or, in comparison, but, on the other hand, however, and in contrast*, those are clues that the text structure of what you are reading is compare and contrast.