

First—narrow your theme to the most specific idea possible.

Use the appropriate writing techniques to present your theme. What type of piece you're writing, what you're writing about, who you're writing for, and the reason you're writing the piece all determine which writing techniques you can incorporate into your work. A list of possible techniques and the forms of writing you can incorporate them in follows:

- **Narration.** Narration means to present facts and details in an organized, usually chronological fashion to tell what happened and who it happened to. Narration is used in most newspaper articles and commonly in stories told in the first person.
- **Description.** Description is the use of words that invoke the senses to build an image in the reader's mind of the item being described. Description is particularly powerful in fiction as a substitute for narration: instead of saying a character was angry, you describe the character as having bulging eyes, flared nostrils, and a beet-red face, and use "thundered," "shouted," or "screamed" in place of "said" to describe the character's voice.
- **Definition.** Definition explains the meaning of a word, term, or topic. Definition can be used in any piece of writing where the reader needs to have something explained to further his or her understanding of the work as a whole.
- **Classification.** Related to definition, classification is the grouping of similar things together. Classification is used more often in non-fiction than in fiction; one use might be in an article on digital cameras where the cameras are organized by manufacturer, by type (point-and-shoot or digital SLR), by features, or by price.
- **Comparison and contrast.** Comparison is showing the similarities of 2 or more things, while contrast is showing the differences between 2 or more things. Comparison and contrast can be used in both fiction and non-fiction, such as the lifestyles of the protagonists in Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper" or a side-by-side comparison of laptop computer features.

- **Analogy.** A form of comparison and contrast, the analogy compares something familiar to something unfamiliar to explain the unfamiliar item, as Jesus did when comparing the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed.
- **Symbolism.** Symbolism is using something to represent something else, such as the storm gathering around Roderick Usher's house in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," representing Usher's own disquiet after his sister's burial. Symbolism is more common in fiction than non-fiction and requires the reader to be familiar with the symbols you use and their intended meaning.
- **Cause and effect.** Cause and effect shows why something happened or presents the consequences of an event. Cause and effect can be written as a description of an event followed by its consequences, such as the Irish potato blight of the 1840s leading to large-scale starvation, unrest, and mass emigration to North America. It can also be written as the description an event followed by the causes that precipitated it, such as the Irish potato blight being caused by the transmission of the disease in ships from North America or the Irish people's planting only a few varieties of potato that were susceptible to the blight. Cause and effect is used less in fiction than in non-fiction, but cause and effect forms the backbone of many science fiction stories ("what-if" stories based on different societal norms or alternate histories) and murder mysteries.
- **Process analysis.** Process analysis is commonly used in technical writing to describe how to do something (help files, user manuals, and wikiHow articles), how something happens, or how something works. Process analysis is often written as steps placed in the order in which they are performed or the order in which they occur naturally.
- **Illustration.** Illustration means to explain a statement by using specific examples. An example of illustration is given above in the point on cause and effect by using the Irish potato blight as a cause and showing its effects and as an effect by showing its causes.