

Fetch me a pen

Approaching Written Genres

Task: Read the texts below and consider these three questions:

- In which subject might these texts be encountered?
- Can you identify the 'genre' of writing? How do you know?
- Can you begin to pick out features of this writing? It might help to compare the texts to others.

Text 1

That night, I had an uneasy sleep. Strange noises emanated from downstairs. It sounded like toenails clicking back and forth on the floor. It must be Bunnicula making his midnight run, I thought, although I'd never known him to make a sound. And I smelled the funniest odor in the air—something familiar, though I couldn't place it. As the night progressed, it grew stronger and stronger until finally it tickled my nose and I sneezed myself awake. I jumped off Toby's bed, still sniffing, and headed down the stairs for the living room to find Chester, to see if he could smell it, too.

Text 2

Organisms made up of one or more cells that have a nucleus and membrane-bound organelles are called eukaryotes. Eukaryotic cells also have a variety of subcellular structures called organelles - well-defined, intracellular bodies that perform specific functions for the cell.

Text 3

In retrospect, the Volstead Act was hopelessly inadequate, because it grossly underestimated the willingness of the lawbreakers to risk conviction, the degree of human ingenuity displayed to get around its provisions, and the ease with which the lawbreakers would be able to subvert all those whose job was to enforce it. Above all, its failure resulted from a naïve American belief in the effectiveness of law.

Text 4

If a rectangular solid has side, front and bottom faces with areas of $2x$, $y/2$ and xy cm^2 respectively, what is the volume of the solid in centimetres cubed?

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Task: Match up the task up to the descriptors. How familiar are you with the terms used in the descriptors? Can you begin to make sense of them having matched them up to the texts?

Text 1 (children's story) Howe, D., & Howe, J. (1979). *Bunnica: A rabbit tale of mystery*. New York: Scholastic.

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Text 2 (KS4-level Science textbook): *Modern Biology*. (2006). Columbus, OH: Glencoe.

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Text 3 (historical account): Behr, E. (1996). *Prohibition: Thirteen years that changed America*. New York: Arcade.

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Text 4 (KS4-level Science textbook): *Science explorer: Life science*. (2001). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

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a) This text is populated with nominalisations—that is, nouns derived from verbs or adjectives. They repackage processes (normally expressed by verbs) and qualities (normally expressed by adjectives) into things (expressed in nouns).

b) Uses technical vocabulary and also everyday vocabulary which takes on a different meaning in this context. Begins with a conditional conjunction.

c) Contains nontechnical vocabulary and simple clauses that are linked into sentences through coordination (*and*) or subordination (*as*, *although*, *until*). The text replicates patterns of speech.

d) Contains a heavy load of technical vocabulary - Sentences contain embedded clauses that form long noun phrases. For example, the first sentence contains two embedded clauses.

All extracts are cited in Fang, Zhihui; Schleppegrell, Mary J. (2010). "Disciplinary Literacies Across Content Areas: Supporting Secondary Reading Through Functional Language Analysis." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 53(7).