

# Practising non-fiction text features



## The passive voice or impersonal writing

Non-fiction writing often uses the passive voice – that is, the tone is impersonal, e.g. *The ingredients are mixed* rather than *First you mix the ingredients*. This tone is important because it gives an air of authority to the account you are writing, but it needs practice. It is very easy to slip into a more casual and personal tone.

Practise writing impersonally by working through these examples.

Re-write these sentences. Can you identify what text type is being used?

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When you are making a cake you have to remember to heat up the oven first. Heat it up to about 190 °C and then, while you are mixing the ingredients, it is heating up nicely.

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2

Lots of people think that smoking is bad for you and I agree. They think that it can damage your lungs and I have read research from doctors that confirms this view.

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3

When you are playing snakes and ladders, you and the other players have to take it in turns to throw the dice. If you land on a square with a ladder on, it's good news and you go up. But if you land on a snake, you have to travel down the snake. Bad luck!

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## Informal and formal description

Non-fiction writing requires an impersonal, authoritative tone. Using the passive voice is important, and so is appropriate description. Do not use description that is

- 1) flowery and/or atmospheric – this is more appropriate for some types of fiction writing;
- 2) informal 'street talk' – use adjectives carefully.

Re-write these sentences using appropriate description.

- 1 School uniform can cast many a teenager into the depths of despair. It's unflattering, uncool and shabby. How can you look your best for school in these harsh, scratchy and dull materials?

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- 2 If you have ever walked down a dirty, litter-strewn street, with fast-food wrappings blowing about wistfully in the wind, you will understand and empathise with me over the problem of litter.

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- 3 Even picking up the fresh bread can get your tastebuds going when you're making a sandwich. Of course, getting soft, creamy butter and delicious, home-made jam is important too, for the best in home sandwich creation.

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- 4 Walking home alone one dark, gloomy and rainy night, Nadia was surprised to find herself surrounded by young, aggressive-looking men. It was obvious that they only wanted one thing – her mobile phone!

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