

# Nonfiction Unit

You are going to learn to comprehend and evaluate nonfiction, paying attention to the following:

1. identify main ideas and supporting details
2. distinguish fact from opinion, fiction from nonfiction, or both
3. identify bias, point of view, and author's intent
4. identify relevant background information
5. analyze and evaluate the credibility of evidence and source and the logic of reasoning

**First... what do these things mean? Think of two things: the definition and *why* it might be important in analyzing and evaluating a nonfiction piece of writing.**

## **main ideas and supporting details**

definition:

*The points the article makes and arguments to back them up.*

why it might be important:

*There is a problem if all the support is opinion, not facts OR  
If no support is given—weak argument!*

## **fact and opinion**

definition:

*Fact—based on studies, research, etc. Can be proven  
Opinion—author's belief or someone else's belief. Should still  
have support, but can't treat as fact!*

why it might be important:

*Author may try to make opinions sound like fact or only have  
opinions to back up main ideas. Again, weak arguments!*

## **fiction and nonfiction**

definition:

why it might be important:

## **bias**

definition:

why it might be important:

**point of view**

definition:

why it might be important:

**author's intent**

definition:

why it might be important:

**relevant background information**

definition:

why it might be important:

**credibility of evidence and source**

definition:

why it might be important:

**logic of reasoning**

definition:

why it might be important:

From the STAR TRIBUNE  
Thursday, December 6, 2001  
Commentary Section

### **A worrisome upswing on student cheating**

By Donald McCabe

For more than a decade, I have surveyed high school and college students about cheating, and the findings are discouraging. Many students cheat; cheating is on the rise; students find it easy to rationalize, and many teachers and administrators have given up trying to control it. Few parents discuss the issue at home, and some apply so much pressure to achieve high grades that their children resort to cheating even when they believe it's wrong.

In a recent survey of high school students, 74 percent admitted that they had copied, used forbidden notes or helped someone else cheat on a test. Seventy-two percent acknowledged at least one incident of serious cheating on a written assignment. In a survey of 2,200 students at 21 colleges conducted two years ago, one-third of the students admitted to an incident of serious test cheating; about half admitted to cheating on written assignments. Research shows that the number of students engaging in the most serious forms of test cheating has doubled since the 1960s in high school and college.

Students place the blame for this phenomenon on society and people in positions of authority. Consider the view of this high school junior from Massachusetts: "To be successful in the world today people must cut corners, cheat, and backstab...Everybody cheats. Just not everybody gets caught." The view of a student at one of our most prestigious universities is even more telling: "In the real world, there are few rules and people cheat all of the time. It is a very competitive world, and when you are in a competitive environment, you do what it takes to win, whether it be cheating or whatever." Or consider the view of a student at a major university in the West: "Due to the fact that adults...are unwilling to stand up and be accountable for the truth, as an example to youth, how can we expect the children to do anything else?"

While students have cheated for generations, the ease with which they are able to justify their behavior by blaming it on others is a more recent and worrisome phenomenon. It's even easier when they see teachers and administrators themselves accused of cheating, for example those charged with improperly administering state-mandated standardized math and reading tests in order to boost scores.

Adding to the confusion, what students and teachers view as cheating often differs. Nowhere is this more confusing than with the use of the Internet. Some students view anything on the Internet as public information and feel free to save text from a Web site and "paste" it into an assignment without citing the source. Even when they know this is inappropriate, students believe they are well ahead of teachers when it comes to understanding the Internet, and they see little risk in plagiarizing.

Students also receive mixed messages at home. For example, in a recent survey, one in five high school students acknowledged that they had submitted for credit work that had been done primarily by their parents. While such assistance might be appropriate in elementary school, parents who are doing assignments for children in high school are sending a message that grades are paramount and how you achieve them doesn't matter.

Of course, many of these attitudes are not new. Cheating has always been a part of school. What is worrisome is that increasingly students view education as just a hurdle that needs to be negotiated to get to the next level, whether that's earning a diploma, gaining admission to college or graduate school or getting a job interview. When education is viewed as simply a means to an end, it is not surprising that so many students cheat. And for many, there's a sense of entitlement that they deserve to be at that next level. If they have to cheat a bit to get there, so be it.

But the future is not all bleak. In high schools and on college campuses, an increasing number of students and faculty are taking action. Students who are willing to work hard and be honest are becoming frustrated with the lack of response to high levels of cheating. So are teachers who truly care about what their students learn. In some cases, a cheating scandal has gotten things moving. In others, someone has heard about the successful efforts of another school.

A catalyst for a number of colleges has been the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke, a consortium of schools attempting to foster greater academic integrity. No one has found a universal solution, but there are some common elements in most successful efforts.

The most effective first step a teacher or parent can take to reduce cheating is to simply talk to students. Let them know the issue is important, outline expectations and work to convince them of the relevance and learning value of tests and assignments. Research suggests that cheating begins in a serious way in junior high school. Leaving the security of a classroom where a single teacher nurtures them, students move into an environment where peers are a much greater influence.

Any effort to impose a standard of academic integrity on students without their involvement in the rulemaking seems doomed to fail. But research suggests that focused and ongoing efforts that involve students can persuade them to take responsibility for academic dishonesty and to modify their behavior. Of course, with the strong counterpressures students experience from society, no one should expect such change to happen easily or quickly.

We will never stop all students from cheating. But many colleges have demonstrated that you can reduce serious cheating to a level where most students feel they are not being unfairly disadvantaged by the cheating of others and are willing to support school policies on academic integrity.

Maybe it's time we trusted our students more and replaced some of our effort to police academic dishonesty with efforts to help students understand the value of academic integrity. We just might reduce the level of cheating while also developing values in our students that will make them better citizens when they graduate.

**Donald McCabe, a professor of organization management at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, N.J., wrote this article for *Newsday*.**

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## Practice as a Class

Analyze the following article: “A Worrisome Upswing on Student Cheating”

What is the **main idea**? and What are the **supporting details**?

Are the supporting details **facts** or **opinions**? Why does this matter?

Is this piece **fiction** or **nonfiction**? How do you know?

Look to see who the author is and what his job is. How would his job lead to possible **bias**?

Are all **points of view** present in the article? If not, who is represented and who is not?

What section of the paper is this article found in? What is the **author’s intent**?

What **relevant background information** do we need to know that isn’t present?

Looking at who wrote the article, discuss the **credibility of evidence and source**.

Is there **logic of reasoning** in the article? Or are there big “jumps” made?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **On your own!**

Analyze the following article: \_\_\_\_\_

**main ideas and supporting details**

**fact and opinion**

**fiction and nonfiction**

**bias**

**point of view**

**author's intent**

**relevant background information**

**credibility of evidence and source**

**logic of reasoning**