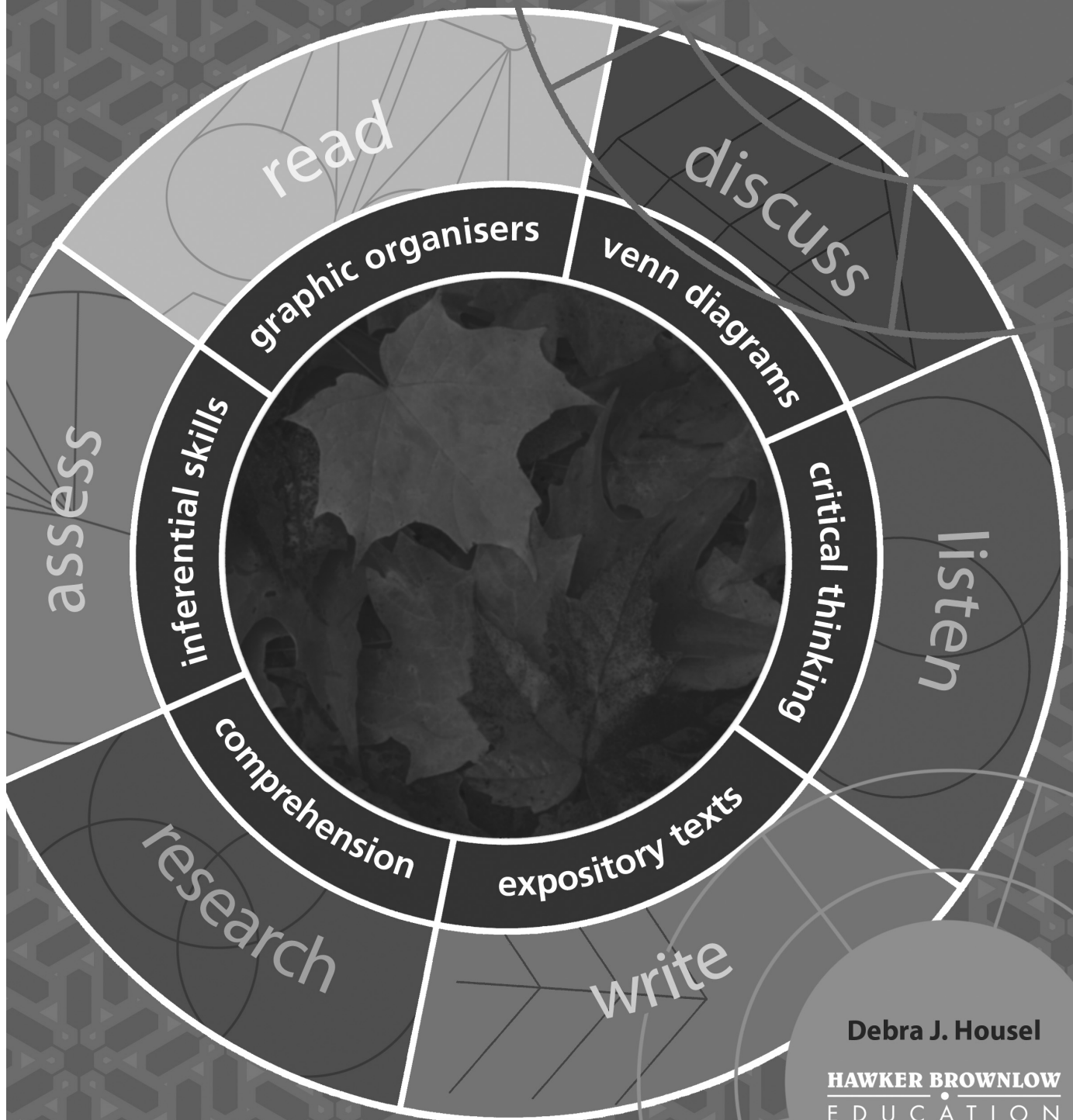


Nonfiction Strategies

years
4-8



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EDUCATION

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Introduction

The ability to handle nonfiction information effectively has greater importance today than ever before in human history. Over 75 percent of all materials that are written, published or available in electronic form on the Internet are nonfiction. So much expository text exists that many refer to it as an ‘information explosion’. Clearly your students need instruction that teaches them how to read, write, discuss, research, remember and listen to information. *Nonfiction Strategies* will help you to prepare them for these prerequisites for success in the 21st century.

Organisation of this book

Mastery of nonfiction comprehension skills comes from regular, meaningful practice over a period of time. The five steps of scaffolded instruction (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2001) provide a guide for teaching any nonfiction skill:

1. Identify and set standards-based goals.
2. Model the learning behaviour.
3. Provide guided practice (lead the students through the process).
4. Provide independent practice (gradually release responsibility to the learners).
5. Assess student learning and performance.

Nonfiction Strategies supports all aspects of scaffolded instruction. It contains seven major strategy sections and a bibliography. The strategy sections include quick and easy ideas that you can implement in 15 minutes or less, as well as strategies that encompass an entire lesson or unit. Every strategy section includes at least two graphic organisers.

- **Preparing students for nonfiction** gives ideas and strategies that will develop students’ vocabulary, knowledge and prediction capabilities.
- **Reading nonfiction** offers techniques for helping students to comprehend what they read in expository texts.
- **Discussing nonfiction** outlines ways to organise and facilitate effective and thought-provoking whole-group, small-group and partner discussions. Discussion prompts offer critical-thinking questions so students will grapple with issues using their higher-order thinking skills.
- **Listening to nonfiction** offers a variety of specific strategies proven to enhance your students’ critical-listening skills and ability to glean key information and essential details from lectures, speeches and audiovisual presentations.
- **Writing nonfiction** recommends ways to develop your students’ ability to write both formal and informal expository pieces.

Introduction (cont.)

- **Researching nonfiction** provides a systematic approach that scaffolds your students' abilities to conduct research and prepare accurate, engaging presentations and written reports.
- **Assessing students' nonfiction comprehension** presents a wealth of ideas for authentically evaluating students' nonfiction understanding. This section takes you beyond the confines of traditional paper-and-pencil objective tests by explaining how to create and use a portfolio system in addition to providing five assessment tools.
- **Resources** list all the journal articles and books cited. These provide primary source information for many of the strategies.

How to use this book

The strategies can be used to enrich any unit in any subject. Skim *Nonfiction Strategies* to familiarise yourself with its contents. Then choose a way to use the book most effectively that works for you. Here are some possibilities:

- Decide which kind of skill(s) your students will need for the particular expository selection. For example, you may choose one strategy from Preparing students for nonfiction, another from Reading nonfiction, and a third from Discussing nonfiction for the same topic or unit.
- Use the activities as introductory or review tasks if you become aware of the need for students to improve certain skills.
- Work through a particular section across a term or unit of work in order to focus on the development of specific skills.
- Make the book available in the classroom for students who wish to practice a strategy in preparation for a project or test.

SECTION 1

Preparing students for nonfiction

Successfully teaching nonfiction means ‘arousing the curiosity of students, assessing their present understandings, exploring with them some of the possibilities for study about the topic, and . . . setting the stage for learning to take place’ (Parker, 2001). This section gives you techniques for getting students to think about what they already know so that they will take in new information and incorporate it into their store of knowledge. The larger a person’s store of information, the more apt they are to successfully comprehend and learn new material.

Nonfiction text is packed with both concepts and vocabulary. Before students can truly comprehend nonfiction material, you must always activate their background knowledge (schema). If your students are unfamiliar with a topic you are about to study, it is even more crucial for you to spend time building their knowledge foundation.

Competent readers and listeners interact with information, consciously thinking of questions, revising predictions and eliminating misconceptions. For information to enter long-term memory, students must not only integrate new data with their previous store of knowledge, they must also be able to transfer this new knowledge to different or new situations. In addition, authors expect readers to use their own experiences and knowledge to interact with information. Therefore, your students must learn the inferential skills necessary to ‘read between the lines’ and understand implied ideas that are not stated. For methods of developing students’ inferential skills, see the Reading nonfiction section.

In this section:

Introducing nonfiction

- ★ Read alouds
- ★ Word association
- ★ Think alouds
- ★ Distinguishing between fact and fiction
- ★ Teaching inferential skills
- ★ Signal words
- ★ Text structure

Activating background knowledge

- ★ Free association
- ★ Quick writes
- ★ Schema activation plan
- ★ Anticipation guide
- ★ Concept organisation

Introducing a topic

- ★ A picture is worth a thousand words
- ★ Analogy as an introduction
- ★ Categorising
- ★ You’re in the picture
- ★ Thinking guide
- ★ Advanced organiser

Extending vocabulary

- ★ Introducing new vocabulary
- ★ Unlock the meanings of new words
- ★ Important word parts in English
- ★ List-group-label
- ★ Word trees
- ★ Semantic matrix
- ★ Knowledge rating

Thinking guide

Thinking guides (Herber, 1978) give your students a preview of the important concepts or issues that will be raised in an article. It also gets them to compare what they think about issues to what the author thinks. Fill in the thinking guide graphic organiser on page 28 with five statements which relate to the article you are about to read with your students. Photocopy and distribute the guide. Read the statements to the students to avoid decoding issues. In the **Me** column, the student writes an 'A' for 'agree' if they believe the statement is true or a 'D' for 'disagree' if they believe the statement is wrong.

After reading the passage, the student fills in the **Author** column. Then the student writes a paragraph about what was learned. The following is an example.

Directions: Read each statement. Write an **A** if you agree or a **D** if you disagree. You will fill in the author information and 'What did you learn?' after reading.

	Me	Author
1. There isn't much we can do to stop disease.	D _____	D _____
2. Everyone in the world faces the same danger from disease	A _____	D _____
3. Today's diseases are much worse than those in the past.	A _____	D _____
4. A deadly disease is called an epidemic.	A _____	D _____
5. Vaccines can prevent the spread of disease.	A _____	A _____

What did you learn?

People who live in Third World countries, who have weakened immune systems, or who engage in unhealthy behaviours face the highest risk of disease. An epidemic is a deadly disease that spreads throughout a population. Today's epidemics – even AIDS – are no worse than smallpox or the bubonic plague.

Main ideas and supporting details: Greek temple

