



Lesson 1.2

Thinking like a Reader

Every once in a while, a great writing idea pops into your head, already narrowed down and crystal clear. When that happens, reach for the nearest pencil or keyboard! If your idea is still a little fuzzy, however, you might reach instead for something called a T-table. A T-table is a graphic organizer that can help writers *and* readers focus on thoughts and feelings. In this lesson, you'll start out as a reader, using a T-table to record your responses. Then, as a writer, you'll use the same graphic to capture the thoughts and feelings you hope *your* readers will have.

A Nonfiction Example: *Undaunted Courage*

This example of informational writing comes from Stephen E. Ambrose's book *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*. In this passage, Ambrose talks about startling changes that occurred in America between 1800 and 1860. Read the passage. Then use the T-table that follows to record what you **see** and **feel** as you read. (Just write notes, not whole sentences.)

Since the birth of civilization, there had been almost no changes in commerce or transportation. Americans lived in a free and democratic society, the first in the world since ancient Greece, a society that read Shakespeare and had produced George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, but a society whose technology was barely advanced over that of the Greeks. The Americans of 1801 had more gadgets, better weapons, a superior knowledge of geography, and other advantages over



the ancients, but they could not move goods or themselves or information by land or water any faster than had the Greeks and Romans. . .

But only sixty years later, when Abraham Lincoln took the Oath of Office as the sixteenth president of the United States, Americans could move bulky items in great quantity farther in an hour than Americans of 1801 could do in a day, whether by land (twenty-five miles per hour on railroads) or water (ten miles an hour upstream on a steamboat). This great leap forward in transportation—a factor of twenty or more—in so short a space of time must be reckoned as the greatest and most unexpected revolution of all—except for another technological revolution, the transmitting of information. In Jefferson’s day, it took six weeks to move information from the Mississippi River to Washington, D.C. In Lincoln’s, information moved over the same route by telegraph all but instantaneously.

Undaunted Courage
by Stephen E. Ambrose

What I See

What I Feel



Reflection

Do you think that author Stephen E. Ambrose planned or hoped for you to see and feel certain things? Share your thoughts here.

Another Example: "A Toast to Traditions"

This writing sample comes from a student writer. Read it carefully. Then use the T-table for this piece to record your thoughts and feelings. Since this is a personal narrative, what you feel or see in your mind as you read may be very different from your response to the Ambrose piece.

A Toast to Traditions

My family is very big on traditions. Thanksgiving, always a big holiday in our house, is loaded with them.

For one thing, dinner is always at *my* grandparents' house. It's very small and crowded for 20 of us, but squeezing into a tiny space is part of the tradition. We have a family toast where we clink glasses and all say, "*Zum Bahnhof!*" (which means something like "to the train station" in German). My grandmother loved to say this as a little girl—and the saying lives on.

We always have turkey—and part of our tradition is for Grandpa to complain about the "round bottomed" platter as he carves. The turkey wobbles back and forth precariously—but he won't use anything else.

One tradition I could forego is the vegetable aspic salad. (Imagine wiggly, brownish gelatin with vegetables and olives—every kid's favorite.) It looks and tastes disgusting, but everyone has to take one bite. No excuses.



Traditions, like them or not, are strangely comforting—maybe because they’re predictable. As much as I hate aspic salad, its lingering flavor is fixed in my mind as part of our Thanksgiving tradition.

What I See

What I Feel

Reflection

Do you think the author of this personal narrative planned for readers like you to see and feel certain things? Share your thoughts here.

Connecting to the Traits

Whether it’s a personal narrative or an informational piece, some writing creates clear pictures or impressions in the reader’s mind. The writer clearly knows the topic well. That’s the trait of _____ in action.

With some writing, the reader senses a strong commitment to the topic. The writer cares deeply about the message and seems to want the reader to feel the same way. That’s the trait of _____ in action.



T-Off, In Reverse

You've been using a T-table to record your impressions as a reader. As a writer, you can also use it to plan. It's a way of getting in touch with your readers, imagining how you'd like them to think and feel as they read your work. Begin by choosing an idea. Write about anything that is on your mind right now, or use our list to help you think of a topic:

- Traditions I love—or would change if I could
- A memory linked to my grandparents
- Recent changes in technology
- Changes in transportation
- A food I could live without

The Two-Minute Conference

Meet with a partner and talk about your idea, either sharing information or telling your story. Take two minutes—no more. Then let your partner share with you, listening carefully for two minutes and asking questions.

T-table Planning

Using the T-table that follows, write notes to yourself about four to six things you really want/need readers to clearly *see* in their minds as they read your piece. Then describe the *feelings* you want your readers to have about your topic as they read. Remember—no sentences, just short notes.



What I Want
Readers to See

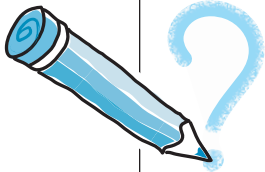
What I
Want Readers
to Think or Feel

From Planning to Drafting

Use your own paper to begin this piece of writing. Go as far as you can in about 15 minutes. Remember to

- focus on what you want the reader to *see*.
- think about how you want the reader to *feel*.
- look back at your T-table if you get stuck.

Hint: Think like a reader. Write what you would want to read.



A Writer's Questions

Could a T-table also be useful in guiding revision?



Putting It to the Test

Would a T-table be a good prewriting strategy to use in a writing assessment? How so?