What Kinds of Documents Will I Read in Real Life?

Let’s say you want to see a movie. Besides finding out the time and place, you might want to read reviews, get information about the cast and director, and reserve seats. You’ll be reading many types of informational documents, such as the ones below.

**Workplace Documents**

The odds are good that in the next thirty years you will hold a variety of jobs. The job you volunteer for at age thirteen will probably be very different from the one you accept at age forty. Whether you are taking orders at a restaurant or giving orders to a staff of a thousand, your job will likely require you to read for information. When earning a living is involved, that information is important. The workplace documents you will read serve two basic functions: communication and instruction.

**Communication** E-mails, memorandums (memos), and reports will tell you about upcoming meetings, changes in policy, and other important information you need to know in order to do your job. Letters of application and résumés will help you find a job.

**Instruction**

Employee manuals tell what is expected of you on the job. User guides teach you how to operate the equipment you use.

**Public Documents**

Public documents contain information about public agencies and community groups. They can be about voting issues, health concerns, and many other subjects. They tell about situations, decisions, responsibilities, schedules, occasions, and interesting events. You’ll use public documents if you work with a government agency, school, park, or library. Public documents inform people what is happening in their community, city, state, nation, and even on the planet.

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**Resources**

- **Collection 6 Resources**, Info Text Focus Skill Builder, p. 3
- **PowerNotes**, interactive lesson presentations with activities
- **Teacher One Stop**, on-level lesson plans and all print resources

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**Differentiating Instruction**

**English-Language Learners/ Readers Gaining Proficiency**

Organize students into pairs and have them look at various documents, such as contracts, television manuals, computer warranties, furniture assembly instructions, feature sheets for products, or résumés. Then, have them classify each document using the bold words on these two pages. Make sure that students discuss their reasoning and point out examples from the documents that back up their choices. Have each group share one of their documents with the class.
Consumer Documents

A consumer is someone who buys something or uses what someone else buys. That covers just about everyone: you, your friends—even a baby. The things consumers buy fall into two basic categories: goods (stuff) and services (help).

Many goods are simple to use. You don’t need an instruction manual to figure out what to do with a candy bar! More complicated goods may not be so easy to use. Let’s say you buy a computer. Now what? You’ll need some information to get your computer up and running. Therefore, the computer package will include consumer documents to give you the information you need to set up and operate your computer. The documents also define legal rights and responsibilities—yours, those of the company that made the computer, and those of the company that sold it.

- **Product information** on the box or label will tell you if an item is what you want. Is the shirt washable? Does the CD player have the features you want? Read to find out.
- **Contracts** spell out exactly what services will and will not be provided. Contracts are generally binding once you or your parent or guardian sign them. So read carefully before you do.
- **Warranties** guarantee that a product will work for a specified period of time. They also spell out what happens if it doesn’t work properly and what you have to do to receive service.
- **Instruction manuals** tell how to set up and use a product. If you break the product because you didn’t read the instructions carefully, you’ll be responsible for the damage.
- **Technical directions** give precise technical information about installing and assembling a product.

Technical Directions

Directions are important for many activities. You may need to follow them when you cook, dance, exercise, play sports, sing, or play music. **Technical directions** are the kind you follow when you assemble or operate any kind of scientific, mechanical, or electronic device. If you skip a step or perform one out of order, the device may not work or may even break, so read the directions carefully. When following technical directions, it is a good idea to:

- read the directions all the way through before you begin
- check off the steps one by one as you complete them
- compare your work with the diagrams and drawings for each step

Your Turn Analyze Documents

In your Reader/Writer Notebook, write four headings at the top of two pages: Workplace Documents and Public Documents on one page, and Consumer Documents and Technical Directions on the other page. Under each heading, list all the documents of that type you think you might need to use sometime soon. Put check marks next to any you have already used or can find in your home or classroom. Add items (and check marks) as you think of them and as you read the documents in this collection.

Advanced Learners

**Acceleration** Provide students with an example of a consumer document, such as a warranty or a set of technical directions. Assign each student a small section of the document and have him or her paraphrase the text in his or her Reader/Writer Notebooks. Have students discuss the challenges and benefits of paraphrasing this type of document.

Guided Practice

**Public Documents**

- Use or create a flyer that gives information about a school event to model reading a public document.
- You might point out that when reading a flyer about Drama Club tryouts, the most important information is *when* and *where* the tryouts are being held and *how* to prepare.

**Consumer Documents**

- Have students read the section about consumer documents.
- Then, ask the class the following questions: Which document would you use to set up a new alarm clock? Which would you read if the alarm clock broke soon after you purchased it?

Assess

Independent Practice

**Your Turn**

Possible responses: Workplace Documents: employee handbooks, work schedules; Public Documents: flyers, public health fact sheets; Consumer Documents: warranties, product descriptions; Technical Directions: recipes, product manuals

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