

Tip Sheet: Literary Techniques for Nonfiction Writers



Whether it's marketing copy or memoir, history or biography, your nonfiction content will engage readers' attention through use of literary techniques like these.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

- **Simile and metaphor:** Comparisons with or without the use of "like" or "as" -
The council's silence, like a heavy blanket, smothered the listeners' hope for change.
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerating for effect -
No one ever turned down a ChocoLatte Bar.
- **Personification:** Giving nonhuman objects human characteristics or behavior -
Let the fragrance embrace you.
- **Symbolism:** Letting one thing stand for another -
Wall Street went wild.

PATTERNS

- **Rhythm:** Read your words aloud to see if the rhythm suits your context.
Buy now. Pay later. Enjoy always.
They basked in gentle sunsets on a beach of golden sand.
- **Rhyme:** Used carefully, rhyme can make your text memorable -
Set it and forget it.
- **Assonance:** Repeating vowel sounds in a series of words -
No more dimly lit interiors!
- **Alliteration:** Repeating initial consonant sounds -
King Corn came in close behind soybeans this week.
- **Asyndeton:** A list with no conjunction -
Our band plays jazz, blues, rock.
- **Polysyndeton:** A list with a conjunction between each word -
Overwhelmed by bills for maintenance and repairs and permits and fuel?

STRUCTURE - FROM SENTENCE TO STORY

- **Sentence length:** Vary sentence lengths to create your desired effect -

Long sentences convey a slow-moving, relaxed, and somewhat sophisticated feeling.

Short sentences pack a punch. Fragments, too.

- **The Rule of Three:** Use any technique three times to establish a pattern. (Then stop.)

His memoir was edgy, enthralling, entertaining. Unfortunately, it was also a lie.

You'll love it. You'll crave it. You'll demand it. And it's in every dish we serve.

- **Narrative Arc**

Narrative nonfiction follows a “character” from recognizing a need or problem, through overcoming obstacles despite setbacks, to resolving the problem and emerging changed. Good copywriting will also create a trajectory: from your audience’s pain point, up an escalating sense of need, to the climactic discovery that you are the solution they’ve been looking for.

Worried about your aging parents eating right? What if you could get piping-hot, nutritionally balanced meals dependably delivered to their door? Don't let Mom and Dad go hungry one more day. Call Backdoor Banquet today. We help everyone feel better.

- **Diction**

Carefully choose your words to convey the tone of your message or brand. Compare these real-life marketing examples:

"Here, guests can expect to find comfort in simplicity, a profound respect for individual ingredients, gracious hospitality, and a rich nod to history in every detail."

[from <https://bellecourrestaurant.com/about/>]

"We launched this joint in 2004 with a burger love hotter than our griddle and deeper than our fryer. Kinda sizzly like that too."

[from <https://myburgerusa.com/>]