

TAURANGA WRITERS

Dr. Trevor Bentley 'On Writing History'

Sunday Focus Session 19th August 2018

Handout 1

Types of Historical Writing

The type of history we choose usually requires a specific type of historical writing. Just as historians have divided history into various types, they have also divided historical writing into various types. These are analytical, narrative and depictive writing. Their main characteristics are outlined below.

Analytical Writing

- It is usually argumentative and concentrates on advancing a particular view.
- It is persuasive and aims to persuade the reader to accept that view.
- The writer sets out to prove their argument with evidence, e.g. the causes of World War 1, or the Great Depression, or the New Zealand women's franchise campaign.

Narrative Writing

- It is used when historians tell their stories chronologically or sequentially.
- It often concentrates on tracing the history of an event.
- It is used to chart the history of a group of people over set time periods, e.g. a history of: the Gallipoli campaign, of ostrich farming, of mountaineering, or a family history.

Depictive Writing

- It tries to engage your senses and imagination, so you feel you are there.
- It attempts to recreate the atmosphere or mood of a time or place.
- It uses a kaleidoscope of detail to achieve these goals, e.g. a battle, a forest fire, a difficult voyage, a shipwreck.

EXERCISE

Read the three passages that and identify the type of historical writing used.

1. Exhausted from their labours, the shivering artillerymen rested on a damp forest floor, covered in ferns lichens and mosses, beneath a canopy of tawa, rimu and many softwoods. The ground hummed beneath them as nearby, the swollen Wairere thundered over the escarpment, in an impressive first stage drop of 90 metres. Dry wood was scarce, and they huddled around poor fires that night to eat and sleep.
2. Ngapuhi's first great musket expedition against the Ngati Paoa and Ngati Maru at Hauraki in 1821, returned with 2000 slaves and booty in the shape of fine cloaks, greenstone ornaments and intricately carved jewellery boxes. In 1822 they launched a long-distance amphibious campaign against Waikato, with a further campaign against Te Arawa on Mokoia Island, Rotorua in 1823. Their last campaign targeted the Ngati Whatua people at Kaipara in 1825.
3. Captive European women were a historic and dynamic presence on New Zealand's 19th century frontiers. Charlotte Badger, Ann Morley and Elizabeth Guard were at the centre of events yet remain a peculiar amnesia. Their invisibility may originate in their temerity in entering a frontier realm preserved for pioneering European males. It may also be a response to women like Mary Bell, Caroline Perrett and Mrs Anaru who chose to remain among Maori, thereby challenging established boundaries between Maori and Pakeha.