

How to Navigate Nonfiction

Exploring a nonfiction book is like going on an expedition. There are places to visit, sights to see, and fascinating things to learn. Before your youngster embarks on her next nonfiction journey, suggest she chart her course with these tips and ideas.



Choose a destination

With fiction, your child starts at the beginning and reads to the end. But for nonfiction, he might jump around to look for specific information. Browsing through the table of contents will help him decide where to look. For example, if he's researching tornadoes in a book on extreme weather, the table of contents may steer him to a chapter titled "Mighty Twisters."

Idea: Before your youngster picks out a book, encourage him to jot down notes about what he wants to know. He could write, "Everyday life on a submarine," and then compare the tables of contents in various books to find the best fit.

Take a shortcut

Sometimes all your child wants is one specific fact. For a STEM research paper, perhaps she needs to know about the design of the sails used on Viking ships. A book's index will guide her to that information fast. It lists topics in alphabetical order, along with their page numbers. Your youngster

would flip to the index of a book about Vikings, skim down the entries to find *ships*, then to the sub-listing *sails*, and turn to the pages listed.

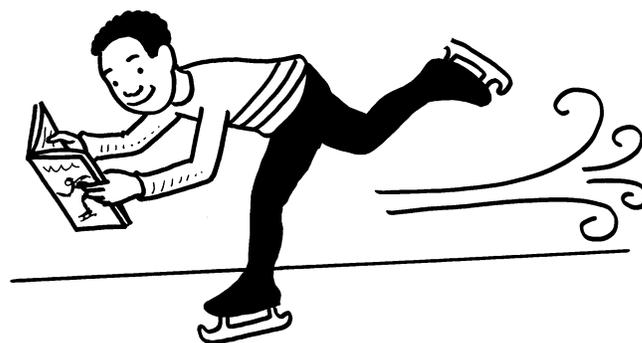
Idea: Practice using an index together by going on fact-finding missions. Browse a nonfiction book with an index, and name a fact covered. For instance,



you could ask her to find information on solar flares in a book about the sun. It's your child's mission to use the index and locate the fact. Then, let her send you on a fact-finding mission.

Follow an itinerary

Authors use headings and subheads (often a word or a short phrase) like signposts to guide readers to the text they want to find. Your youngster can read them first and jump to



the sections that interest him. If he wants to learn how to become a competitive speed skater, he might skim a biography of his skating hero to find headings and subheads about how that skater trained.

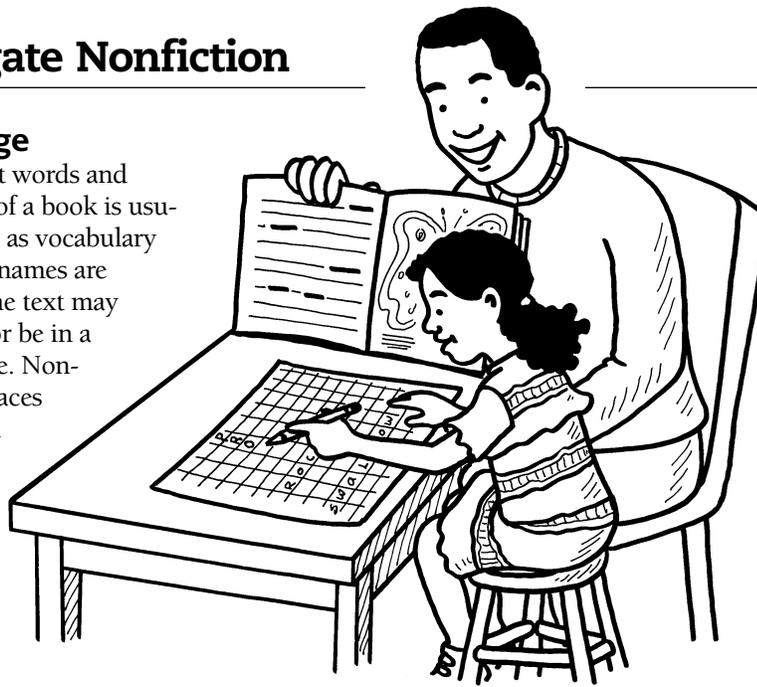
Idea: Recommend that your child make fact cards using headings and subheads. He could rewrite them as *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, or *why* questions on separate index cards. Then, have him answer with the facts he learns as he reads. For a report on Florence Nightingale, he may turn a "School days" subhead into "Where did Florence Nightingale go to school?"

continued

Learn the language

Spotting the important words and phrases within a section of a book is usually easy. Keywords, such as vocabulary terms, dates, places, and names are designed to stand out. The text may appear in **bold** or *italic*, or be in a different color or font size. Nonfiction uses various typefaces as a way of saying, “Look at me! I’m important!” For instance, if your youngster is reading about the International Space Station, she could look for the keyword *orbit* to learn the path the station travels.

Idea: Turn keywords into crossword puzzles for each other to solve. Arrange the words into a hand-drawn grid on graph paper, or make one online at abcya.com/crossword_puzzle_maker.htm. Then, use facts from the text as clues. If a keyword is *proboscis*, your child might consult the book and write “the long, thin tube that forms part of a butterfly’s mouth” as the clue. When your puzzles are complete, create blank versions, swap, and solve.



subject he enjoys like karate or cooking. Have him hunt for graphics—how many kinds can he find?

View the exhibits

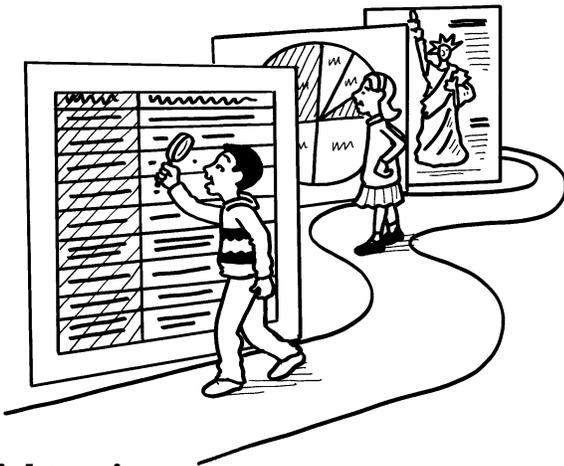
Encourage your youngster to look closely at illustrations in nonfiction books and also to read their captions. Together, they provide explanations that will improve her understanding of the material. For example, a photo may illustrate how gears work, while the caption explains the different parts shown.

Idea: Organizing family photos gives your child a chance to think about captions. Gather photos, and collaborate on writing captions that explain the pictures, adding names and facts that will bring them to life.

Take a side trip

Sidebars are mini-articles related to the main text. They hold fascinating facts, anecdotes, or activities. In a book on magnets, your youngster may find a sidebar with instructions for a magnetic-poles experiment to try at home.

Idea: When your child reads nonfiction about a favorite subject, challenge him to create sidebars that could be in the book but aren’t. For a book about writing fiction, he might dream up a sidebar of fun writing prompts or one with clever ways to remember grammar rules.



Go sightseeing

Diagrams, maps, graphs, charts, and time lines are graphics that make up the “scenery” in a nonfiction text. They’re not only interesting to look at, they pack a large amount of information into a small space. For instance, your youngster may interpret data in a sports almanac graph to compare the popularity of baseball in various countries. Or he could examine a diagram of the Statue of Liberty to understand how the pieces were assembled.

Idea: Let your child explore how graphics are used in nonfiction with a treasure hunt. Start with library books about a

Extra! Extra! Read more about it!

Nonfiction books may ignite your child’s passion for a topic. Encourage her to check the back pages for these “extra” features that offer ideas for additional things to read.

● **Source list.** Articles, books, and papers the author cited.

● **Bibliography.** Books the author used for research.

● **Further reading.** A recommended list of books, magazines, and websites about the same subject.

● **Author’s biography.** Titles of the author’s other books might be found here (or in a list at the front of the book).



Get the Punctuation Right

Should you use “it’s” or “its”? A semicolon or a colon? Punctuation can be tricky. This guide will help your children remember basic rules they’ll need for writing.

Periods, exclamation points, and question marks

- Put a period at the end of most sentences:
This summer is supposed to be extremely hot.
- Periods are used with abbreviations, such as *Mrs.* and *Tues.*
- An exclamation point shows excitement:
We’re going out for ice cream!
- Use a question mark after a question (*Did you do your homework?*), but not with an indirect question: *Mom asked if I did my homework.*

Semicolons and colons

- A semicolon can be used instead of a period or conjunction (*and, or, but*) between two complete sentences: *My favorite subject is math; he prefers science.*
- Use semicolons in a list that already has commas: *She visited Boise, Idaho; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Seattle, Washington.*
- A colon introduces a list. *You’ll need these items for the party: balloons, streamers, and cake.*

Quotation marks and hyphens

- Quotation marks surround a person’s exact words: *My dad said, “Come home after school.”* Quotation marks aren’t needed here: *My dad said to come home after school.*
- Use quotation marks around titles of articles, stories, and poems. *Note:* Titles of books, magazines, newspapers, and movies are generally italicized.
- Hyphens are used when talking about age: *A six-year-old child.* Do not hyphenate when you say “I’m seven years old.”

- Use a hyphen when writing out fractions:
He ate one-quarter of the pizza.

Commas

- Use a comma between two adjectives: *He’s an organized, diligent student.*
- A comma is used before a conjunction (*and, or, but*) to join two complete sentences: *He wanted to go to the game, but he was sick.*
- Dates have commas between the day and year (*May 1, 2016*). In the middle of a sentence, put a comma after the year as well: *My friend was born December 30, 2005, in Baltimore.*
- Commas are used before or after dialogue: *“Don’t be late,” Mom said. Or Mom said, “Don’t be late.”*

Apostrophes

- Contractions have apostrophes. They replace one or more letters: *you’re (you are), it’s (it is), she’s (she is or she has).*
- Use an apostrophe to show possession: *My teacher’s desk is neat.* If the noun is plural, the apostrophe follows the “s”: *The teachers’ desks are neat.*
- Don’t use an apostrophe with the possessive pronoun “its”: *The dog hurt its paw.*
- Never use an apostrophe with a plural noun that’s not possessive: *Flowers for sale.*
- Use *your* when you are talking about something that someone has or that belongs to someone: *Don’t forget your jacket. You’re is the contraction of you are: You’re a great listener.*