Fun Activities

Story Tracking Timeline

In Chapter 2, "The Ecology of the Nonfiction Biosphere," Foster claims that we still rely on newspapers to tell us quickly and first about breaking news. Choose a news story of some national importance and track the first mention of it in the online version of your local newspaper, in the online version of a national newspaper, on Twitter, on Facebook, and on the national television news. After you find the first mention of the story in each source, create an annotated timeline that shows when each source reported the news and briefly summarizes how much information each source made available during that first mention.

Write Some 21st Century Advice

Foster focuses the vast majority of his text on media forms that dominated the twentieth century. Thinking about both what you have learned from reading his book and what you know from your own use of twenty-first century media forms, write some advice for younger students about how to fully understand the meaning of memes, time-limited video (such as those on TikTok or Snapchat), reddit threads, or some other contemporary form of nonfiction.

Write an Absurd Argument

Foster's book discusses the importance of solid claims, grounds, and warrants. Learn a little more about logical arguments by reading or watching a video about logical fallacies. Write an argument that seems, on the surface, to be trying to argue logically for something that is clearly absurd (letting babies carry handguns, for instance). Use unsound claims, grounds, and warrants and incorporate logical fallacies as you defend your ridiculous thesis.

Write Some Very Unhelpful Notes

Choose a nonfiction book that you are very familiar with and write a "Notes" section for it. Your notes should not be helpful in any way. Have a look at a model "Notes" section in a book or article and think about both types of notes entries Foster discusses--content notes and source notes. What strange and unenlightening commentary can you add in the content notes? What improbable and irrelevant sources can you claim that your book's author consulted? (Be sure to use correct MLA formatting for your sources, even if they are entirely made up!)
Structures in Music and Art Presentation

In several places in his book, Foster makes the point that structure influences a reader's perception of meaning. Choose a piece of music and a piece of visual art on the same subject (love, grief, beauty, ambition, etc.) and create a presentation in which you discuss how the structures of these two pieces create similar or different messages about the subject. Remember that your focus here is not on content but is instead on the ordering and placement of that content.

Statistical Lies Presentation

Do some research to find out the various ways that statistics can be used to mislead an audience. Create a presentation that showcases at least four ways that statistics can be misleading.

Review a Journalism Movie

Choose a film on this list to watch and review. In your review, be sure to explain how the movie does or does not reflect what you have learned from Foster about journalism. Remember that you are responsible for choosing a film that meets the standards of your own home.

- His Girl Friday (1940)
- Citizen Kane (1941)
- Ace in the Hole (1951)
- Park Row (1952)
- Network (1976)
- All the President’s Men (1976)
- Broadcast News (1987)
- Shattered Glass (2003)
- Good Night, and Good Luck (2005)
- Zodiac (2007)
- Frost/Nixon (2008)
- Spotlight (2015)
• The Post (2017)

Write an Opinion Column

Choose an opinion column from the newspaper (print or online) that you strongly disagree with. Do some research and write an opposing column that refutes the position you disagree with--be sure to back up your ideas by connecting each claim to grounds through logical warrants.

Fake News Presentation

In Chapter 17, Foster discusses the problem of fake news. Do some research and find a true story that is so strange or improbable that people might think it is fake. Then create a presentation for your classmates in which you present both the true story and a fake news piece that you have created. Your goal is to fool your classmates into believing that your fake story is the real one by providing bogus quotes and data, faked photographs, and so on--whatever misleading and false evidence will convince others that your false story is the true one.

Animate Some Advice

Consider Foster's book as a whole. What are the most important pieces of advice for reading nonfiction that Foster offers? Using an online animation maker such as Powtoon, Animaker, or Pixteller, bring this advice to life with an animated short aimed at younger students.
Essay Topics

Essay Topic 1
What are the "four Ps" that Foster discusses in Chapter 1, "The Structure of Nonfiction Information," and what is the function of each?

Essay Topic 2
In Chapter 2, "The Ecology of the Nonfiction Biosphere," Foster proposes that newspapers write the "first draft" of history, magazines write the "second draft," and history books write the "final draft." Argue for or against this claim--or accept it with qualifications.

Essay Topic 3
In Chapter 2, "The Ecology of the Nonfiction Biosphere," Foster makes a number of claims about the importance of newspapers. Do you agree, disagree, or agree with qualifications?

Essay Topic 4
On page 28 of Chapter 2, "The Ecology of the Nonfiction Biosphere," Foster writes the following paragraph:

"That's easy: time. The thing of which there is never enough. That heals all wounds or possibly wounds all heels."

Analyze the effectiveness of this paragraph. What rhetorical strategies are at work here? What do you believe to be its purpose? Does it accomplish its purpose?

Essay Topic 5
In Chapter 4, "The Parts You Don't Read," Foster says that titles are important guideposts to meaning. Evaluate the effectiveness of the chapter titles that Foster has chosen for this book.

Essay Topic 6
Choose a piece of nonfiction--a book or longform article--and write a foreward for the work. Your foreward should offer context and key ideas that will guide readers more successfully through the work. Cite in MLA format any sources you use in creating your foreward.
Essay Topic 7

In Chapter 6, "Source Code," Foster suggests that as microfiche research is time-consuming and frustrating, writers should use secondary sources such as biographies. Offer an evaluation of this argument. Be sure to consider the assumptions Foster is making about both primary and secondary sources and the applicability of his suggestion to nonfiction in fields outside of history--such as science, sociology, the arts, politics, and so on.

Essay Topic 8

On page 89 of Chapter 7, "All in How You Look at Things," Foster makes the claim that "there are comparatively few books written that own nothing to the passage of time" (89). Explain his meaning here and then use factual evidence to evaluate the strength of his claim.

Essay Topic 9

In Chapter 7, "It's All in How You Look at Things," Foster explains the history of the term "Fake News." Explain the evolution of this term, being sure to mention people who were important to its evolution and giving clear examples of media called "fake news" at each step of the process.

Essay Topic 10

Choose a passage of one of Hunter S. Thompson's essays to analyze. Explain the techniques Thompson uses that are more commonly associated with fiction than with nonfiction, and explain the relationship between your observations and Foster's remarks about Thompson's writing in Chapter 9, "Living the News."

Essay Topic 11

In Chapter 9, "Living the News," Foster discusses the work of Joan Didion. Write an essay in which you describe his tone in this discussion of Didion and then analyze how he creates this tone.

Essay Topic 12

In Chapter 10, "From the Inside Out," Foster argues that the essay began with the Enlightenment. Many of the works that he cites were called "treatises" by their authors, however. Look up the similarities and differences between an "essay" and a "treatise." Then look up the writings of Ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle. Write an argument of definition in which you take a stand about whether the essay and the treatise are the same or
different types of writing; in your essay, take a stand about when the "essay" becomes a distinct type of writing.

**Essay Topic 13**

In Chapter 10, "From the Inside Out," Foster explains several questions that are important to ask while reading opinions and editorials. Explain each of these questions and its importance in critical reading.

**Essay Topic 14**

Choose a piece of science writing and evaluate it according to the standards laid out in "Interrogating the Text."

**Essay Topic 15**

Consider Foster's plea for critical thinking in Chapter 15, "Reading Internet Sources." He blames the presence of false information on the web on a lack of "gatekeepers" (248) and calls the lack of "quality control" on the web a "fatal flaw" (246). Think carefully about the following questions and then write an essay in which you give your opinions about media gatekeeping.

- Who has historically controlled media, and what has this control meant for those without a voice in traditional media?

- Have the masses of people historically been fully informed, critical thinkers?

- If there were "gatekeepers" ensuring the truth of everything published on the web, who would they be and how would this alter the function of the web in the average person's life?

**Essay Topic 16**

Write an essay in which you define and describe a form of writing found exclusively on the Web. Be sure to cover the "grammar" and purpose of the form in your description.

**Essay Topic 17**

In Chapter 16, "Social (Media) Disease," Foster discusses clickbait and its tendency to inflate reader expectations. Consider how titles and subtitles used in print books and magazines are similar to and different from the use of titles as online clickbait. Write an essay that compares and contrasts these two uses of titles.
Essay Topic 18

Based on the language and tone of Foster's book, who is his imagined audience? Is this audience consistent throughout the book? Give specific textual examples as you analyze how Foster's language and tone reveal the presumed audience for this book.

Essay Topic 19

Does Foster follow his own advice and "rules" in this book, or does he say one thing and do another? For instance, in Chapter 1, "The Structure of Nonfiction Information," Foster says the first job of the writer, on page one, is to get the reader to be interested enough to read page two. When you got to the end of page one, how interested were you in reading page two? Does this mean that Foster followed his own advice, or not? Consider the rest of the book in this way. Use specific textual evidence to evaluate whether How to Read Nonfiction Like a Professor lives up to the standards that Foster sets for other authors.

Essay Topic 20

Write a comparison and contrast essay in which you explain how reading nonfiction is both similar and dissimilar to reading fiction.