

Reading non-fiction and media: 6. Presentation

This audio bite is about presentation.

- ELIOT: When we talk about presentation, or how something is presented in a text, we are talking about what a text looks like. You might think it's not really important in English, but it is. Often the questions ask you to write about things like the colours used, or underlining, or even the photos.
- ALIX: Most people find this easy. It's usually done with the media passages, because if you did it with a normal story, like a novel, you wouldn't have much to say. A novel will probably just be presented in chapters and paragraphs, and that's about it.
- ELIOT: But media texts are different. For example, a magazine advert looks very different to a novel. And if you hold a media passage up at arm's length, you'll see how it's organised. For a start, they often have headings in bigger, bolder type. Like a newspaper with headlines like 'Prince to Marry in August'. You tend to read these headings first, so you can quickly work out what it's about. The headings can also guide you, so you might not read everything in a leaflet – just the bits you need to know.
- ALIX: And the text is often written in different sections. So you can have a heading, with some writing underneath, and then another heading, and so on. This splits up the information – it looks better, but it's also quicker and easier to read – so if it's for children, it's often in sections. And all newspapers are in sections too, with the writing in columns and boxes.
- ELIOT: They also have photos or diagrams. So you might have the picture of a pop star, or a car crash. These photos grab your attention. They also bring the story to life and break up the writing – that means that it looks less boring and easier to read. But don't forget that most photos have a caption – a sentence or two explaining it – and you should include this in your answer.
- ALIX: You should also be able to notice other aspects too. For instance, many media passages use colours. It makes a photo look much better than black and white. But colours can also represent other things. For instance, a lot of adverts use green – it can suggest that something is natural, fresh or good for the environment.
- ELIOT: Media texts often have logos too, which are ways of identifying a company. So if you look at someone's trainers, you know instantly what make they are. And some logos mean other things too – so if something is recycled, you get this little circle with two arrows.

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- ALIX: But presentation is also about how words are printed. For example, you can make a passage look like someone's handwriting – by using a different font. Some fonts look very modern, but others look old or formal. And you can split information by putting it in bullet points.
- ELIOT: Or write words in capital, italics, bold, or underlined.
- ALIX: Whatever it is, you always need to write what the effect is – does it make it easier to read? Does it make it stand out? Or is it there to help the reader?
- ELIOT: It should be clear that presentation is important in media texts. Look at the passage from a distance and you can spot things like headings, sections, boxes, columns, photos, diagrams and captions.
- Write about other things, like colours, logos and the way the words are printed out. The key to a good answer is explaining why the writer chose to use a certain presentation. Was it to grab your attention, to create a special image or make it easier to read? That's what you've got to decide.