

# LIB 330: A Field Guide to Nature Essays

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This guide is loosely based on Aristotle's principles of rhetoric. It is intended to help you get the most out of readings assigned from *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. These readings serve both as examples of views on nature and as models for writing your own nature essay.

Scan each essay once to get a sense of what it is about. As you scan, and later as you read more carefully, consider the following factors that make the essay what it is.

## I. The form of the essay

**A. Is the** reading in fact a self-contained essay, or a section excerpted from a longer work?

**B. Is the** reading divided into parts? If so, consider why the author put the divisions where they are.

**C. How does** the structure of the essay serve or reflect the author's purpose(s) in writing it?

## II. The content of the essay

**A. Intention/Purpose:** What kind of essay is this?

Writing about Nature: A Spectrum*						
			Essays on Experiences in Nature			
Field Guides and Professional Papers	Natural History Essays	Rambles	Solitude and Backcountry Living	Travel and Adventure	Farm Life	Man's Role in Nature

**B. Topic(s):** What is the essay about? Many of the best essays are about several things simultaneously. Look for instances of metaphor and allegory that make the essay work on more than one level.

**C. Thesis and subordinate points:** What is the main idea communicated in the essay? What supporting and incidental ideas are presented along the way?

### III. The voice of the author

Any author who expects the reader to come along for the ride must establish a presence that will hold the reader's attention. This "voice" may have many facets. Traditionally, three main components of the author's voice have been seen as central:

**A. *Ethos* or character:** A distinguished public figure, a respected scientific expert, your best friends, and your mother are all people you will usually listen to, but the authority of each is different.

What sort of authority does the author convey in his or her writing? What character does your author present on the page?

**B. *Pathos* or emotional appeal:** A good author will use the emotional coloring of words to support the points being made. The snow outside may "glisten and shimmer," or its "glare" may "obscure visibility." How I put it depends on how I want you to feel about the snow.

What is the emotional tone of your author's language about the subject? What response is it supposed to evoke?

**C. *Logos* or argument:** Some authors may even feel compelled to offer reasons (aside from personal authority and emotional persuasion) for you to believe what they write. Look for presentations of fact that are then used as the basis for a logical inference about something or other.

What logical arguments does the author use to persuade the reader to accept the thesis and any subordinate points?

\*Taxonomy from *This Incomperable Lande*, ed. T. J. Lyon (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 4.

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