

WHAT IN THE WORLD?

LEVEL 1 (GRADES 5 AND UP)

Ultra-Processed Food

Free Sample

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SAMPLE EDITION
2025/2026: ISSUE 6

WHAT IN THE WORLD?

Level 1, 2025/2026: Issue 7

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HAY'SXW'QA!

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I have had many parents comment to me about how great they think *What in the World?* is, and they look forward to each month's issue coming home... This is a great resource for a small country school to explore the global issues that affect us all.

K. Camelon, Grade 7/8 teacher

Admaston, ON



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THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

—WHY IT PAYS TO GO EASY ON DIETS HIGH IN DYES AND PRESERVATIVES

BEFORE READING

1. Ask students to take out a sheet of paper and a pencil. Give them a few minutes to jot down what they ate yesterday.
2. Next write "Nova Food Classification scale" on the board. Explain that this is a system of sorting our food into four groups. Write these groups on the board:

Group 1 - Unprocessed or minimally processed foods.

Group 2 - Processed culinary ingredients.

Group 3 - Processed foods.

Group 4 - Ultra-processed foods.

3. Have students review what they wrote down, and ask them to assign a group number to each of their food items.

N.B. Suggest that they begin with either Groups 1 or 4, as these will likely be the easiest for them to identify. You may choose to share their examples of Groups 1 and 4 before moving to Groups 2 and 3.

Group 1 foods include seeds, vegetables, fish, and eggs.

Group 4 foods are low in fibre and high in sugar, salt, and fat such as chips, pop, granola bars, etc. Most are snack foods.

4. Based on your observations of the class, you may need to provide the definitions for Groups 2 and 3.

Group 2 includes cooking additives that make food more delicious, such as butter, sugar, and olive oil.

Group 3 refers to foods that are preserved, pickled, or salted such as pickles, canned tomatoes, and cured meats.

5. Once they have numbered all of their food items, have students count how many food items they wrote down in total. Then ask them to tally the number of items in each group. Debrief student observations as a class.

6. Finally, invite students to set a purpose for reading the article, referring to the resource page **Setting A Purpose Before Reading** as needed.

NOVA NOVA NOVA NOVA





THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

—WHY IT PAYS TO GO EASY ON DIETS HIGH IN DYES AND PRESERVATIVES



Have you eaten any UPFs this week? You probably have. They're everywhere. Soft drinks. Hot dogs. Bread. Instant noodles. Pre-packaged snacks.

In fact, in 2025, Heart & Stroke Canada published a report showing that UPFs, or ultra-processed food and drink, make up about 43 percent of adult Canadians' daily calorie intake.

The problem? UPFs also contributed to 37 percent of new cases of heart disease and stroke and 38 percent of heart-disease-related deaths, the study found.

"Considering the substantial burden of heart disease and stroke on Canadian society, we urgently need policies ... to reduce consumption," said Dr. Jean-Claude Moubarac, who led the study.

A MENU OF CHEMICALS

So what are UPFs? There's no agreed-upon definition, but a

common one is that they have more than five ingredients not normally found at home. These include **emulsifiers**, **preservatives**, additives, dyes, and sweeteners.

They differ from foods, like eggs and apples, which are mostly eaten as they are found in nature. UPFs often don't even start out as whole foods. They can be made from elements such as sugars, oils, fats, and isolated proteins. Manufacturers also add other substances, such as artificial colours, flavours, and preservatives.

Imagine mixing all that in a blender, then hardening it in moulds. Voilà: breakfast cereal. Or chicken nuggets. Or potato chips. These are what food writer Michael Pollan calls "edible foodlike substances."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) estimates that 70 percent of

packaged products in the U.S. food supply are UPFs.

They even show up in baby and toddler fare. A recent study published in the journal *Nutrients* revealed that more than 70 percent of these foods are ultra-processed. This is alarming because babies' stomachs can't handle additives the way adult stomachs can.

"The top ingredient ... wasn't a fruit or vegetable—it was one or more additives," said study co-author Dr. Elizabeth Dunford.

THE HISTORY OF UPFs

UPFs haven't always existed. Before the 1900s, most food was... food. Some of the earliest UPFs were Coca-Cola (1886) and Jello (1897). After that came Crisco Vegetable Shortening, Spam, Velveeta cheese, Kraft Mac & Cheese, and Oreos.

The list expanded during World War II (1939-1945).

DEFINITIONS

EMULSIFIER: a special 'helper' ingredient that stops substances from separating that don't usually mix, like oil and water

PRESERVATIVE: a substance added to food, drinks, or products to keep them fresh for a longer time

Soldiers on the move needed food that was portable, stable, and easy to make. Powdered cheeses, **dehydrated** potatoes, and canned meats fit the bill. Scientists added preservatives, flavours, and vitamins.

Then, as more women entered the workforce, convenience became important. Starting in the 1970s, the use of UPFs exploded. Corn and wheat were turned into high fructose corn syrup, vegetable oil, and modified starch. Ads even claimed UPFs were healthier.

The global economy contributed, too. Today, food comes from all over the world. UPFs travel better and last longer than most fresh foods. They're often more affordable than fresh foods, too.

A NEW LOOK AT FOOD

But what we know about nutrition is evolving. For example, in 2018, nutrition researcher Kevin Hall did a study for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the U.S. For two weeks, 10 adults ate mostly UPFs. Another 10 ate UPF-free foods. Both diets had roughly the same calories, **carbohydrates**, proteins, and fats. Then, the groups switched.

In the first two weeks, the UPF group gained a kilogram on average. They ate about 500 extra calories a day compared to

THE NOVA CLASSIFICATION SCALE

In 2009, Brazil's Center for Epidemiological Studies in Health and Nutrition released a study. Professor Carlos Monteiro at Sao Paulo University, noticed that people were buying less sugar, yet obesity and **Type-2 diabetes** were rising. Sugar consumption was up because people were buying more ready-to-eat foods that contained extra sugar. So he helped create a system called The Nova Food Classification scale.

The scale has four groups. Group 1 includes unprocessed or minimally processed foods, such as seeds, vegetables, fish and eggs. Group 2 has small quantities of "processed culinary ingredients," such as butter, sugar, and olive oil that make group one foods tastier.

Processed foods make up Group 3—foods have been preserved, pickled, salted, and so on. Examples include pickles, canned tomatoes, and cured meats. Group 4 are ultra-processed foods and drinks. They tend to be low in fibre and high in sugar, salt, and fat. They promote snacking and often "replace freshly made regular meals and dishes."

the control group. That's about one quarter-pound burger with cheese. They also had higher levels of hormones that trigger hunger. When they traded, group two gained the same weight.

RISKY HABITS

UPFs don't fill people up. In fact, they make consumers want more. And study after study connects them to poor health such as heart disease, cancer, obesity, and brain disorders. Thickeners and emulsifiers such as polysorbate 80, carrageenan, xanthan, and guar gum increase the risk of **Type-2 diabetes**. Dyes are implicated in behavioural issues.

It doesn't take much. Eating just 10 percent more calories a day from UPFs (about one serving) may lead to a 50 percent higher risk of death from heart disease.

The good news? The reverse is also true. Eating 10 percent fewer UPFs can reduce the health risk.

EXPERT ADVICE

Here are some tips to help you do that. Prepare meals at home and make your own treats like muffins or chips using fewer UPFs. Read ingredient lists. Avoid foods with unpronounceable or unrecognizable ingredients.

If fresh produce costs too much, choose the flash frozen or canned kind. Buy whole wheat instead of white bread. Drink water, not sugary beverages.

Avoiding all UPFs may not be realistic. Still, knowing what's in your food helps you get the nutrients you need in their healthiest form. ★

DEFINITIONS

CARBOHYDRATES: the main source of energy for our bodies, found in fruits, vegetables, and cereals

DEHYDRATE: to remove water to preserve something, to dry out

TYPE-2 DIABETES: a condition when the body cannot use insulin correctly and sugar builds up in the blood. Over time, high blood sugar levels can damage the eyes, kidneys, nerves, and heart.



THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

—WHY IT PAYS TO GO EASY ON DIETS HIGH IN DYES AND PRESERVATIVES

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What are UPFs? Explain.

2. What did a 2025 Heart and Stroke Canada study say about the amount of UPFs that Canadians eat?

3. Explain why many health professionals say that UPFs are harmful.

4. Why were these types of food needed during World War II?

5. Describe what happened during the decades after the war ended. Why was convenience important?

6. Describe what Professor Carlos Monteiro discovered about sugar and various diseases.

7. Describe what Professor Monteiro discovered about increased sugar consumption.

8. What UPF classification scale did he create? List the groups that make up this scale.



THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

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QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. The article quotes Dr. Jean-Claude Moubarac who led a study that showed the harmful effects of UPFs on heart disease and stroke: *“Considering the substantial burden of heart disease and stroke on Canadian society, we urgently need policies... to reduce consumption.”*

As you see it, what kinds of policies could the Government of Canada put in place to support Dr. Moubarac's conclusion? Give examples to support your response.

2. Many of the ultra processed foods that we consume have additives and preservatives that extend their shelf life and make them more convenient because they don't spoil quickly. As you see it, how can we change our habits in order to include more natural foods in our diet? Give examples to support your response.

3. Many people are unaware that foods that contain 'wholesome' ingredients such as whole grains, nuts, and fruit may also contain a number of ingredients, such as sugar, saturated fat, and salt that are harmful to our health. As you see it, how might product labels be altered to better inform consumers about their ingredients? Give examples to support your ideas.



THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

—WHY IT PAYS TO GO EASY ON DIETS HIGH IN DYES AND PRESERVATIVES

QUESTIONS FOR ONLINE EXPLORATION

Note: The links below are listed at www.lesplan.com/links for easy access.

1. Learn more about ultra-processed foods and how they have become so prevalent in our diets:

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=CECnIMoVxII> [11:20]

List three facts that you learned.

2. Learn more about the NOVA Food Classification Scale:

<https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/ultraprocessed-foods-bad-for-you>

What questions do you have?

3. Many ultra-processed foods have addictive qualities which make them hard to resist:

https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=J_o3EXyhYS8 [9:24]

What do you find interesting about this information?

4. Learn about the harmful effects that ultra-processed foods can have on our health:

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=wIhbYA5QLEw> [6:42]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Vrp_MglwZI [4:31]

List three reasons why we should avoid ultra-processed foods.

5. The Government of Canada explains the benefits of limiting highly processed foods in our diet:

<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/healthy-eating-recommendations/limit-highly-processed-foods/>

What questions do you have?

6. Explore these tips for cutting back on your consumption of ultra-processed foods:

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=2gEgTjDngM8> [2:21]

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=wCs6hyHz-eg> [3:22]

<https://www.heartandstroke.ca/healthy-living/healthy-eating>

What did you learn?



THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

—WHY IT PAYS TO GO EASY ON DIETS HIGH IN DYES AND PRESERVATIVES

EDITORIAL CARTOON



YOUR TASK:

Examine the editorial cartoon, then answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper:

1. What do you *already know* about what scientists say people should be eating versus what they actually eat?
2. Describe what you *see* and *read* in the cartoon.
3. As you see it, what might the cartoonist be saying about the eating habits of American (and Canadian) people? Explain.
4. For what reasons do you agree with the cartoonist? For what reasons do you disagree? Explain. ★

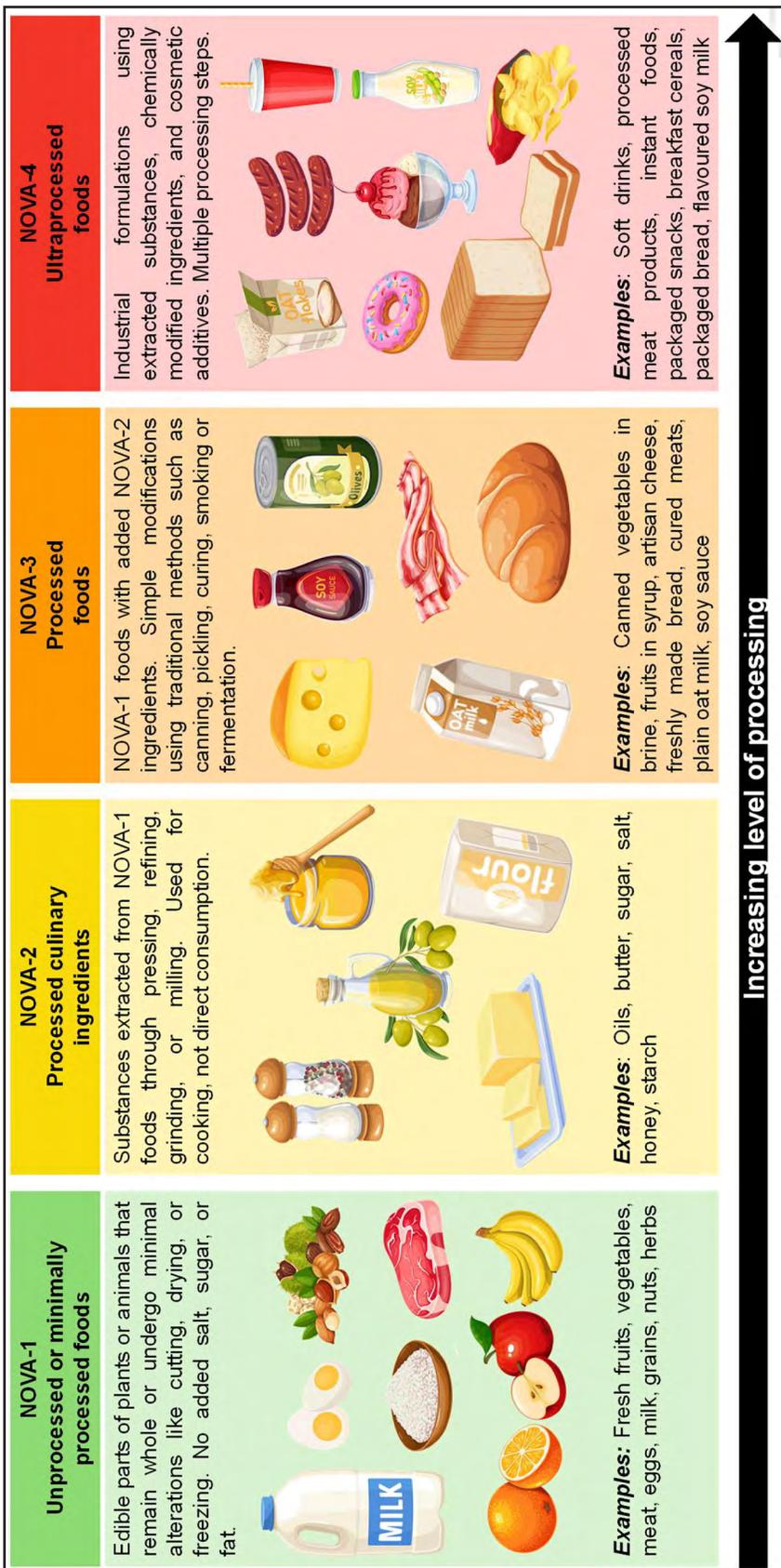


THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

—WHY IT PAYS TO GO EASY ON DIETS HIGH IN DYES AND PRESERVATIVES

INFOGRAPHIC

The Four Categories in the NOVA Classification System



Increasing level of processing

The development of the NOVA system was driven by observations of rapid changes in global food systems, particularly the increasing prevalence of industrially manufactured food products in diets worldwide. This transformation in food production and consumption patterns prompted researchers to develop a classification system that could capture the extent and purpose of industrial food processing rather than focusing solely on nutrient composition.

The NOVA system introduces a hierarchical classification system comprising four distinct categories, each defined by specific processing characteristics and purposes. At its foundation, NOVA-1 encompasses unprocessed and minimally processed foods, which undergo basic modifications such as cleaning, packaging, or freezing while maintaining their fundamental natural characteristics. This category includes fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, meats, eggs, frozen vegetables, and packaged fresh meat cuts.

Building upon this foundation, NOVA-2 represents processed culinary ingredients, substances extracted and purified from NOVA-1 foods or obtained directly from nature. These include cooking oils, butter, sugar, and salt, which are ingredients typically used in food preparation rather than consumed in isolation. NOVA-3 comprises processed foods created by combining NOVA-1 foods with NOVA-2 ingredients through traditional preservation or cooking methods. Examples include traditional breads, cheeses, and cured or canned products.

The fourth category, NOVA-4, represents UPFs, which are industrial formulations characterised by their extensive processing and use of industrial ingredients and cosmetic additives. Examples include soft drinks, packaged snacks, and ready-to-eat meals. The distinction of UPFs marks a critical aspect of the NOVA system, as it identifies products that have undergone the most substantial industrial modification and often contain ingredients rarely used in domestic food preparation.

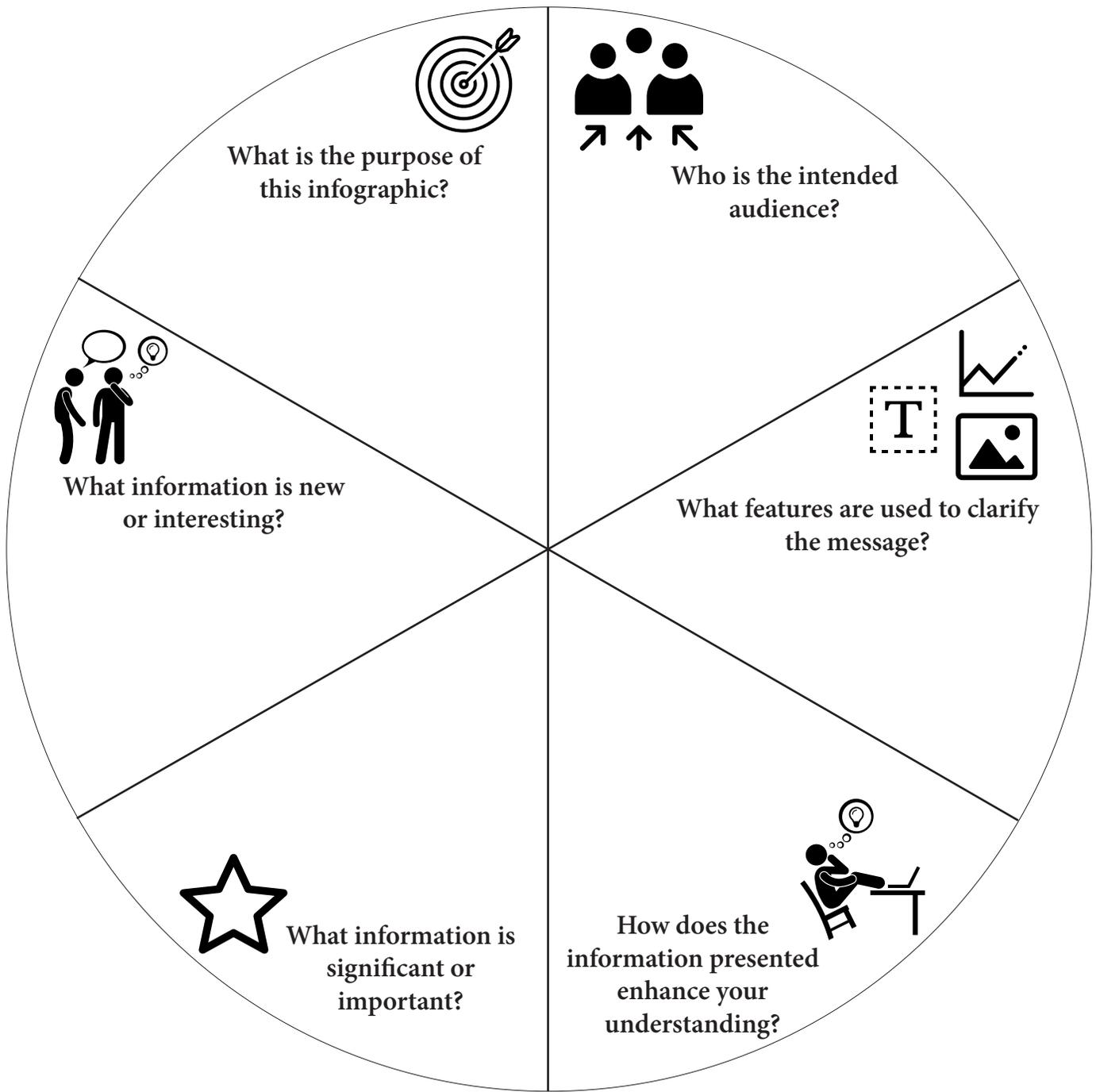
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THE RISKS OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

—WHY IT PAYS TO GO EASY ON DIETS HIGH IN DYES AND PRESERVATIVES

ANALYZING AN INFOGRAPHIC



What questions do you still have about the topic presented?



SETTING A PURPOSE BEFORE READING

There are a number of reasons we read, and setting a purpose for reading – knowing WHY we are reading – helps us to focus on important information and to better understand and remember what we read. It also helps us decide HOW we will read the text.

We don't read all texts for the same purposes or in the same way. For example, we read an instruction manual for a new Blu-ray player for a different reason than we read a book or a website. How we will read it – the strategies we use – will also differ. We are more likely to skim to find the information we need in a manual. Once we find what we need, we might read the instructions carefully to figure out what to do. Then, we stop reading, put the manual down, and carry out the steps. We may have to reread if we get confused or forget what to do.

This is a very different approach than the one we would use to read a book. When we read a book, we usually read cover-to-cover. We read carefully so we don't miss any details because we want to understand the whole story. Sometimes we make connections or create images in our minds as we read to help us better understand what we are reading. Depending on its length, we may put the book down before we finish reading it but we will start reading where we left off.

Good readers are flexible and responsive. This means that they match their reading strategies to their purpose for reading. What types of text do you read? Why do you read them? What strategies do you use to read each of these texts? The chart below is a summary of the main purposes for reading and what each entails.

Purpose for reading	What it looks like
For enjoyment	Usually student-selected. Allows students to choose a variety of genres and forms. Allows students to pursue what interests them while developing reading skills.
To experience something new	Students make connections between their personal experiences and those of people around the world.
To learn more about themselves and others	Students reflect on what they've read and express opinions and perspectives. Students develop a sense of their personal values and make sense of the world around them.
To gain information	Students use the features of informational texts to gather, analyse and apply what they've learned.
To understand issues	Students develop a sense of perspective. Students pose questions, acknowledge other points of view, critique the opinions presented and support opinions with evidence.
To appreciate writing	Students respond to text in ways other than written answers to apply what they've learned in new contexts.
To appreciate use of media to communicate	Students respond to a variety of media formats (e.g., infographics, political cartoons, videos, etc.) and react to how the format supports the meaning of the message.

* Chart adapted from: A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction, Grades 4-6, p. 11.

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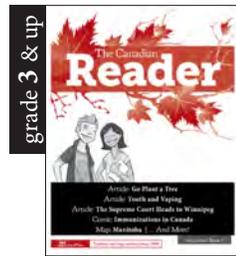


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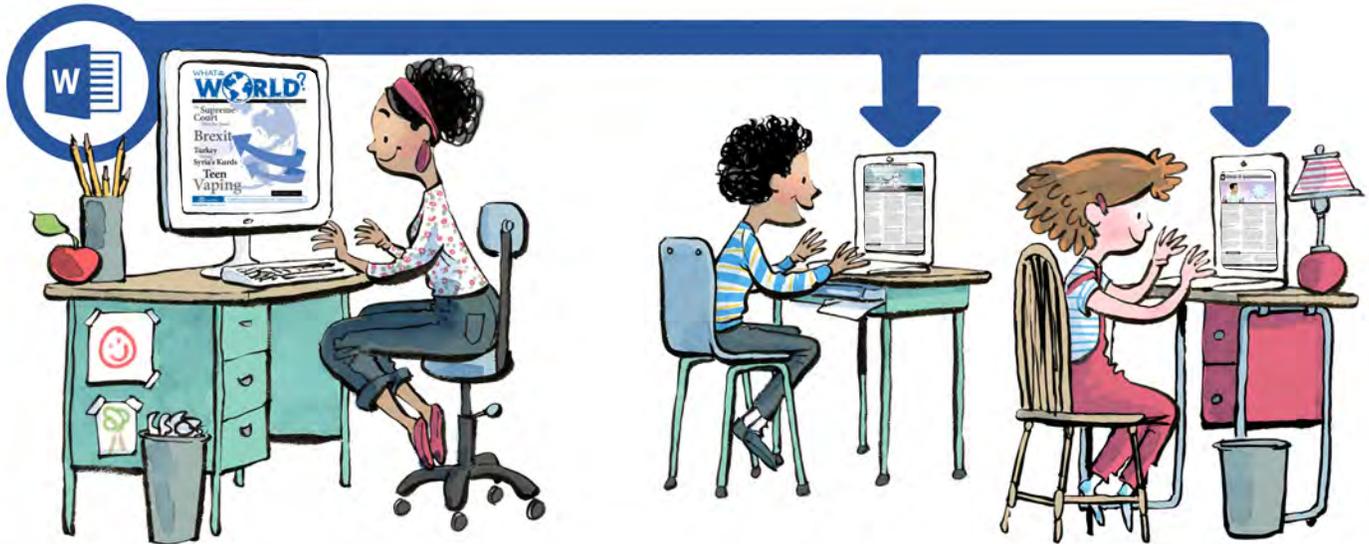
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- 3) Create a new file in a different format. Use the **Word Save As** command to choose: 1) plain text, 2) rich text format (RTF), 3) Web page (.htm), 4) PDF, etc.

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LEVEL 2 (GRADES 8 AND UP)

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2025/2026: ISSUE 6

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