# Documentary

**Key characteristics of documentaries**

* Belong to the nonfiction genre.
* Are factual.
* Content is real.
* Engage and inform the audience.
* Real setting.
* No character development.
* Can make use of characteristics of fiction such as dramatization and storytelling techniques and they often do.

### Guide to documentary analysis

1. Determine the type of documentary (see Bill Nichols’ six modes of documentary below) - remember to write down arguments to how you can see that it is a particular type of documentary.
2. Identify the main message of the documentary.
3. Analyse the documentary:
   * What is the filmmaker's purpose with the documentary?
   * What is the argument of the documentary?
   * Is the backing for the claims reliable?
   * Is the attitude/viewpoint of the filmmaker visible in the documentary?
   * Composition: how is the documentary built up? Does it follow a traditional Hollywood model? If it is an episode of a series, does it have a cliff-hanger to keep viewers interested?
   * What cinematic techniques are used to support the claims/viewpoint or to create dramatic effect and make the narrative interesting, and how are they used? Are there effects such as text, graphics and figures or animation on the screen?
   * Are there interviews and with whom, use of archival material (old photos, videos and audio recordings) or re-enactment/dramatization of scenes?

**Bill Nichols' six modes of documentary**

| **Type of documentary** | **Characteristics** |
| --- | --- |
| **The expository mode** | * Classic type of documentary. * Narrative voice/voice over. * Addresses the viewer directly. * Logical argumentation. * Aims at educating/informing. |
| **The poetic mode** | * Creating a certain mood. * Uses cinematic techniques. * Editing supercedes storyline. * Experimental/avantgarde. * Personal expression. * Aesthetic. |
| **The participatory mode** | * Recorded interaction including filmmaker. * Filmmaker takes the role as investigator. * Filmmaker is part of the documentary. * Subjective. * Use of archival footage. |
| **The reflexive mode** | * Questions the authenticity of the documentary. * Makes the audience aware of the process. * The least used of the six. |
| **The performative mode** | * Filmmaker directly involved with the subject. * Subjective. * Filmmaker becomes the audience's guide. * Shaped as a [narrative](https://theenglishhandbook.systime.dk/index.php?id=163#c642). * Use of characteristics of fiction. * Gives the audience an emotional experience. |
| **The observational mode** | * *Fly on the wall.* * Objective. * Filmmaker observes the truth. * No staging. |