# 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.
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| **The poetic mode** | * Creating a certain mood.
* Uses cinematic techniques.
* Editing supercedes storyline.
* Experimental/avantgarde.
* Personal expression.
* Aesthetic.
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| **The participatory mode** | * Recorded interaction including filmmaker.
* Filmmaker takes the role as investigator.
* Filmmaker is part of the documentary.
* Subjective.
* Use of archival footage.
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| **The reflexive mode** | * Questions the authenticity of the documentary.
* Makes the audience aware of the process.
* The least used of the six.
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| **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.
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| **The observational mode** | * *Fly on the wall.*
* Objective.
* Filmmaker observes the truth.
* No staging.
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