

USING LISTICLES IN TEACHING COUNTRY STUDIES

A listicle is a new genre in digital writing. The term comes from a combination of the words “list” and “article”. It can also be referred to as a blog post with numbered topic items, where the various topics address things that people search for online, such as legal advice, recipes or professional tips.

Listicles are rigidly structured pieces of writing with formal elements to follow. Some require minimal written content and focus more on visuals while others offer great ways to organize information into memorable bullet points.

What are the formal elements of listicles? They always have a title (headline) and are written numerically in a list format, are focused around a certain subject and include a short or more detailed description for each listed item. There are also some non-compulsory elements, such as a brief introduction or conclusion, a rating, social media links, contact info or pictures.

These are some of the most common types of listicles:

- “best-of” or “worst-of” listicles highlight the best or worst things in a particular category, for example, “Top 10 Books All Authors Should Read”;
- “pros and cons” listicles compare two or more things and give readers a comprehensive look at both sides of a topic, for example, “The Pros and Cons of Living in the City vs. the Suburbs”;

- resource listicles give readers helpful information they can use in their everyday lives or business and may include tutorials, tools, services, or websites to help readers learn more about a specific topic;

- step-by-step listicles are guides that provide readers with an easy way to follow instructions and be successful with their projects;

- personal experience listicles offer insights from the author's life, such as "10 Things I Learned While Travelling the World";

- news (current events) listicles provide a quick overview of the latest events, such as "10 Things You Need to Know about the Olympiad";

- quiz listicles usually have multiple-choice questions that allow readers to test their knowledge or personality, such as "What Type of Dog Breed Matches Your Personality?"

Listicles have stopped being just funny and amusing pieces of online writing and have become a valuable resource in education. When written the right way, whether simple or elaborate, they present useful information that is easy to follow and retain.

The **broad pedagogical power** of the listicle helps students by enhancing their **reading, researching and digital-media skills**. When used as a home task, it is an effective way for students to practise finding evidence, arguing a point, and writing clearly, which is all focused around a specific purpose. Listicles teach a student to keep to a word limit, to structure and rank if necessary, to condense big ideas into smaller items. They motivate and allow to establish shared interests and compare opinions on different topics. The capacity for listicles to appeal to visual, auditory, reading or writing learners offers teachers exciting ways to differentiate instruction.

Moreover, listicles are a publishable form of writing across mainstream media platforms as well as corporate websites and social media blogs, so the skill of writing a listicle can help a student in the future in a range of careers.

While pursuing the course of Country Studies, a student may write listicles on a great number of topics. Rather than simply assigning an annotated bibliography, a teacher can ask students to create a listicle ranking their sources from most relevant to their topic to least relevant; most to least recent or interesting. Although there are limits to the amount of text in a listicle, prompting students to include only the necessary information provides an opportunity to practise concise writing skills and curate ideas to a particular topic. If you leave the number of items open, students can easily demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge of a subject. If you limit the number of items they can include in their list, students can learn the value of scope. Further, urging students to choose images to support their texts allows them to demonstrate creative and critical thinking skills, and further consider modes of composition outside of text.

In the course of British Studies students can be asked to write different kinds of listicles, such as "3 most important inventions of the Industrial Revolution", "5 women that shaped the UK history", "10 facts I didn't know about the UK

before doing the course”, “5 things you should avoid doing while making a class presentation”, “5 facts about eco-housing in the UK”, “5 reasons why the British talk about the weather”, “7 sights in the UK that will take your breath away”, etc.

Not only do listicles incorporate digital literacy, they are also an effective way of uncovering student interests and opinions. As a reflective exercise, students can gather listicles on a topic and engage with them critically by analyzing omissions and inclusions, then do the same with their own listicle.

To introduce students to listicles one can use the popular site “Buzzfeed”. Some other useful platforms are “Cracked”, which is a website that is focused on the humorous side of life and has millions of monthly readers. One should also mention “Whatculture”, as well as “Wonderlist” or “History Lists”.

Not to be dismissed as a vehicle for meme-sharing, listicles provide a good example of how new genres surface in a digital writing landscape. Listicles are rather popular and clickbait online as they are easy to read, engaging, shareable, versatile and universal. Listicles offer logic and orderliness by structuring the material properly, are easy to comprehend as the information is broken into chunks. They help to scan and skim if necessary, and are usually fun to read and write. The creative diversity of elaborately made listicles makes them a useful and effective teaching tool for all ages.