

## Author's Purpose

When you write nonfiction, it's important to know the reason why you are writing.

You can use action verbs to describe your reason, or purpose. Have you ever written a piece for any of the purposes below?

To inform

To compare

To analyze

To describe

To prove

To discuss

To persuade

To evaluate

To illustrate

You can figure out the author's purpose by looking at its main idea. What kind of point is the author making?

What is the purpose of the paragraph below?

Before we get to how fortune cookies are made, let's try to find out where they originated. The history of fortune cookies is a little murky. Some think that modern-day fortune cookies were inspired by 14th century Chinese rebels against Mongol invaders. Legend says that a Taoist priest and his followers sent messages hidden inside of traditional Chinese moon cakes (Chinese pastries stuffed with lotus seed paste) to inform rebels about potential uprisings against the invaders. Others believe that the fortune cookies have Japanese roots in traditional *tsujiura senbei* (rice cakes with paper fortunes stuffed inside), made at the Hyotanyama Inari shrine in the 19th century. Another group of fortune cookie enthusiasts thinks that the idea started around the same time, but in this instance by Chinese railroad workers in America who would hand out cakes stuffed with holiday wishes.

This topic sentence shows us that the author intends to show readers where the idea of a fortune cookie came from. Both of these subjects inform readers about the fortune cookie: S/he will share little-known facts about a popular treat.

**Let's look at the purpose of each part of this article:**

<b>The Reading Passage</b>	<b>My Notes on Author's Purpose</b>
<p>1) If you've ever been to a Chinese restaurant, you've most likely received a fortune cookie at the end of your meal. You've also probably wondered how they managed to get that tiny slip of paper into a hard, closed cookie.</p> <p>2) Should you not have seen a fortune cookie, let me describe one for you. They are small, hard golden cookies that can fit into the palm of your hand. But there's one thing that makes them unique: they're folded into a butterfly shape to create a pocket holding a 1/2" x 2" paper "fortune."</p> <p>3) Fortune cookies often come at the end of a meal in a Chinese, and sometimes Japanese, restaurant.</p>	<p><b>1) The author introduces the topic and a question that the article will answer.</b></p> <p><b>2) The author describes what a fortune cookie looks like.</b></p> <p><b>3) The author describes how a fortune cookie is commonly used.</b></p>

Traditionally, the fortunes were Confucian phrases about life (Confucius was a famous Chinese philosopher from the 6th century BC—over 2500 years ago!). Nowadays, the fortunes inside the cookies contain just about everything from quotes to advice. Some companies even let you write your own fortunes! Often, they are written in both English and Chinese, and may have lottery numbers and smiley faces on them.

4) Before we get to how fortune cookies are made, let's try to find out where they originated. The history of fortune cookies is a little murky. Some think that modern-day fortune cookies were inspired by 14th century Chinese rebels against Mongol invaders. Legend says that a Taoist priest and his followers sent messages hidden inside of traditional Chinese moon cakes (Chinese pastries stuffed with lotus seed paste) to inform rebels about potential uprisings against the invaders. Others believe that the fortune cookies have Japanese roots in

**4) The author informs readers about possible origins of the fortune cookie.**

traditional *tsujiura senbei* (rice cakes with paper fortunes stuffed inside), made at the Hyotanyama Inari shrine in the 19th century. Another group of fortune cookie enthusiasts thinks that the idea started around the same time, but in this instance by Chinese railroad workers in America who would hand out cakes stuffed with holiday wishes.

5) The invention of fortune cookies as we know them today is just as difficult to pin down. Most people nowadays believe that fortune cookies were created by a Japanese man named Makoto Hagiwara in 1914 in San Francisco. Hagiwara owned what is now called the Golden Gate Park Japanese Tea Garden, where he served tea and fortune cookies. However, many still hold to the popular belief that fortune cookies were invented by a Chinese-American named David (Tsung) Jung, who owned the Hong Kong Noodle Company in Los Angeles. He claimed to have stuffed the cookies with passages from the Bible and handed them out to unemployed men near his

**5) The author informs readers about two conflicting histories of the invention of the fortune cookie.**

bakery in 1918. In 1983, the debate between the two confectioners came to a head in the Court of Historical Review in San Francisco when their dispute was decided by Judge Daniel M. Hanlon, in favor of Hagiwara.

6) So, just how did these two gentlemen manage to get fortunes inside their cookies? Well, the process is actually very simple, and relies on the basic chemistry of a common ingredient—sugar. The batter for fortune cookies is usually composed of sugar, flour, water and eggs. When warm, the dough is flexible and can be molded into many shapes. When the baked dough cools though, the sugar hardens into a crispy, shiny cookie. Originally, bakers would mix the dough, pour it out into 3” circles, bake them, quickly place a fortune in the middle and use chopsticks to fold them into the familiar shape before they cooled.

7) In 1974 fortune cookie manufacturing changed forever. Edward Louie, the owner of the Lotus Fortune Cookie Company in San Francisco, invented a

**6) The author describes how people can make fortune cookies.**

**7) The author describes how machines make fortune cookies.**

machine that could insert the fortune and fold the cookie. In 1980 Yong Lee created the first fully automated fortune cookie machine, called the Fortune III. Modern machines follow the same steps of handmade fortune cookies: they mix ingredients, pour batter into 3" cups which are then covered with metal plates to keep the batter flat and bake for about 3 ½ minutes. Vacuums then suck fortunes into place, use metal fingers to fold the fortune in half to trap the fortune inside, bend the cookie into shape, and cool and package the final cookie. Now fortune cookie machines like the Kitamura FCM-8006W can make up to 8,000 cookies in an hour!

Fortune cookies are a prominent part of Asian-American cuisine and have filtered into popular culture as well. People create customized fortune cookies to send funny messages to friends and family—and sometimes to even propose marriage to a loved one! They are even used in advertising campaigns for corporations. Even though

**8) The author informs readers about the widespread use of the fortune cookie in contemporary American culture.**

popular belief says otherwise, modern fortune cookies are as American as baseball and apple pie.	
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You might be asked about the author's purpose in writing one part of the article, or you might be asked about the author's purpose in writing the entire article.

To figure that out, think of the genre of the text and its central idea. What point is the author making about the topic?

**Genre:** Informational Article

**Main Idea:** The author is telling readers about the development of the fortune cookie in America.

So, the author's purpose is *to inform* readers about the topic.