

Using Text Structure

Description

One assumption that many teachers make is that a student who is a proficient reader of literature will, in turn, be a proficient reader of expository texts. That is not necessarily so.

The trouble that many good readers of literature tend to have with expository texts has to do, in part, with text structure. Text structure refers to how the text is organized. For example, a text might present a main idea and then details, a cause and then its effects, an effect and the causes, two different views of a topic, etc.

While most pieces of fiction follow the same or similar general organizational patterns, different expository texts can have very different text structures. Therefore, it is important to teach students to recognize common text structures found in expository texts.

Purpose

Teaching students to recognize common text structures found in expository texts can help students monitor their comprehension. Attempting to identify the text structure early on in the reading of a new text encourages the reader to question how subsequent sections of the text fit into the identified text structure.

If a subsequent section does not seem to fit into that text structure, the reader is faced with one of two possibilities. Either the reader needs to reevaluate the choice of text structure, or he or she needs to reevaluate his or her understanding of the text. Either way, the process of identifying the text structure will encourage the reader to monitor his or her comprehension of the text.

How to Teach Readers to Use Text Structure

- **Introduce the idea that expository texts have a text structure.** Explain to students that expository texts (such as the text in their science and social studies textbooks) have different organizational patterns. These organizational patterns are called text structures.
- **Introduce the following common text structures.** Explain that text structures can often be identified by certain signal words.

Text Structure	Description	Signal Words
Description/List Structure	This structure resembles an outline. Each section opens with its main idea, then	For example, for instance, specifically, in particular, in

	<p>elaborates on it, sometimes dividing the elaboration into subsections.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: A book may tell all about whales or describe what the geography is like in a particular region.</p>	addition
Cause and Effect Structure	<p>In texts that follow this structure, the reader is told the result of an event or occurrence and the reasons it happened.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: Weather patterns could be described that explain why a big snowstorm occurred.</p>	Consequently, therefore, as a result, thereby, leads to
Comparison/ Contrast Structure	<p>Texts that follow this structure tell about the differences and similarities of two or more objects, places, events or ideas by grouping their traits for comparison.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: A book about ancient Greece may explain how the Spartan women were different from the Athenian women.</p>	However, unlike, like, by contrast, yet, in comparison, although, whereas, similar to, different from
Order/Sequence Structure	<p>Texts that follow this structure tell the order in which steps in a process or series of events occur.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: A book about the American revolution might list the events leading to the war. In another book, steps involved in harvesting blue crabs might be told.</p>	Next, first, last, second, another, then, additionally

- **Show examples of paragraphs that correspond to each text structure.**
- **Examine topic sentences that clue the reader to a specific structure.** Look for the signal words that are associated with each text structure.
- **Model the writing of a paragraph that uses a specific text structure.**
- **Have students try writing paragraphs on their own that follow a specific text structure.** Writing paragraphs that follow certain text structures will help students recognize these text structures when they are reading.
- **For students who are proficient with paragraph organization, do steps 3 –6 with longer chunks of text or entire chapters and articles.**

For more information see: Simonsen, S. (1996). Identifying and Teaching Text Structures in Content Area Classrooms. In D. Lapp, J. Flood, & N. Farnan (Eds.), *Content Area reading and Learning: Instructional Strategies* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Source: National Education Association
<http://www.nea.org/reading/usingtextstructure.html>