# Alaska Staff Development Network

## Spring Webinar Series
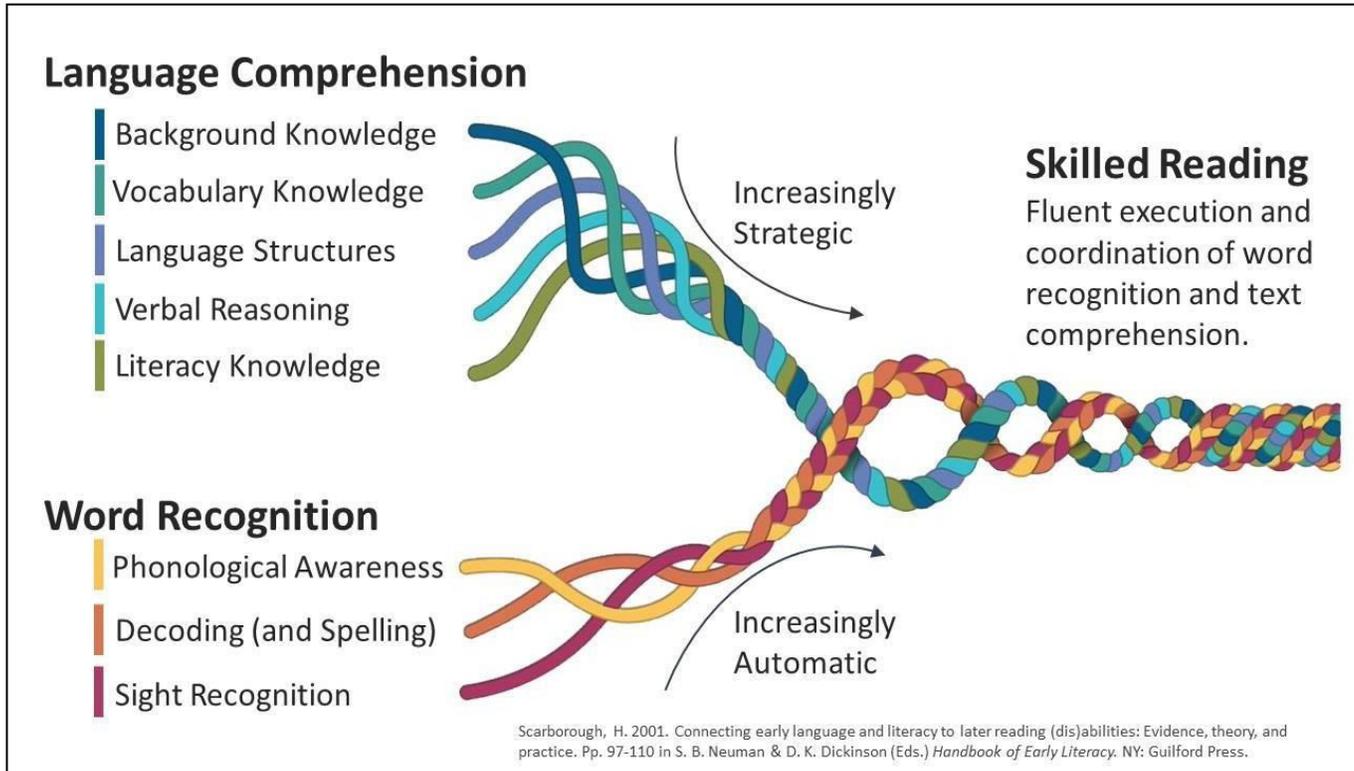
# LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION
## Developing Literacy Knowledge: Text Structure

Lexie Domaradzki & Shelby Skaanes

**Notes:**

**Scarborough's Rope Model**

## Language Comprehension

Background Knowledge
Vocabulary Knowledge
Language Structures
Verbal Reasoning
Literacy Knowledge

Increasingly Strategic

### Skilled Reading

Fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

## Word Recognition

Phonological Awareness
Decoding (and Spelling)
Sight Recognition

Increasingly Automatic

Scarborough, H. 2001. Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis)abilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. Pp. 97-110 in S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.) *Handbook of Early Literacy*. NY: Guilford Press.

**Notes:**

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2

# TYPES OF HELPFUL CONTEXT CLUES

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Definition** | The author provides a direct definition of an unfamiliar word, right in the sentence.<br>• SIGNAL WORDS: Is, *ore, means, refers to* | A conga is a barrel-shaped drum. |
| **Appositive Definition** | A type of definition clue. An appositive is a word or phrase that defines or explains an unfamiliar word that comes before it.<br>•SIGNAL WORD *or*<br>•    SIGNAL PUNCTUATION: set off by commas | At night you can see constellations, *or* groups of stars, in the sky. |
| **Synonym** | The author uses another word or phrase that is similar in meaning, or can be compared, to an unfamiliar word.<br>• SIGNAL WORDS: also, *as, identical,* like, likewise, *resembling, some, similorly, too* | My dog Buck travels everywhere with me. My friend's canine buddy travels everywhere with him, *too.* |
| **Antonym** | The author uses another word or phrase that means about the opposite of, or is in contrast with, an unfamiliar word.<br>•SIGNAL WORDS: *but, however, in contrast, instead of, on the other hand, though, unlike* | I thought the movie would be weird, *but* it turned out to be totally mundane. |
| **Example** | The author provides several words or ideas that are examples of an unfamiliar word.<br>• SIGNAL WORDS: *(or example, for instance, including, like, such as* | In science we are studying marine mammals *such as* whales, dolphins, and porpoises. |
| **General** | The author provides some nonspecific clues to the meaning of an unfamiliar word, often spread over several sentences. | Einstein rode his bike everywhere. He thought driving a car was way too complicated. |

# Text Structure Strategies for Improving Expository Reading Comprehension

*Julia V. Roehling, Michael Hebert, J. Ron Nelson, Janet J. Bohaty*

This article presents practical applications of research-based strategies for using text structures to improve students' expository text comprehension.

Expository (or informational) text is the primary source of reading material used to present academic content (e.g., science, social studies). As such, it is essential that students are able to comprehend expository text. This is recognized in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, which state that, as early as kindergarten, students should be able to engage with informational text in multifaceted ways, such as identifying the main topic, asking and answering questions about key details, and describing connections between pieces of information (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

The problem teachers face is that expository text reading tends to be more difficult for students than typical story reading (McCormick & Zutell, 2015). Several characteristics of expository text may contribute to this difficulty:

- Technical vocabulary
- High density of facts
- Unfamiliar content
- Cognitively demanding concepts

Expository text can also be challenging because its structure is different from the typical story structure familiar to students. *Structure* refers to the way information is organized in a text. Meyer (1975) was the first to describe different types of expository text structures. Five text structures that show up the most consistently in the literature are description, compare and contrast, sequence, cause and effect, and problem and solution, although the terms and definitions for these structures have varied across researchers (e.g., compare and contrast has also been referred to as adversative; Englert & Hiebert, 1984)

and are sometimes imprecise. Therefore, for teachers planning to use these text structures in their instruction, it may be most useful to use more frequent terms along with student-friendly definitions, such as the ones used by Bohaty (2015; see Table 1).

Although the structure of expository text may be one characteristic contributing to its difficulty, it is also a characteristic that students can use to meet the demands of content area text. Knowing the structure of an expository text may provide students with a mental framework for thinking about it. The purpose of this article is to present practical, evidence-based solutions for teaching students how to use text structure strategies to improve their expository reading comprehension.

Interpreting education research and putting it into practice can be challenging and time consuming. In this article, we do that work for teachers by translating the most effective practices from the

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text structure literature into recommendations for teachers. Hebert, Bohaty, Nelson, and Brown (2016) conducted a meta-analysis on text structure instruction, concluding that it is an effective way to improve expository reading comprehension. The literature interpreted in this article comes from this meta-analysis. We hope our article helps narrow the research-to-practice gap. The recommendations are organized into four sections:

1. Learning objectives
2. Instructional strategies
3. Assessments
4. Reading materials

These recommendations are offered as springboards for teachers to begin thinking about how to implement some effective text structure strategies into their classroom instruction so students are better able to comprehend expository text.

## Learning Objectives

As with all instructional units, planning for text structure instruction should begin with clear learning objectives that outline the skills teachers want their students to demonstrate by the end of instruction. In reviewing descriptions of text structure activities and assessments in the extant literature, we determined that four learning objectives recurred frequently:

1. Students will be able to identify the structure of an expository text.
2. Students will be able to select and organize the most important information in an expository text.
3. Students will be able to summarize an expository text.
4. Students will be able to write their own expository text.

## Instructional Strategies

After teachers decide on the learning objectives for their text structure unit, their next step is to plan specific instructional strategies to help students achieve the objectives. To that end, we describe effective strategies related to each of the four objectives.

### *Identification Strategies*

Learning to recognize the structure of expository text may help students focus on the important information in a particular passage and can serve as a foundation for attaining the other text structure objectives. There are

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**PAUSE AND PONDER**

- Why is it important for students to learn how to comprehend expository text?

- What are some reasons why expository text reading is challenging for students?

- Which of the text structure learning objectives are most appropriate for your students?

- How might you assess students' progress toward the learning objectives?

- Where might you get the necessary reading material for text structure instruction?

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**Table 1**
**Student-Friendly Descriptions of Five Text Structures**

| Text structure | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Simple description | "The author's intent is to tell us about something. They use characteristics or facts to describe it" (Bohaty, 2015, p. 39). |
| Compare and contrast | "The author's intent is to describe a connection between two things. They make connections by telling us similarities or differences" (pp. 39–40). |
| Sequence | "The author's intent is to describe the order in which things happen. There are three types of Sequence: steps, timeline, and cycle. Regardless of the type, the author is putting information in an order" (p. 40). |
| Cause and effect | "The author's intent is to tell us how an event always leads to an outcome. The event is the cause and the outcome is the result. The relationship is between the cause and the effect" (p. 40). |
| Problem and solution | "The author's intent is to tell us how a problem might be solved. The relationship is between the problem and potential solution" (p. 40). |

two possible goals of identification strategies: to recognize a single text structure or to discriminate among several possible text structures. The goal teachers choose may depend on whether they teach a single text structure or multiple text structures at a time. There are several strategies teachers can use to help students identify the text structure of the passages they read.

**Introducing the Concept of Structures Without Reading Materials.** It may be useful to introduce students to the concept of text structures outside of written text using group discussions to activate prior knowledge. Here are example discussion starters for each text structure:

- *Simple description:* Describe how this classroom looks to somebody who has never visited.
- *Compare and contrast:* Note the similarities and differences between an apple and an orange (e.g., Alvermann, 1981; Coleman, 1983).
- *Sequence:* Explain how to tie your shoelaces.
- *Cause and effect:* What are some reasons why you might be late to school? What might happen if you are late for school?
- *Problem and solution:* What are some problems that occur in school and some solutions (McDermott, 1990)?

Students should be the ones who actively generate the ideas. After the group discussion, teachers should provide the text structure definitions and then transition into pointing out examples of text structures in expository text.

**Teaching Signal Words.** Another strategy is to have students look for signal words in expository text (e.g., Wijekumar, Meyer, & Lei, 2012). As the label suggests, signal words are words that signal the text structure to the reader. Other terms for *signal words* include *clue words*, *cue words*, or *keywords*. To help keep track of the signal words in a passage, students can highlight or underline them as they read (e.g., Hoffman, 2010). Table 2 provides examples of signal words for each text structure.

Signal words can be very effective for helping students identify the structure of expository text. However, we find it necessary to offer a few words of caution. First, signal words can be misleading. There are times when a signal word may appear in a passage without reflecting the passage's overall structure. Second, students may end up paying more attention to the signal words than they do to the content of the passage.

It should not be forgotten that the purpose of teaching signal words is to help students identify the structure of a text, which then provides a framework for understanding the content of the text. Using signal words to identify text structure is a strategy, not an end goal. Therefore, it is best if this strategy is paired with additional instruction.

**Discrimination Training.** Discrimination training involves studying more than one text structure at a time. For example, when teaching struggling readers in fourth and fifth grades, Bohaty (2015) introduced the simple description and compare-and-contrast text structures in the same lesson. Students then read passages and determined which text structure was being used. This required students to think about the content of the passage and the intent of the author. By introducing different text structures in close proximity, teachers can highlight the elements that distinguish each text structure from

**Table 2**
**Examples of Signal Words for Five Text Structures**

| Text structure | Signal words |
| --- | --- |
| Simple description | *Looks like, sounds like,* [shape, size, color, number], *for example, for instance, specifically, such as, in particular* |
| Compare and contrast | Compare: *Same as, similar(ly), both, have in common, likewise, alike*<br>Contrast: *Different, in comparison, in contrast, however, but, on the other hand* |
| Sequence | *First, second, third…, initially, preceding, before, next, then, finally, now, following, after* |
| Cause and effect | *Because, as a result, outcome, so, thus, consequently, leads to, is caused by, if…then, produces, therefore* |
| Problem and solution | *The problem/issue/difficulty is, solution, solve, one answer is, a reason for the problem* |

the others, which may help students discriminate among them (Bohaty, 2015).

## Selection and Organization Strategies

Students' ability to select and organize the most important information in a text may keep them from becoming bogged down by less important details. Being able to identify the structure of a text is a helpful precursor to this objective because students learn that the important information is based on the text's structural elements (e.g., the problem and solution in a problem-and-solution passage or the similarities and differences in a compare-and-contrast passage). We present strategies first for selecting and then for organizing information from passages.

**Asking Guiding Questions.** To help facilitate the selection of important information from passages, students can learn to ask themselves guiding questions. These questions should help students focus on the structure-related elements of the text. For example, second graders were taught to focus on the cause of a cause-and-effect paragraph by asking themselves, What is the cause (Williams et al., 2007), or what happened (Williams et al., 2014)? Similarly, to focus on the effect, they were taught to ask themselves, What is the effect (Williams et al., 2007), or why (Williams et al., 2014)?

Students can use the guiding question technique with other text structures as well. Here are some appropriate questions when reading a compare-and-contrast passage (Williams, Stafford, Lauer, Hall, & Pollini, 2009): What two things is this paragraph about? How are they the same? How are they different? See Table 3 for more examples of guiding questions for each text structure.

**Using Signal Words (Again).** Another way to help students select the key information in text is to have them pay attention to the signal words. Williams et al. (2014) used signal words to teach second graders to select structure-related information from cause-and-effect passages. Students analyzed a target paragraph by circling the cause words (e.g., *because*) in blue and effect words (e.g., *therefore*) in green. For sentences containing a cause word, students learned that the cause came after the signal word and the effect came before it. The reverse was true for sentences with effect words.

**Using Graphic Organizers.** Graphic organizers can also aid in the selection of important information and, by providing spaces to record structure-related information from the passage (see Figure 1), they can illustrate how information can be organized in a meaningful way. Teachers can supply empty graphic organizers for students to fill in or teach students to create their own.
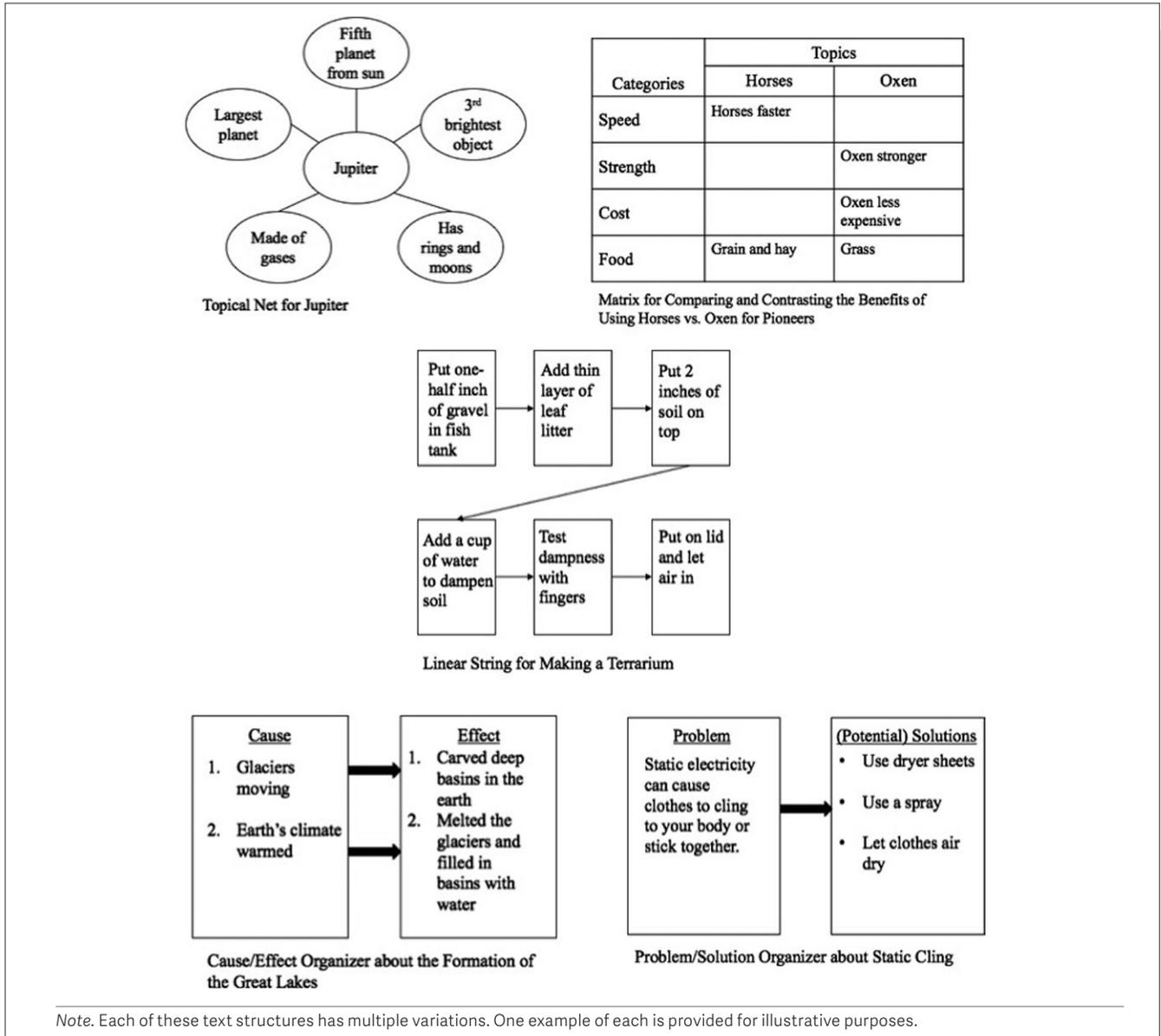
For simple description passages, teachers may consider using graphic organizers called topical nets (e.g., Newman, 2007; Russell, 2005; Scott, 2011; Whittaker, 1992). Topical nets consist of a center circle (or other shape) with additional circles branching out from it. Students write the main topic in the center circle and write characteristics and facts in the outside circles.

Students can organize passages with a compare-and-contrast text structure into matrices (e.g., Hall, Sabey, & McClellan, 2005; Whittaker, 1992; Williams et al., 2005, 2009). A matrix has the topics listed across the top and the categories on which the topics are being compared or contrasted listed down the left side. Organizing the information in

**Table 3**
**Examples of Guiding Questions for Five Text Structures**

| Text structure | Guiding questions |
| --- | --- |
| Simple description | What is the author describing? What are the details used to describe it? |
| Compare and contrast | What objects, concepts, or categories are being compared? How are they the same? How are they different? What features are being compared? |
| Sequence | What is the first thing that happened? What is the next step? What happened last? |
| Cause and effect | What are the cause(s) and related effect(s)? What happened? Why? |
| Problem and solution | What were the difficulties or questions? What were the attempts or possible actions to solve them? How was it or might it be solved? What were the consequences of the options? What was the result of the actions? |

**Figure 1**
**Graphic Organizers for Five Text Structures**



*Topical Net for Jupiter*

| Categories | Topics | |
|---|---|---|
| | Horses | Oxen |
| Speed | Horses faster | |
| Strength | | Oxen stronger |
| Cost | | Oxen less expensive |
| Food | Grain and hay | Grass |

*Matrix for Comparing and Contrasting the Benefits of Using Horses vs. Oxen for Pioneers*

*Linear String for Making a Terrarium*

*Cause/Effect Organizer about the Formation of the Great Lakes*

*Problem/Solution Organizer about Static Cling*

*Note.* Each of these text structures has multiple variations. One example of each is provided for illustrative purposes.

this manner makes the similarities and differences more apparent.

An effective option for organizing sequence passages is using linear strings (e.g., Newman, 2007; Reese, 1988; Russell, 2005; Scott, 2011). Linear strings are made up of a series of boxes connected in the middle with lines or arrows. Starting in the first box, students write down each event from the sequence, with each box containing a different event. The arrows indicate the direction of the sequence.

Graphic organizers for cause-and-effect text structures should highlight the relation between the cause(s) and the effect(s). One way to do this is to have two side-by-side text boxes with the causes written in the left box and the effects written in the right (e.g., Gentry, 2006; Gould, 1987; Williams et al., 2014). Arrows can be drawn to specify the direction of the relations.

We recommend that students use a similar graphic organizer for problem-and-solution passages. In

this case, the problems would go in the left box and the solutions would go in the right. Of course, teachers can make variations of this basic structure, such as adding boxes for information about why the problem happened (McDermott, 1990), attempts to solve the problem, or possible solutions.

**Using Note Frames.** As an alternative to taking notes in graphic organizers, students can use note frames. Figure 2 provides an example of a note frame for a compare-and-contrast passage about plant and animal cells. Note frames are helpful because they provide students with a simple framework for recording structure-related information from texts onto typical lined paper. Students should practice recording information into teacher-created note frames before learning how to create their own frames (Bohaty, Hebert, Nelson, & Roehling, 2016).

### Summarizing Strategies

Like graphic organizers or note frames, summaries should include the structure-related information from a text. Consequently, if students have already completed a graphic organizer for a passage, they can use it to help write their summary (e.g., Hall et al., 2005; Newman, 2007; Scott, 2011; Williams et al., 2009). The important information is already picked out, so teaching this strategy becomes a simpler task of teaching students to rewrite their notes into a paragraph and add a topic sentence.

If students need more support with learning to write summaries, they can use paragraph frames (e.g., Hall et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2005, 2009). Paragraph frames have a cloze format that prompts students to include certain information in their summaries: "This paragraph is about ___ and ___. In some ways, they are the same. ___. In some ways, they are different. ___" (Williams et al., 2005, p. 542). This strategy is most helpful when students are first learning to write summaries. As students become more practiced with this task, teachers should attempt to fade the frames away (Hall et al., 2005).

### Writing Strategies

Teachers can adapt many of the previously identified *reading* strategies as *writing* strategies to help students create their own expository passages (e.g., Hammann & Stevens, 2003; Hickerson, 1986; Raphael, Englert, & Kirschner, 1986). Using these strategies may strengthen students' understanding of text structures for reading, as writing has been shown to improve reading comprehension (Graham & Hebert, 2011). Before teaching the specific strategies, it may be helpful to show students examples of well-written expository passages (e.g., Raphael et al., 1986), as the study of models (or mentor texts) is an effective tool for writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007). In this section, we present a few example strategies in abbreviated form because they have been presented previously as reading strategies.

**Writing With Guiding Questions.** One writing strategy is to provide students with worksheets that contain guiding questions (Raphael et al., 1986). The purpose of guiding questions is to remind students of the structure-related information that should be included in their text. For example, if students are writing a cause-and-effect paragraph, some guiding questions might be these: What happened, and why (see Table 3 for more examples)?

Responding to structure-related questions can help students plan their writing. Teachers can then model how to turn these responses into statements, and then how to structure the statements into a cohesive passage. Students should be given guided practice opportunities to scaffold their understanding.

**Writing With Graphic Organizers.** The same graphic organizers that students use to take notes about reading materials can also help them organize their own writing (see Figure 1; Hammann & Stevens, 2003; Raphael et al., 1986). As an example,

**Figure 2**
**Example of a Compare-and-Contrast Note Frame**



Plants and animals are both made of cells. Their cells are similar. Cells of plants and animals both have a nucleus in the center. They both also have cytoplasm, a jelly-like substance around the nucleus. In contrast, plant and animal cells have some differences. Plant cells are rectangular. They also have cell walls. Animal cells have a rounded shape. They do not have cell walls.

| Structure: *C/C* | Topic: Plant cells vs. animal cells |
| --- | --- |
| Similarities ▼ | |
| Nucleus - in center | |
| Cytoplasm - jelly-like substance | |
| Differences ▼ | |
| Shape - plants rectangular vs. animals round | |
| Cell walls - plants have vs. animals don't have | |

*Note.* Adapted from "Taking Notes on Expository Text Using Text Structures: A Strategy for Struggling Readers," by J. Bohaty, M. Hebert, J.R. Nelson, and J. Roehling, April 2016, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Council for Exceptional Children, St. Louis, MO.

if students are supposed to write a paragraph with a sequence structure, they could first organize their thoughts into a linear string. Filling in graphic organizers provides students with a framework for thinking about the information they need to include in their text.

To increase students' understanding and flexible use of text structures, teachers can also use graphic organizers to have students reorganize expository texts into different structures. For instance, Hammann and Stevens (2003) taught students how to reorganize two simple description paragraphs into a compare-and-contrast passage. To help with this transformation, students put the information from the simple description paragraphs into a compare-and-contrast planner (or organizer) before composing the new passage. A major difficulty with asking students to write expository text is that they may not have sufficient content knowledge to do so adequately. Using preexisting text bypasses this problem.

## Assessments

After planning and implementing text structure instruction, teachers need to know whether their instruction was effective. More specifically, they need to determine whether students have met the learning objectives and whether their expository reading comprehension has improved as a result. Assessments are a tool for gaining this knowledge.

### Assessing Student Progress Toward Learning Objectives

Teachers should have a plan for assessing whether students have reached each of the learning objectives in their text structure unit. In this way, teachers can find out whether students have learned the different skills intended to improve their expository reading comprehension.

**Assessing Identification Skills.** Teachers may simply want to assess whether students are able to identify the structure of text. For example, Williams and colleagues (2009) wanted to determine whether second graders could correctly identify compare-and-contrast passages. To administer the assessment, an interviewer read a paragraph to the student and asked, "Does this paragraph tell a story about animals, compare and contrast animals, or tell about an animal's problems?" (p. 19). Students earned one point for correctly identifying the structure.

Of course, teachers can make the assessment more challenging for older students. As another example, Bohaty (2015) assessed fourth and fifth graders' identification skills with a 15-item measure. Each item consisted of a short passage followed by five multiple-choice options: simple description, compare and contrast, sequence, cause and effect, and problem and solution. Students first read the passage and then decided which of the five text structures it best represented.

**Assessing Skills for Selecting and Organizing Information.** Teachers can develop rubrics to assess whether students can successfully select and organize the important information in a passage (e.g., Newman, 2007; Scott, 2011). The rubric should have two main considerations: Are the students including the relevant information? And is information organized according to the appropriate text structure elements? However, there are a variety of ways that these two considerations could be integrated into the rubric. A graphic organizer rubric adapted from Scott (2011) shows one example of how this could be done (see Figure 3).

**Assessing Summarizing Skills.** We also recommend developing rubrics to assess students' ability to summarize expository text (e.g., Newman, 2007; Scott, 2011; Ulper & Akkok, 2010). A good summary might include a topic sentence and key details based on the structure of the original text while also leaving out unessential parts. However, teachers may vary in their definition of a good summary, and their rubrics should vary accordingly. Figure 4 provides an example of a rubric for summary writing adapted from Ulper and Akkok (2010).

**Assessing Writing Skills.** When evaluating whether students can write expository text with appropriate text structures, teachers can use techniques similar to those students used to revise their writing: a rubric containing questions that the text should answer based on its intended structure. The rubric could also take into account whether students included signal words to improve the clarity of their writing. Because the purpose of the writing objective

**Figure 3**
**Example of Graphic Organizer Scoring Rubric**

| Score | Explanation of score |
|-------|----------------------|
| 5 | Graphic organizer using the appropriate text structure that displays the topic plus of all the text's subtopics with related details |
| 4 | Graphic organizer using the appropriate text structure that includes the topic (which may not be clearly stated) plus all of the text's subtopics with some related details |
| 3 | Presentation of information that does not use the appropriate text structure but demonstrates some awareness of text organization, including some subtopics and some related details |
| 2 | List of details |
| 1 | Incorrect content and/or little or nothing related to text; copying |
| 0 | No response |

*Note.* Adapted from "Explicit Instruction on Rhetorical Patterns and Student-Constructed Graphic Organizers: The Impact on Sixth-Grade Students' Comprehension of Social Studies Text" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), by D.B. Scott, 2011, University of Maryland, College Park. Adapted with permission.

is for students to gain a deeper understanding of text structures, we advise placing less emphasis on spelling and grammar.

## Assessing Expository Reading Comprehension

The assessments that we have mentioned so far are meant to check whether students have met the learning objectives for the text structure unit. If students have met the learning objectives, they have demonstrated the ability to use text structure strategies that are intended to improve their expository reading comprehension. However, teachers still need to monitor whether using text structure strategies actually helps students better comprehend expository text, which is the ultimate goal of text structure instruction.

## Reading Materials

The instructional strategies and assessments that we have described require multiple expository passages for each text structure that is taught. Teachers could write their own passages (e.g., Williams et al., 2005) or extract passages directly from expository reading material (e.g., Bartlett, 1978; Duffy, 1985). However, extracted passages do not always have an obvious text structure. Armbruster (1984) referred to these passages as inconsiderate text. If they so choose, teachers can modify inconsiderate text (e.g., Bakken, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 1997), which may involve rewriting the text to make the structure more distinct or selecting portions of the text that already have a distinct structure.

Our recommendation is that teachers should start by using modified passages that provide a strong model

**Figure 4**
**Example of Summary Scoring Rubric**

| Summarizing rules | None: 0 points | Inadequate: 1 point | Acceptable: 2 points | Adequate: 3 points |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Summary included a reconstructed title. | | | | |
| Summary included the thesis of the source text. | | | | |
| Summary included supporting idea(s) of the source text. | | | | |
| Summary was the reconstructed form of the source text in original sentences. | | | | |
| All necessary text was chosen and placed in summary. | | | | |
| There was no trivia or redundancy in the summary. | | | | |
| Summary was satisfying/long enough to represent the source text. | | | | |

*Note.* Adapted from "The Effect of Using Expository Text Structures as a Strategy on Summarization Skills," by H. Ulper and E.A. Akkok, in L.E. Kattington (Ed.), *Handbook of Curriculum Development* (pp. 303–328), 2010, New York, NY: Nova Science. Copyright 2010 by Nova Science Publishers. Adapted with permission.

for how text should be structured. We believe that starting with well-structured passages may make it easier for students to learn the text structure strategies. Once students feel comfortable using the strategies with well-structured passages, teachers can begin to incorporate more authentic passages that may have ambiguous text structures. Teachers can then begin to teach students to use these strategies with multiple passages within the same text source. The benefit of incorporating authentic text into instruction is that students may able to generalize the text structure strategies more easily to everyday reading materials they encounter in school and beyond.

## Conclusion

Knowing how to read and comprehend expository text is an essential skill in today's society. Edu-

cators should not assume that students will automatically learn this skill over time. Rather, educators need an explicit, research-based method for teaching expository reading. In this article, we have presented one such method: text structure instruction.

Text structure instruction is versatile; there is no one set way that it should be implemented. This versatility makes it an advantageous instructional method. Teachers can adapt text structure instruction to make it appropriate to the skills and needs of their students. To conclude, Figures 5 and 6 provide examples of how teachers of two different grade levels might combine some of the strategies that we presented in this article to develop a cohesive unit on text structure instruction that meets the needs of their students.

**Figure 5**
**Example Text Structure Unit Plan for Second Grade**

| | |
|---|---|
| Objectives | 1. Students will be able to identify sequence passages.<br>2. Students will be able to select and organize the most important information in simple description and sequence passages. |
| Instruction | The teacher developed a cohesive sequence of text structure activities to meet the objectives.<br><br>To meet objective 1:<br>1. Introduce the concept of sequence text structures with a group discussion (e.g., how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich).<br>2. Introduce signal words.<br>3. Model discriminating between passages with and without a sequence text structure.<br>4. Have students practice identifying sequence passages, with support and independently.<br><br>To meet objective 2:<br>1. Model organizing sequence passages into linear strings by asking questions about the text (e.g., What happens first?).<br>2. Have students practice organizing sequence passages into linear strings, with support and independently. |
| Assessment | The teacher developed a plan to assess whether students had met the objectives.<br><br>To assess objective 1:<br>1. Read aloud 10 passages as students follow along with their own copies.<br>2. Have students write yes if they thought the passage had a sequence text structure or no if they thought it did not.<br>3. Have students explain their decisions using evidence.<br><br>To assess objective 2:<br>1. Have students read two sequence passages and organize them into linear strings.<br>2. Check the linear strings to see if each box contains one of the main events without extraneous details. |
| Reading material | Passages were adapted from trade books to provide a clear example of a single text structure. |

**Figure 6**
**Example Text Structure Unit Plan for Fifth Grade**

| Objectives | 1. Students will be able to select and organize the most important information from cause-and-effect and problem-and-solution passages.<br>2. Students will be able to write their own problem-and-solution passage. |
|---|---|
| Instruction | The teacher developed a cohesive sequence of text structure activities to meet the objectives.<br><br>To meet objective 1:<br>1. Model organizing cause-and-effect and problem-and-solution passages into graphic organizers by using signal words to select the structure-related information.<br>2. Have students practice organizing cause-and-effect and problem-and-solution passages into graphic organizers, with support and independently.<br><br>To meet objective 2:<br>1. Model filling out a problem-and-solution graphic organizer using a topic relevant to students' lives (e.g., not enough allowance money).<br>2. Model writing a passage using the information in the graphic organizer, making sure to add signal words for clarity.<br>3. Think of a new problem. With input from the class, create a new graphic organizer and then write a passage from the information in it.<br>4. Provide students with example problems to write about. Have them practice creating a graphic organizer and then writing a passage from the information in it. |
| Assessment | The teacher used assessments to check whether students had met the objectives.<br><br>To assess objective 1:<br>1. Have students read three cause-and-effect and three problem-and-solution passages and put ideas into graphic organizers.<br>2. Check the graphic organizers to make sure they include the appropriate structure-related information without extraneous details.<br><br>To assess objective 2:<br>1. Provide students with a few examples of problems to write about.<br>2. Have students select a topic, identify resources, and read information on their topic.<br>3. Have students create a graphic organizer and then write a passage from it.<br>4. Use a rubric to score the writing for communicative clarity. |
| Reading material | Passages were taken directly from textbooks to make it easier for students to adapt the strategies to future expository text. |

## TAKE ACTION!

Use the following framework for thinking about text structure instruction:

**1.** Decide what the specific learning objectives will be for the text structure unit.

**2.** Plan out the instructional strategies that will help students meet the objectives.

**3.** Develop a plan for assessing students' progress toward the objectives.

**4.** Prepare the expository reading materials to be used for instructing and assessing students.

### NOTES

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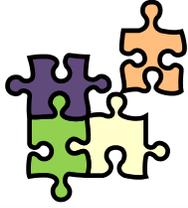
## Problem and Solution

**Purpose:** to state one or more problems and provide one or more solutions to the problem.

### Signal Words and Phrases

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| problem | answer | so that |
| solution | solved | led to |
| dilemma | cause | issue |
| puzzle | since | advantage |
| because | as a result of | disadvantage |
| question | in order to | |

### Comprehension Question Frames

1. What is the problem?
2. Who has the problem?
3. Why is it a problem?
4. What is causing the problem?
5. What solutions have been suggested or tried?
6. What are the pros and cons of various solutions?
7. Which solutions worked or seem to have the best chance for solving the problem?

### Graphic Organizers
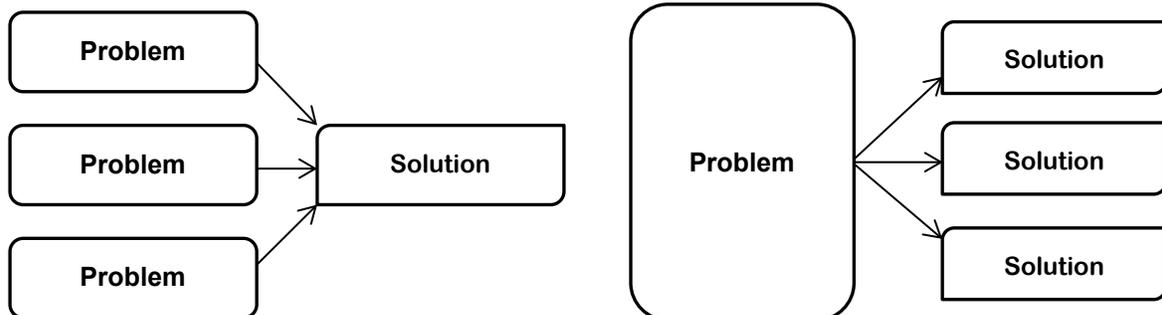
## Description

**Purpose: to explain a topic, concept, person, place, event or object, by providing characteristics, features and/or giving examples.**

### Signal Words and Phrases

position words (e.g., beside, near, in front of, above, along)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| such as | most important, notable | specifically |
| for instance | features | characteristics |
| appears to be | made up of | consists of |
| looks like | in fact | for example |

### Comprehension Question Frames

1. What is the subject being described?

2. How is the topic being described (i.e., where it is, what it does, how it works, what it looks like, its classification)?

3. What are the most important attributes or characteristics?

### Graphic Organizers
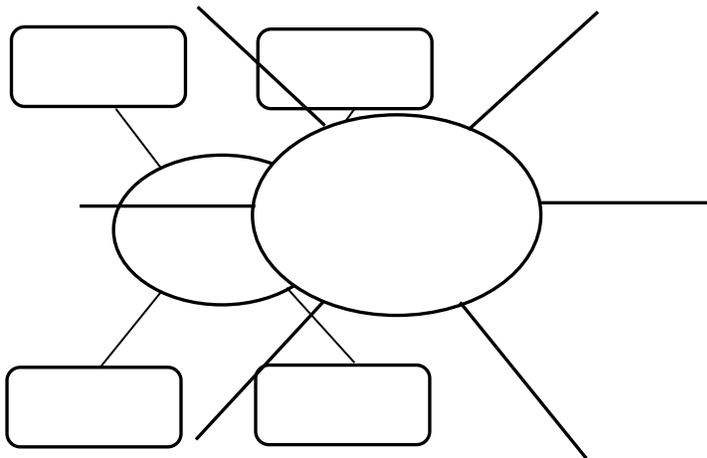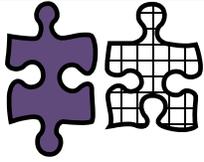
# Compare and Contrast

**Purpose: to describe what is similar and/or different about two or more subjects.**
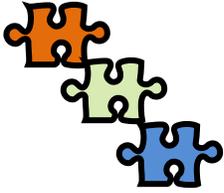
## Signal Words and Phrases

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| both | similarity | either-or |
| also | opposite | yet |
| too | different from | on the contrary |
| just as | compared to | on the other hand |
| instead of | however | in contrast |
| but | as opposed to | in comparison |
| alike | same as | |
| unlike | despite | |

## Comprehension Question Frames

1.  What subjects are being compared?

2.  What is it about them that is being compared?

3.  What characteristics of the subjects form the basis of the comparison?

4.  What characteristics do they have in common? How are they alike?

5.  In what ways are they different?

## Graphic Organizers

Alike    Different
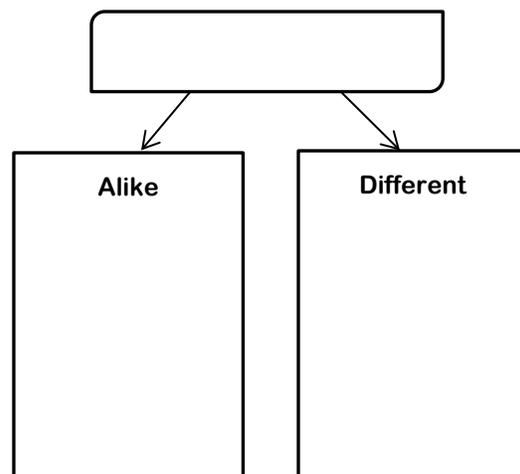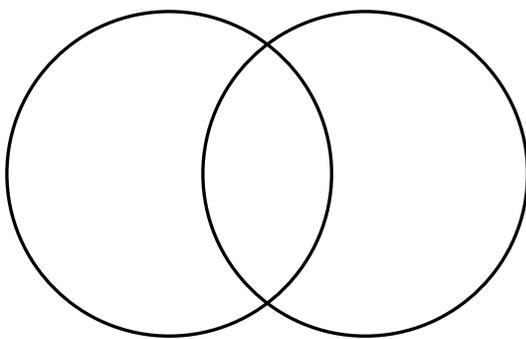
## Chronology/Sequence

**Purpose:** to provide information in time order or the order in which events, actions, or steps in a process occur.
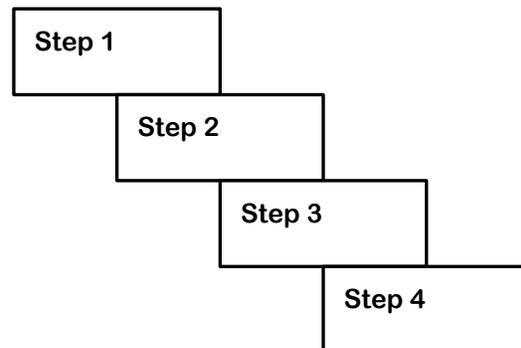
### Signal Words and Phrases

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| first/second/third | directions | as soon as |
| then | before | prior to |
| next | now | step |
| last | after | following |
| initially | at the same time | simultaneously |
| during | meanwhile | finally |

### Comprehension Question Frames

1. What sequence of events is being described?
2. What are the major events or incidents that occur?
3. What happens first, next, last?
4. How is the sequence or cycle revealed in the text?
5. What are the steps, directions, procedures to follow to make or do something?

### Graphic Organizers

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4

## Cause and Effect

Purpose: explain why or how something happened/happens

Effect = What happened     Cause = Why it happened

### Signal Words and Phrases
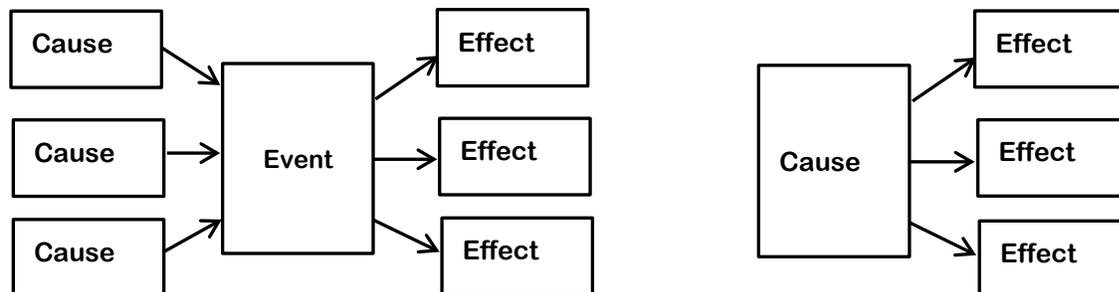
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| because | leads to | on account of |
| so | consequently | outcome |
| therefore | when/if - then | effects of |
| as a result | reasons for | impact |
| since | thus | influenced by |
| in order to | due to | |
| is caused by | for this reason | |

### Comprehension Question Frames

1. What were the specific events that happened?
2. Why did the events happen? What were the causes?
3. What were the results or outcomes of these events happening? What was the effect?
4. Did prior events cause or influence the main event? If so, in what ways?
5. What is the significance of the event and/or the results (outcomes)?

### Graphic Organizers

```
Cause ┐
Cause ─→ Event ─→ Effect
Cause ┘         Effect
                Effect

Cause ─→ Effect
         Effect
         Effect
```

## Text Structure Practice: Identification

### Directions

Read each passage below and determine which of these text structure types each represents:

- Problem and Solution
- Description
- Compare and Contrast
- Chronology/Sequence
- Cause and Effect

Circle any signal words that could be used to help identify the text type and underline any other words or phrases that helped you make your decision.

| Sample Passage | Text Structure |
|---|---|
| There are several reasons why so many people attend the Olympia games or watch them on television. One reason is tradition. The name Olympics and the torch and flame remind people of the ancient games. People can escape the ordinariness of daily life by attending or watching the Olympics. They like to identify with someone else's individual sacrifice and accomplishment. National pride is another reason, and an athlete's or a team's hard-earned victory becomes a nation's victory. There are national medal counts and people keep track of how many medals their country's athletes have won. | |
| The Olympic symbol consists of five interlocking rings. The rings represent the five areas—Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North and South America— from which athletes come to compete in the games. The rings are colored black, blue, green, red, and yellow. At least one of those colors is found in the flag of every country sending athletes to compete in the Olympic games. | |
| One problem with the modern Olympics is that it has become very big and expensive to operate. The city or country that hosts the games often loses a lot of money. A stadium, pools, and playing fields must be built for the athletic events and housing is needed for the athletes who come from around the world. And all of these facilities are used for only two weeks! In 1984 Los Angeles solved these problems by charging a fee for companies who wanted to be official sponsors of the games. Companies like McDonald's paid a lot of money to be part of the Olympics. Many buildings that were already built in Los Angeles area were also used. The coliseum where the 1932 games were held was used again and many colleges and universities in the area became playing and living areas. | |
| The modern Olympics is very unlike the ancient Olympic games. Individual events are different. While there were no swimming races in the ancient | |

| | |
|---|---|
| games, for example, there were chariot races. There were no female contestants and all athletes competed in the nude. Of course, the ancient and modern Olympics are also alike in many ways. Some events, such as the javelin and discus throws are the same. Some people say that cheating, professionalism, and nationalism in the modern games are a disgrace to the Olympic tradition. But according to the ancient Greek writers, there were many cases of cheating, nationalism and professionalism in their Olympics, too. | |
| The Olympic games began as athletic festivals to honor the Greek gods. The most important festival was held in the valley of Olympia to honor Zeus, the king of the gods. It was the festival that became the Olympic games in 776 B.C. These games were ended in A.D. 394 by the Roman Emperor who ruled Greece. No Olympic games were held for more than 1,500 years. Then the modern Olympics began in 1896. Almost 300 male athletes competed in the first modern Olympics. In the games held in 1900, female athletes where allowed to compete. The games have continued every four years since 1896 except during World War II and they will most likely continue for many years to come. | |

## Text Structure Practice: Use

### Directions

1. With a partner, select one of the passages above.

2. Practice modeling a "think aloud" about how you figured out what text structure it follows, including identifying signal words.

3. Select and complete an appropriate graphic organizer for your passage.

4. Select comprehension frame questions you would ask students to use with this passage.

5. Explain how knowing the text structure helped you locate, organize, understand and recall the content.

### Graphic Organizer

### Comprehension Question Frames

## Planning Tool for Teaching About Text Structure
*Adapted from Doing What Works, www.dww.ed.gov*

| Teaching Strategies | Planning Notes |
|---|---|
| **Identify an informational text structure you would like to teach or review** | |
| **Select texts that are:**<br>• good examples of the particular structure you are teaching<br>• engaging, interesting<br>• appropriate to the students' reading level<br>• high quality, have rich language | |
| **Explain why understanding text structure is important**<br><br>**Model how to identify text structure** | |
| **Help students to identify clue words in informational texts** | |
| **Use graphic organizers (maps, charts, cards, diagrams) to help students match structure to content** | |
| **Plan questions to help students understand text structures** | |
| **Plan activities for students to explore text structure on their own, in pairs or groups (diagrams, games, dramatizations, etc.)** | |
| **(other teaching strategies here)** | |
| | |

| Planning Tool for Applying Text Structure to Content Area Text | |
| --- | --- |
| **Teaching Strategies** | **Planning Notes** |
| Identify passages from the text for this lesson/unit/chapter where applying text structure knowledge would be useful. | |
| What pre-reading questions would you ask or activities would you have students do to help them identify the structure type?<br>(e.g., looking for signal words) | |
| What during-reading supports will you provide to help them use their knowledge of text structure to understand this passage?<br>(e.g., guiding questions to answer and record, graphic organizer) | |
| What after-reading supports will you use to help them use their knowledge of text structure to understand, recall, organize, and/or summarize this passage?<br>(e.g., guiding questions, writing summaries from graphic organizer information, topical file cards or sticky notes) | |
| (*other teaching strategies here*) | |
| How will you assess<br><br>(1) how well students are learning to identify this text structure and use it to improve comprehension and<br><br>(2) next steps? | |