

Teaching Text Structure

4th – 6th Grade

Supplemental Resources

What is Text Structure?

Text structure refers to the organizational patterns that are used by authors to present their ideas and achieve a particular purpose in a piece of text. As authors write a text to communicate an idea, they will use a structure that goes along with that idea.

Why Teach Text Structure?

Knowing how a piece of text is organized helps the reader make better sense of the information presented in the text which ultimately leads to increased comprehension. By identifying the organizational structures of texts, students can observe how authors arrange ideas and determine which kinds of structures are used to interrelate ideas. Students who are able to identify and understand the organizational structure of a piece of text remember more of what they read, are better able to organize their own recall of the information, and are better able to discriminate between information related to the main idea and extraneous information. Additionally, building a student's awareness of the different structures they encounter when they read leads them to be better writers. It builds their ability to select structures that match the information they want to convey and assists them in their organization and presentation of these ideas.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy for a reader to identify an expository text pattern and use it to support his/her comprehension. Informational writing is complex. Authors do not always write texts in neat, perfectly identifiable patterns. Further, at any time, an author can switch from one expository text pattern to another. But, the reader who is attentive to the author's style and organizational patterns will find it easier to negotiate the decisions that the author has made in explaining the information. Further, comprehension typically is stronger when the reader can use the writer's strategies to mentally organize the information while s/he is reading. S/he will find it easier to shift from one pattern to another when the author's explanation signals it.

How do I Begin Teaching Text Structure?

It is helpful to begin teaching text structure using "pure" examples. Though these examples are often contrived, they help students begin to identify the attributes of each structure. Once they have a basic understanding of each text structure, they can use this knowledge as a framework for reading and comprehending more complex text.

Critical components of teaching text structure include:

- Explicitly teaching each structure through the use of "pure" or model texts
- Having students complete graphic organizers aligned to the structure of the text
- Alerting students to the types of signal words or phrases associated with each structure
- Asking questions before, during, and after reading related specifically to the text structure
- Requiring students to write in each of the structures

Common Text Structures

Chronological Order:

Purpose: to show how to do something or make something, or to relate a series of events that happen over time

- Also known as time order, sequence, or temporal order
- This structure is organized from one point in time to another
- Transition words such as *first, next, later, after, before, following, then, in addition to, followed by, and finally* are included to help the reader understand how events relate to one another
- Dates and times are also used

Questions to ask as we read: How are the steps organized? What is the time span from the first event to the last? How does the author signal the change from one event to the next? What do all of the events explain?

Cause and Effect

Purpose: to show why something exists or is in place, to tell what happens as the result of an action or actions, to show how one or more causes led to one or more effects

- This text structure also has a strong time component, since *causes* come before *effects*
- Transition words such as *cause, effect, as a result, consequently, so, so that, because of, since, in order to,* are used
- Many texts do not include just one cause leading to one effect—instead, there may be several causes and several effects

Questions to ask as we read: What is the cause? What are the effects? Were there several causes and several effects? How did the cause lead to the effects? How did people react?

Problem and Solution:

Purpose: to present a problem, and show how it can be (or has been) solved

- This text structure can be confused with cause and effect
- The key difference is that problem and solution always has a solution, while cause and effect does not
- Transitions may include *problem, solution, solve, effect, hopeful, concern, challenge, resolve*

Questions to ask as we read: What is the problem? What are the solutions? Who worked to solve the problem? Has the problem been solved yet, or will it be solved in the future? What caused the problem?

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Compare and Contrast:

Purpose: to present how two topics are the same and/or different.

- This text structure is fairly easy for students to understand
- The text may use a *clustered* approach, with details about one topic followed by details about the other
- The text may also show an *alternating* approach, with the author going back and forth between the two topics
- Transition words may include *like, similar, unlike, on the other hand, also, same as, different from, resembles, yet, as well as, alike, however and too*
- Compare and contrast paragraphs are often embedded in other text structures as an author needs to explain a similarity or difference

Questions to ask as we read: What is being compared? What are the similarities? What are the differences? Which similarities and differences are the most significant? Are the details alternating or clustered?

Description:

Purpose: to tell what something is, to present an item's attributes or properties, to show what an item or place is like

- Helps us visualize and understand a topic
- Descriptive adjectives help us visualize the topic
- Explains the characteristics of the subject or topic and uses details

Questions to ask as we read: What is being described? How does the author organize the description? Which detail is the most important? How do all of the details fit together?

Proposition and Support:

Purpose: To make a claim/statement and support it with details

- This structure attempts to convince or persuade the reader to follow the views or ideas of the author
- Signal words include *clearly, logically, surely, in conclusion, therefore*

“Understanding the expository text structures gives readers a better shot at determining important information when reading nonfiction...The text in standardized tests and traditional textbooks frequently falls into one or another of these text structures. If students know what to look for in terms of text structure, they grasp the meaning more easily.”

from Nonfiction Matters, by Stephanie Harvey

Text Structure Examples:

Chronological:

Goose bumps make me shiver. First I get cold. Then I shake all over.

Description:

Goose bumps make me shiver. I get little bumps on my skin. They look like sesame seeds.

Compare and Contrast:

Some people get goose bumps from fear. Others get goose bumps when they are touched emotionally.

Cause and Effect:

Goose bumps make me shiver. When the temperature drops below 45 degrees, my skin crinkles into goose bumps.

Problem and Solution:

Goose bumps make me shiver. But they disappear as soon as I cover up with a jacket or sweater.

Now, you try it!

Text Structure Examples:

Chronological:

The first day of school is always an interesting day.

Description:

The first day of school is always an interesting day.

Compare and Contrast:

The first day of school is always an interesting day.

Cause and Effect:

The first day of school is always an interesting day.

Problem and Solution:

The first day of school is always an interesting day.

Sample Paragraphs –Chronological Order

The Fire

Daniel Sullivan was the first to notice the flames coming from the O’Leary barn at around 8:30 pm on October 8. A problem with the alarm box made it impossible for the people in the area to call for the fire department. By 9:30 pm, the entire block was blazing. In another 3 hours, there were fires all over Chicago. The heavy wind coming from the lake only made the fire bigger. It would be another day before the fire would be completely out. By that time, 17,500 buildings had been burned.

Harry Houdini

Harry Houdini was born in Hungary in 1874 and moved to Wisconsin when he was four years old. As a young boy, he became captivated by magic when he saw a magician perform. Harry directed his energy to becoming a magician, but some of his first shows were a flop. After five years he almost gave it up. But the “needle trick changed all that. In this trick he swallowed needles and thread and coughed them back up with all the needles threaded through their eyes. Harry was on his way up! Harry went on to perform amazing stunts and tricks including in 1910 escaping out of the mouth of a cannon just before it blew up. No wonder Harry Houdini became a household name. Harry Houdini died on Halloween in 1926.

Diary of the Monarch Butterfly

February 19, 2007 — It's too early for spring migration, but monarch butterflies are on the move! They are spreading down the rivers in search of water. These early signs mean the winter season is coming to a close. Monarch butterflies have been in Mexico since November. Can they survive all winter with little or no food? Let's find out.

March 1, 2007 — It's March. The days are getting longer and temperatures are rising in Mexico. Within the month these butterflies will leave their winter home and begin the trip to North America. Get ready to track the spring migration.

March 10, 2007 — Here come the monarchs! Spring migration begins every March in a flurry. The monarchs are in a race against time. They can't stay in Mexico any longer. They can't move north too quickly either. The timing of their spring migration must be precise. How do they know when to leave, and why do they leave now?

Sample Paragraphs – Descriptive

Jupiter

Jupiter is one of the nine planets in our solar system. It is called the giant among the planets because it has a diameter ten times as big as the earth. It also has twelve moons! Many scientists believe that the matter of which Jupiter is composed is in the form of a gas; it is not solid like the rock that makes up the earth and the moon. The truth in this hypothesis must await further exploration. Scientists do know that Jupiter's rotation period is about ten hours, and its revolution period is about twelve years. This means that Jupiter spins very rapidly on its axis as it makes its orbit around the sun. The atmosphere surrounding this planet is probably made up mainly of ammonia and methane, and its temperature is far, far below zero. Since it has no water, no oxygen, and extremely low temperatures, it is unlikely that it could support life. This giant among planets does not seem like a friendly place for humans.

Icebergs

Icebergs—giant blocks of ice that float in the sea—come in many shapes, sizes, and colors. Some are deep blue or green. Some look like floating sculptures. Old icebergs that have been worn down by the weather sometimes look like pillars of ice. Usually, only about one-fifth of an iceberg appears above the surface of the water. The other four-fifths of the “berg” is hidden underwater, out of sight. Sometimes, an iceberg has what is called a “**foot**,” an extension completely underwater. These are especially dangerous for ships. It was an iceberg “foot” that sank the *Titanic* in 1912, killing 1,503 people.

Humpback Whales

The humpback whale is huge. She is longer than a school bus and weighs 35 tons, but she preys on some of the smallest inhabitants of the sea world—tiny shrimp-like creatures that aren't much bigger than a piece of popcorn called krill. To feed, she opens her mouth wide, taking in hundreds of gallons of water in a single gulp. A humpback whale has no teeth. Instead, attached to its upper jaw are rows of long, thin fingernail-like material called baleen. Each piece of baleen is about three feet long and has bristles at its end that act like a strainer. When the whale takes in a mouthful of water, it forces the water out through the baleen with its tongue, trapping thousands of tiny krill inside its mouth. Humpback whales eat A LOT of krill – up to 4,400 pounds per meal!

Sample Paragraphs – Compare/Contrast

Oceans and Ponds – How are They Different?

To a small child, the ocean and the pond seem very much the same. However, there are important differences to point out. To begin with, a pond is a very small body of water. The ocean covers more than half of the earth's surface. Ponds are very shallow, but the ocean is several thousand miles deep in most places. Some green pond plants are rooted in mud on the floor of a pond. Because of the ocean's depth, the sunlight can't reach the ocean's floor, hence no green plants grow there. Ponds contain fresh water, which means there is no salt content. The ocean, though, is the largest body of salt water on earth. While they are both bodies of water, there are clearly major differences between the ocean and a pond.

Different Schools for Aztec Kids

Aztec children went to one of two different kinds of schools. One kind was for the sons and daughters of nobility, or wealthy people high up in society. There, children learned to read, write, and do math. They learned to play musical instruments. Some children studied to be priests. They learned the secret language of the priesthood, how to predict eclipses and comets, and how to keep track of the days on the sacred calendar. Other children learned how to work with silver and how to carve wood and stone. The priests were strict with the children at these schools, giving harsh punishments if a child broke a rule.

Children of common people went to a different kind of school. The priests were less strict with these children, and they allowed the children to go home sometimes. In both kinds of schools, children learned about religion and war. They learned songs, poems, and dances to honor their gods. They memorized stories of the gods and how they ruled the earth.

Beastly Bee-havior

Scientists have a joke about killer bees: How can you tell the difference between a regular honeybee hive and a "killer" bee hive? Kick the hive and see how far you run! "Regular bees might buzz you for 100 feet or so," explains insect expert Margaret McMichael. "But 'killer' bees might chase you for two miles!"

In many ways, killer bees and honey bees are similar. A killer-bee sting is no more deadly than a regular bee sting. Like killer bees, all honeybees have venom (poison) in their stingers. In many ways, killer bees also behave like regular honeybees. For example, all bees attack when they think their hive is in danger.

But some differences in behavior make killer bees more deadly than honey bees. Compared to ordinary honeybees, killer bees have:

- quick triggers — Unlike a honey bee, it takes very little to get killer bees riled up. "They can sense you walking from about two car-lengths away," says Margaret.
- big colonies — Killer beehives can hold more than 50,000 bees, that is many more than in a honey bee hive. When a killer bee hive is disturbed, there are many more bees to react.
- staying power — when killer bees get angry, they will chase you for much longer than honey bees will if they are angry.
- smoke them out: "Smoke makes them think their house is on fire," says Margaret. "To get energy to fly away, they swallow a bellyful of honey. It's hard to sting with a full belly!"

Adapted from Scholastic's *SuperScience Blue*.

Sample Paragraphs – Cause and Effect

Sunbear: An Endangered Species

The sun bear, native to Southeast Asia, is an endangered species for two reasons. First, people in this part of the world hunt the sun bear for body parts such as the gall bladder, the claws and the meat. The body parts are valuable because some people believe that eating them will help heal broken bones and bruises. They believe this because the sun bear appears to fall out of trees without injuring itself. Additionally, special restaurants serve bear paws and bear meat to diners who think that eating this kind of meal will bring good health. In addition to being hunted, the sun bear's habitat is being destroyed. The jungles where the sun bears live are being cleared to make way for homes and farms. Legendary beliefs can be harmful to nature.

Old Batteries: A Nuisance or a Hazard?

When batteries are thrown into the trash, they are harmful to the environment. If batteries are not properly disposed of, they can crack or become damaged. As a result, the toxic substances inside the batteries leak, and the surrounding water and soil are contaminated. Likewise, when batteries are incinerated, or burned, the air is contaminated by toxic fumes. Since incineration produces ashes, the ashes contain toxic substances. Over time, the ashes are buried and the toxic substances make their way into the soil and water. Finally, old car batteries are also harmful because they can crack open when they are dropped. If a neighborhood trash collector drops an old battery in the street or driveway, the toxic contents may spill and pose a health hazard for pets and small children. So it is very important to properly dispose of old batteries to protect our environment.

Populating the Cities

In recent decades, cities have grown so large that now about 50% of the Earth's population lives in urban areas. There are several reasons for this occurrence. First, the increasing industrialization of the nineteenth century resulted in the creation of many factory jobs, which tended to be located in cities. These jobs, with their promise of a better material life, attracted many people from rural areas. Second, there were many schools established to educate the children of the new factory laborers. The promise of a better education persuaded many families to leave farming communities and move to the cities. Finally, as the cities grew, people established places of leisure, entertainment, and culture, such as sports stadiums, theaters, and museums. For many people, these facilities made city life appear more interesting than life on the farm, and therefore drew them away from rural communities.

Headaches

Headaches can have several causes. Many people think that the major cause of headache is nervous tension, but there is strong evidence that suggests diet and environment as possible factors. Some people get headaches because they are dependent on caffeine. Other people may be allergic to salt, or they may have low blood sugar. Still other people are allergic to household chemicals including polishes, waxes, bug killers, and paint. If they can manage to avoid these substances, their headaches tend to go away. When a person has recurring headaches, it is worthwhile to look for the underlying cause, especially if the result of that search is freedom from pain.

Paragraph One

You are walking along a pond when you see a frog – or is it a toad? How can you tell the difference? Frogs and toads have many physical attributes that can be used to identify which is which. Frogs have smooth skin, and rely on their large, powerful legs. Frogs are also, slimmer, smaller, and more streamlined than toads. Toads have warty skin in contrast to frogs. Toads are fatter and slower than frogs. Unlike frogs, toads can puff themselves up with air. Although frogs and toads are different, they also have some similarities. Both frogs and toads are classified as amphibians. They both have lungs, but can breathe through their skin. Using sounds to attract their mates is another similarity between the two. Toads and frogs both have diets that consist of insects, worms and more. As you can see, frogs and toads can easily be mistaken for one another, but when you know what to look for, telling the difference becomes easy.

What was the author's purpose in writing this text?

What text structure did the author use? How do you know?

What steps did you use as a reader to figure out the text structure?

Paragraph Two

Have you ever thought about what makes a volcano erupt or what happens afterward? When the temperature rises deep under the Earth's crust, it becomes hot enough to melt rock and turn it into magma. Sometimes this melted rock blasts through the Earth's surface, which causes rock, ash, and deadly gases to fly into the air. The lava that flows out of the volcano can knock down trees and destroy houses and even whole towns. Although volcanoes can cause lots of destruction, the volcano's eruption also creates new land. Many times this new land forms an island in the ocean. You might even live on land created by a volcano!

What was the author's purpose in writing this text?

What text structure did the author use? How do you know?

What steps did you use as a reader to figure out the text structure?

Paragraph Three

Astronauts face many difficulties in space caused by weightlessness. One of the challenges is floating around the cabin. To solve this problem, astronauts wear shoes that are coated with a special adhesive. This adhesive sticks to the floor of the cabin. Serving food is another difficulty. It won't stay on the table! Experts solved this problem by putting food and drinks in pouches and tubes. Food is preprocessed and only needs to be mixed with water. Weightlessness makes the simple task of turning a doorknob or a wrench a real problem. Since there is no gravity to keep the astronaut down, when he exerts a force one way, the opposite force may flip him over completely. Being very careful about how much force one exerts to do these simple tasks usually solves these problems. On earth, life is much simpler, thanks to gravity.

What was the author's purpose in writing this text?

What text structure did the author use? How do you know?

What steps did you use as a reader to figure out the text structure?

Paragraph 4

A coconut is a tropical fruit. It comes from Asia originally, but it grows in Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Central America, and South America. A coconut grows on a coconut palm, which looks like a palm but actually is taller and has more leaves. The coconut appears to be shades of brown and has a hairy shell. On the inside, there is a watery liquid called coconut milk. After you break through the shell, you find what is called the coconut meat. Both the meat and the milk are white. Dried coconut meat is called copra. The coconut is a very interesting fruit.

What was the author's purpose in writing this text?

What text structure did the author use? How do you know?

What steps did you use as a reader to figure out the text structure?

Paragraph Five

Fast food gets bad press these days, especially since it often contains too much fat, sodium and calories, but it brings much needed convenience to our stressful busy world. Fast food is easily found and varied. At any mall, for example, customers have many choices at the food court. To avoid too much fat or salt, they can choose healthier options: salads, turkey sandwiches and so on. On a busy Saturday, with two hungry kids, a mother out shopping is happy to find exactly the right food to eat. Not only that, but the food will be ready quickly, thus reducing the stress on her from demanding children. Fast food is also inexpensive; most menu items offer a full meal for under ten dollars. It is easy to see why fast food is so popular these days—it is convenient and reduces our stress.

What was the author's purpose in writing this text?

What text structure did the author use? How do you know?

What steps did you use as a reader to figure out the text structure?

Text Structure Resources

(Emily Kissner, 2009)

One thing that I have found with teaching text structure is that students need practice. Lots and lots of practice!

Over the course of several days, we work on each text structure, reading texts that show the structure and talking about how we can depict the information in a graphic organizer.

The biggest challenge of this is finding text. I don't have trouble with chronological order text or main idea/detail text. But the other text structures are hard to find in short, easy-to-read texts.

Here are several texts that I wrote for my students. I use these for the Shared Reading portion of my reading class, following up with picture books and leveled texts for guided reading.

Using the texts:

-Try highlighting the transition words in each text before handing out to students. Once you give the texts to the students, have them try to figure out why the words are highlighted. Create a list of transitions for the text structure.

-Always bring the conversation back to meaning. Understanding text structure helps students to understand the text. How can we use the structure to find the main ideas?

-These texts work very well for summarizing practice. You can write a summary together, or ask students to summarize on their own. Remind them that their summaries should reflect the structure of the text.

Title	Text Structure	Teaching Ideas
"Fluttering Beauties"	compare and contrast	-This is an easy introduction to compare and contrast text -Notice that this text uses an alternating compare and contrast structure – details about butterflies and moths are interspersed with one another -This text would lend itself well

		<p>to a Venn diagram or comparison chart</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Pull a few books about butterflies and moths from the library for students who are interested in further study
“Vernal Pool or Puddle?”	compare and contrast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This text is a little more challenging than the previous one -The topic of this text, vernal pools, goes along with “Salamander Crossing”
“What Is A Tsunami?”	cause and effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Cause and effect texts are often difficult for students -Be sure that they understand “causes” and “effects” -As you work with students, help them to identify the paragraph that includes the causes and the paragraph that includes the effects
“Salamander Crossing”	problem and solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students often have trouble distinguishing between cause and effect and problem and solution -This is complicated by the fact that problem and solution texts often need to explain some causes and effects along the way -In this text, look for the transition words “problem” and “solution”
“The Flooded City”	problem and solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -This text also has an element of cause and effect
Understanding Text Structure	overall	<p>This is a good practice page for helping students to match text</p>

		structures. It works well with the picture book <i>Flute's Journey</i> by Lynne Cherry
Text Structure Practice	overall	Another practice page, this one is focused on watersheds

For more on text structure:

-Look at my Powerpoint presentations: Understanding Text Structure, Introduction to Structure, and Teaching Text Structure, all available free at TeachersPayTeachers.com

Check out my books, available at Heinemann.com

<http://www.heinemann.com/products/E02642.aspx>

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Fluttering Beauties

You're outside on a beautiful summer day. The light breeze brings the flutter of brightly colored wings. What is that lovely creature? Is it a butterfly or a moth?

Butterflies and moths are common insects. However, most people can't tell them apart. They have many similarities. Both are insects. This means that they have three body parts and six legs. Also, both have large wings. Sometimes these wings are plain. Sometimes they are covered with fancy patterns.



But there are ways to know if you are looking at a butterfly or a moth. Some differences have to do with how the insects look. For example, butterflies have thin antennae. Moths have feathery antennae. You can see another difference in the wings. Butterflies have small scales on their wings. On the other hand, moths have larger scales. These scales make moths look fluffier than butterflies.

It can be hard to catch a butterfly or moth to take a close look at the antennae or wings! You can also look at how the insects behave to tell them apart. Most butterflies are active during the day, while most moths are active at night. Another behavior difference can be seen in the way that the creatures rest. Butterflies usually sit on a flower with their wings folded together. On the other hand, moths keep their wings spread out while resting.



Next time that you enjoy a lovely summer day, take a closer look at the winged beauties fluttering about. Are they butterflies or moths? Now you can decide!

Emily Kissner, 2009

Vernal Pool or Puddle?

If you take a walk in the forest in March or April, you might notice a large pool of water. What is it? Are you looking at an ordinary puddle, or a vernal pool?

Vernal pools are different from ordinary puddles. Both vernal pools and puddles are formed by rainfall or the melting of snow. But a puddle lasts only a few hours or a few days before it dries up. Vernal pools, on the other hand, can last for weeks or months. They finally dry up in the heat of the summer.

Animals can visit both vernal pools and puddles. But vernal pools are very important for some kinds of animals. Mole salamanders and wood frogs will only lay their eggs in vernal pools. In vernal pools, young salamander larvae and tadpoles can grow up without being eaten by fish.

Vernal pools and puddles can both be found in forests and fields. Small invertebrates called copepods live in both puddles and vernal pools. These tiny creatures are only 5 mm long, but they dart quickly through the water! Another kind of invertebrate, the fairy shrimp, is only found in vernal pools.

While vernal pools and puddles have some similarities, they also have some differences.

Emily Kissner, 2009

What Is A Tsunami?

Do you like to play in waves at the beach? If so, you know that some waves are big, and some are small. But there are waves that are bigger than any you might see on a regular day at the beach. These waves are called tsunamis.

What causes tsunamis? They are not regular ocean waves. A tsunami is a huge wave that is caused by an earthquake at sea. When an earthquake causes the sea floor to rise or drop, water is displaced. This makes a wave that can travel for many miles in the ocean. As the water becomes shallow close to the land, the wave becomes huge.

Tsunamis can have terrible effects. The great wave of water crashes upon the coast with huge force. This force can knock over buildings, tear down forests, and even destroy entire towns and villages. Tsunamis can be deadly and kill many people.

Emily Kissner, 2009



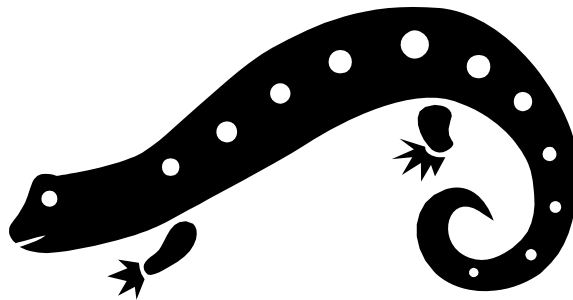
Salamander Crossing

In the spring, mole salamanders migrate. They travel on the first rainy March night. Where are they going? These salamanders are moving from their forest homes to vernal pools. Vernal pools are big puddles that last through the whole spring. The salamanders go to the vernal pools to mate and lay eggs.

But mole salamanders face a problem. As people have built more homes, some salamanders have to cross roads to get to their vernal pools. On rainy March nights, this can be a problem. Drivers have trouble seeing the little amphibians. Many salamanders get run over!

In many towns, people have tried to come up with a solution to save the salamanders. Sometimes, volunteers come out with flashlights. They warn drivers and help to make sure that the salamanders get across the road safely. In one town, they have even built a tunnel! The salamanders can crawl through the tunnel and get to their vernal pools.

Emily Kissner, 2009



The Flooded City

Venice is a very special city in Italy. What makes it special? Venice is almost completely surrounded by water!

Venice does have streets and roads like other cities. But Venice also has special waterways called canals. People use boats to move along these canals.

The people of Venice have always loved their city. Many people visit Venice to see the beautiful bridges and old buildings. There are hundreds of old houses, famous churches, and lovely fountains.

But the city of Venice is facing a problem. The tides are rising. Each day, there are two high tides. Each day, the water rises and covers streets and roads. The water comes up to the windows of buildings.

The problem is even worse when there are storms. Storms make tides even higher. The city of Venice could be completely flooded!

Scientists have worked to find a solution. They planned a set of 78 steel gates in the water outside of Venice. These gates will be able to open and close. When the water is calm, the gates will be open. But when there are storms, the gates will rise and protect the city.

Will the gates work? No one really knows. But the people of Venice hope that these gates will save their city from the high tides.

Emily Kissner, 2009

Understanding Text Structure

(Emily Kissner, 2009)

As authors write to explain information, they can use several different methods to organize their information. Here are some that you should learn:

- ❖ **Chronological order:** Events happen in a sequence
 - Look for clue words like *first, next, then, after, later, and finally* to show you that a paragraph is organized in this way
- ❖ **Problem and solution:** The author explains a problem and one or more possible solutions
 - Look for clue words like *problem* and *solution*
- ❖ **Cause and effect:** The author tells about a *cause* and one or more possible effects
 - Look for clue words like *cause, effect, as a result, consequently, so*. Be careful! Cause and effect paragraphs often look like problem and solution.
- ❖ **Compare and contrast:** The author tells how two things are similar and different
 - Look for clue words like *similar, different, however, on the other hand, similarity, differences*

You should learn to look for text structure as you read. When you understand the structure of the text, you can have a better understanding of the author's main ideas.

Here are some paragraphs about the wood thrush. Read through each one and look for the clue words that can help you identify the text structure. Then, decide whether each one is organized in chronological order, problem and solution, cause and effect, or compare and contrast.

The wood thrush is a cousin to the robin. Both birds lay eggs that are a pretty turquoise blue. When robins are babies, they have spotted chests like the wood thrush. And both kinds of birds migrate in the winter. However, there are some differences. The wood thrush prefers deep forests, while the robin can live in towns and backyards. The wood thrush builds a neater nest than the robin. Both birds are fun to see flying around.

Text structure:

The number of wood thrushes is declining, or going down. A main cause of this decline is habitat loss. The wood thrush is losing habitat in two places – the United States and Central America. In the United States, forests are being turned into shopping centers, developments, and factories. As a result, the wood thrush has fewer places to build nests and raise young. In Central America, tropical rainforests are being cut down to make room for farms. This means that migrating wood thrushes have trouble finding territory for the winter months.

Text structure:

In spring and summer, wood thrushes often hunt for insects on the forest floor. They will hop along dead logs and poke their beaks into the leaf litter to find their food. Unfortunately, many people clean up the dead leaves from their yards. The wood thrush has trouble finding food when this happens. But you can help the wood thrush. Put aside a small section of your yard for leaves, dead logs, and rocks. This way, the wood thrush will have a place to search for food.

Text structure:

Male and female wood thrushes build their nests in late spring. The eggs take about 13 days to hatch. After the babies emerge from the eggs, both parents help to feed them. The parents take care of the young birds for about a month. Then the little fledglings are ready for life on their own.

Text structure:

What do you think?

Can a paragraph have more than one text structure? Why or why not? _____

Name _____

Text Structure Practice

Emily Kissner, 2009

Directions: Read each paragraph. Then, write the text structure of the paragraph on the lines below.

problem and solution *cause and effect* *chronological order* *description*

#1

Did you know that the way you take care of your lawn can affect the watershed? Many people use pesticides and herbicides to kill insects and weeds. These chemicals can run off into streams and rivers, harming plants and animals.

—

#2

Streams face many problems. Chemicals like pesticides, herbicides, and oil can wash into the stream during storms. Dirt and debris from construction sites and bare ground cause problems too. But there is a solution. A riparian buffer zone, or an area of trees and shrubs along a waterway, can dramatically improve water quality.

#3

Wetlands are important for many reasons. Not only do they serve as resting places for migrating birds, but they are also breeding grounds for many different types of animals. Wetlands also absorb excess water during storms, helping to prevent flooding. The plants of wetlands help to absorb toxins and improve water quality.

#4

Planting a riparian buffer zone is easy, but requires some planning. The first step is to observe the area. What is already growing there? Next, decide what you would like to plant. Trees like river birches, pin oaks, and sycamores provide habitat for wildlife as well as a good buffer zone. A shrub like sweet spire is both ornamental and well-suited to the wet area. After you have decided on the plants, gather the necessary tools. Then you can get started on your riparian buffer zone!

Text Structure Summary Frames

Problem/Solution Text

_____ had a problem because _____
Therefore, _____
As a result, _____.

Comparison/Contrast Text

_____ and _____ are similar in several ways. Both _____ and _____ have similar _____. Finally, both _____ and _____ are different in several ways. First, _____, while _____. Secondly, _____, but _____. In addition while _____, _____. Finally, _____, while _____.

Sequence Text

Here is how a _____ is made. First, _____. Next, _____. Then, _____. Finally, _____.

Cause/Effect Text

Because of _____, _____. _____ caused _____. Therefore _____. Finally, due to _____, _____. This explains why _____.

Descriptive Text

There are _____ kinds of _____. The first kind of _____ is _____. It _____.

The second one is _____.

It _____. The third kind is _____. It _____.

Now you can recognize the _____ kinds of _____.

Comprehension Toolkit Texts (3-6 Kit)

Below is a list of some of the text found in the Comprehension Toolkit and the text structure used by the author. The list is not all-inclusive, but rather a place to start.

Reminder: Expository text typically has one overall structure that links to the author’s purpose in writing the text, however, within the text there may be a paragraph written using another structure. (i.e. a cause/effect article on volcanic eruptions may have a descriptive paragraph describing how volcanoes erupt).

Text Structure	Text Title	Resource Book
Chronological Order	The Life of Frida Kahlo	Source Book of Short Text
Chronological Order	Gypsy Musician	Source Book of Short Text
Chronological Order	Building a Colossus	Source Book of Short Text
Chronological Order	The Maya	Source Book of Short Text
Chronological Order	Garana’s Story	Source Book of Short Text
Chronological Order	Racing for Life	Source Book of Short Text
Compare/Contrast	Community Life	Source Book of Short Text
Compare/Contrast	Ancient Mexico – Where and When	Toolkit Texts (Grade 4-5)
Cause/Effect	On Deadly Ground – Storm Surge	Toolkit Texts (Grade 6-7)
Cause/Effect	Basketball Without Borders	Toolkit Texts (Grade 6-7)
Cause/Effect	Summer of the Shark	Source Book of Short Text
Cause/Effect	Ozone Hole	Source Book of Short Text
Descriptive	Icebergs: Floating Snow Cones	Toolkit Texts (Grade 4-5)
Descriptive	The Scoop on Dino Poop	Toolkit Texts (Grade 4-5)
Descriptive	The Super Ant	Source Book of Short Text
Descriptive	Your Circulatory System	Source Book of Short Text
Descriptive	Real Giants	Source Book of Short Text
Descriptive	The Comeback Humpbacks	Source Book of Short Text
Descriptive	Big Talkers	Source Book of Short Text
Problem/Solution	Dear Mother Earth	Toolkit Texts (Grade 4-5)
Problem/Solution	The Struggle for Equal	Toolkit Texts (Grade 4-5)

	Rights	
Problem/Solution	Frog Watching	Toolkit Texts (Grade 6-7)
Problem/Solution	Understanding Electricity	Source Book of Short Text
Problem/Solution	Can Kids Stop Kids from Smoking?	Source Book of Short Text
Problem/Solution	Turn it Off	Source Book of Short Text
Problem/Solution	Back to School	Source Book of Short Text
Problem/Solution	A Focus on Girls' Education	Source Book of Short Text
Problem/Solution	Tigers Roar Back	Source Book of Short Text
Proposition/Support	The Case Against Soda	Source Book of Short Text
Multiple structures within the text (Descriptive, Chronological Order, Problem/Solution)	At Home in the Arctic	Source Book of Short Text