Text Structures

Recognizing Text Structures

One way that a reader can read like a writer is for him/her to pay attention to the author's style for organizing and explaining information. Stories (narratives) include a setting, plot, character, problem, and resolution, expository text is framed around different structures. These structures occur in both textbooks and trade books, although **no one structure is used by itself. Students can get a "feel" for the prominent structure used, but should also be explicitly taught that authors will not only use one structure by itself.** The reader who is attentive to the author's organizational patterns will usually find it easier to comprehend the information being explained.

Most expository texts are structured to facilitate the study process. They contain many structural elements that help guide students through their reading. Authors of expository texts utilize these structures to arrange and connect ideas. Students who understand the idea of "text structure" and how to analyze it are likely to learn more than students who lack this understanding. Reading comprehension in students improves when they acquire skills in structural development and use them properly.

Expository text is written by authors to inform, to explain, to describe, to present information or to persuade. Expository text is subject-oriented and contains facts and information using little dialogue. The organization of the structure of expository text is dependent upon the form or genre (letter, journal entry, newspaper article, editorial, brochure, map, etc). There are however, seven basic structures of expository text and researchers recommend that teachers begin to teach expository text structure at the paragraph level.

Further, text features can help the reader locate and organize information in the text. For example, headings help introduce students to specific "bits" of information. Presenting information in this manner helps students hold each bit of information in short term memory. Students then can process it or connect it to background knowledge and store it in long term memory. Without headings, information would be overwhelming, making it difficult to process effectively.

Structural elements in expository texts vary; therefore, it is important to introduce students to the components of various texts throughout the school year. It is also important to teach and model the use of these components properly at the beginning of the school year. Educators need to share the structure of trade books, reference materials, and articles. The recognition and use of text organization are essential processes underlying comprehension and retention.

Text Pattern	Characteristics	Signal Words	Questions to Ask:	Graphic Organizers
Narrative	Paragraphs in this pattern **tell a series of events that change over time.** Narrative texts have the following elements: **setting** (time, place and character introduction); **plot** (problem is identified); **reaction of protagonist & attempts to solve the problem;** and **a resolution.** Understanding the main character & his/her actions is integral to understanding a story's plot and theme.	first, after that, later, a hundred years passed, etc.	**Questions to ask for this structure are:** *Who wanted what and why? How, where, & when did it take place? How was it resolved?*	Story Map/Plot Line Character Map Timeline
Definition	This structure is the form of writing that **authors use when they want to define a topic or subject.** Definitions are an important part of any type of writing and are especially important for expository text.	when, also, too, then, to begin with, for instance, for example, in fact, one, two, first, second, third, to begin, next, finally, most important, etc.	**A question for the definition structure is:** *What is being defined? What are its unique characteristics?*	Flow Chart Analogy Map Semantic Web
Description, List, or Enumeration	This structure is used to **describe the attributes and features of facts, ideas, steps, characteristics, people, places, or items.** Paragraphs in this pattern **qualify the list by criteria such as size or**	one, two, first, second, third, to begin, next, finally, most important, when, also, too, then, to begin with, for instance, for example, in fact, etc.	**Questions for the descriptive structure are:** *What is being described? What are its unique (sensory) attributes?*	Semantic Web Circle Map Circle-to-circle Map Platform Map Wedge Map

	importance. Usually, the **main topic is introduced** & **then attributes follow**. The **focus may include the senses**. Enumeration is the most common textbook organization..			
Classification	This structure is an organizational strategy whereby **authors arrange groups of persons, places, things, or abstract ideas according to a common**. Students can learn to classify objects, persons, places, or events by sorting by size, color, likes, dislikes, etc.	one, two, first, second, third, to begin, next, finally, most important, when, also, too, then, to begin with, for instance, for example, in fact, etc.	**Questions that can be asked about classification text structure might include the following:** *What categories does the author use to classify these items into categories? How can these items be put into categories?*	Platform Map Semantic Web
Cause-Effect	This structure **shows how facts, events, or concepts (effects) happen or come into being because of other facts, events, or concepts (causes).** The author explains one or more causes of a phenomenon or specific event along with the resulting effects. **Key words** are often used to clue in the reader that an effect is *nearby in the text.*	because, since, therefore, consequently, as so that, a result, cause, this led to, so, nevertheless, accordingly, if….then, thus, etc.	**Questions that can be used for cause and effect are:** *What happened? What were the effects of (TOPIC)?*	Flow Chart Multi-Flow Chart Platform Map Wedge Map Semantic Web

Time Order or Sequence	This involves **putting facts, events, or concepts in order of occurrence.** Learning how to **use the key process words and transition words** is very helpful. However, there are exceptions when authors do not use the key words. ***When this happens,*** students need to **analyze the reading to determine the beginning and the end of an event** and decide which things happened in the middle and in which order.	on (date), not long after, now, as, before, after, when, first, second, then, finally, during, finally, until, etc.	**Questions that can be asked for time order or collection could include the following:** *What happened first, second, and third? How were items in this paragraph organized: by age, time, etc?*	Timeline Flow Chart Multi-Flow Chart
Comparison-Contrast	This structure **shows how two or more facts, concepts, people, places, or things are alike or different.** Authors use descriptions of items being compared to illustrate their similarities or differences. **Figurative language & key comparison words can help you understand** this structure.	however, but, as well as, on the other hand, not only...but also, either...or, while, although, similarly, yet, unless, meanwhile, nevertheless, otherwise, compared to, despite, etc.	**Questions that can be asked about Comparison Text might be:** *How are these items alike? How are these items different?*	T-Charts Venn Diagrams Multi-Flow Charts

Problem and Solution	This structure shows the development of a **problem and the solution(s) to the problem.** *This is a special case of the cause and effect pattern* in which the **writer states a problem, clarifies or explains the problem and suggests one or more solutions to the problem.** Usually, the author would like the reader to accept his or her solution to the problem. In this case, the author writes persuasively. If the author wants the reader to make up his or her mind about the best solution, he or she poses several solutions and does not advocate for any one in particular.	because, cause, since, therefore, consequently, as a result, this led to, so, so that, nevertheless, accordingly, if....then, thus, etc.	**Questions that can be used for Problem/Solution include the following:** *What were the reasons for this? What caused this to happen? Is there a solution to the problem?*	Circle Map Flow Chart Multi-Flow Chart Platform Map Wedge Map Semantic Web