

Tools for Instruction

Text Structure

Text structure refers to the way an author decided to organize the ideas and details that he or she wanted a reader to understand. Authors often select from common organizational patterns, such as sequence, cause and effect, and compare and contrast. Identifying text structure in a passage helps students anticipate what is ahead and adjust their reading accordingly. However, an entire text does not always follow a clear pattern of organization, and texts often shift from one structure to another. This poses the greatest challenge for students, and using clear examples to provide instruction and practice with text structure is important.

Three Ways to Teach

Teach Types of Text Structure 20–30 minutes

To introduce the concept of various text structures, be explicit about what they are and why authors might use them. Explain that authors make choices about the way they organize information in order to make information easier for readers to understand. Then display the first two columns of the chart below. Review the text structures and the reasons why an author might use them.

| Text Structure | Why It May Be Used | Examples |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Sequence | To explain events in the order they occurred or to explain the steps in a process | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A book recounting the Gold Rush• An instruction manual describing how to build a model airplane |
| Cause and Effect | To explain events (causes) that result in other things happening (effects) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• An article on the effects of an earthquake• A blog about the effects of not getting enough sleep |
| Compare and Contrast | To explain what is similar or different between or among people, places, things, or ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A textbook chapter about sea creatures• A Web site comparing baseball teams |

Through discussion, guide students in completing the last column of the chart (sample answers are shown). Encourage them to consider the reading they do in and out of school, and ask questions such as these.

- *What might you read that breaks information into steps?*
- *In what subject do you usually think about what causes things to happen?*
- *Where might you read descriptions of how things are alike and different?*

Add students' responses to the chart, and reflect on an author's choice of one structure over another. Over time, help students identify patterns in the places they frequently find particular text structures. Point out, for example, that science often uses cause and effect to explain how nature works.

Identify Shifts in Text Structure 30–45 minutes

Help students understand why authors use different text structures in the same selection, and how to recognize these shifts.

Review common text structures, along with the reasons why an author might choose to use them. (You might use the chart in the previous activity.) Then assign varied text structures from the same selection to small groups, one per group. You may distribute copies or locate passages in student texts. Have students work together to identify and analyze their text structure. Provide prompts to guide their thinking, and have them take notes.

- *Does this text tell about things in order, events that resulted in other events, or what is similar and different between things?*
- *What clues alerted you to your text structure?*
- *How did the author's choice of this text structure make it easier for you to understand the information?*
- *How might the information have been different if the author chose a different text structure here?*
- *If you were the author, would you have selected the same pattern of organization? Explain.*

Have students use their notes to present their text structure to the class. With each presentation, identify the shift in text structure, including where it takes place, and why.

Choose Text Structures 30–45 minutes

Connect to Writing To help students learn more about why authors choose to organize information in different ways, let them practice being the author.

- Provide several writing prompts that lend themselves to different patterns of organization. Have students choose one prompt and develop two to three paragraphs about it. Each should reflect a different text structure.

The opening day of baseball is always interesting.

The lunch room is a busy place.

Everyone has one day that stands out.

- Have students share their writing and compare text structures.

Check for Understanding

| If you observe... | Then try... |
|--|---|
| difficulty recognizing text structure in reading | focusing instruction on one structure, and explaining the signal words that give clues about it. Choose a brief passage on sequence, for example, and underline transition words such as <i>first</i> , <i>second</i> , <i>next</i> , and <i>last</i> . Encourage students to connect these words to events in order or steps in a process. |