20 Strategies to Teach Text Structure

As early as third grade, students are expected to recognize expository text structures such as the following: sequence, description, compare-contrast, cause-effect, and problem-solution. The ability to identify and analyze these text structures in reading helps make expository text easier to understand. Students should also use these text structures to organize their own writing. The following research-based teaching strategies can be applied in teaching students to use text structure:

1. Discuss with students that writers use text structures to organize information. Introduce the concept to them, and reinforce it every time students read and write.

2. Introduce and work on text structures in this order: description, sequence, problem and solution, cause and effect, and compare and contrast.

3. Skim and scan to predict text structure(s). Make predicting possible text structures a part of every pre-reading activity.

4. Teach the signal words for each text structure. Prior to reading, skim and scan passages and make predictions about text structure. During reading, analyze text and revise predictions about structure.

5. Teach and model the use of graphic organizers to go with each text structure. Identify text structures in advance and provide appropriate advanced organizer. For example, the teacher models charting the structure of specific paragraphs while reading and also provides practice in using the graphic organizer to write different text types.

6. Scaffold instruction using the gradual release of responsibility model. Spend quality instructional time in each phase of the model when teaching text structure strategies. For example, the teacher uses a think aloud to model for demonstration. The teacher then invites students to participate for shared demonstration. Then students practice with teacher support for guided practice. Finally, students apply the skills and strategies they have learned for independent practice.

7. Provide explicit instruction. For example, the teacher shows students specifically how and when to use strategies such as attending to signal words while reading different content areas or using signal words when writing expository text.

8. Model a think-aloud strategy. The teacher reads aloud a paragraph, pausing at appropriate points to share her own comprehension strategies and understanding of the text. Next the teacher might move to a shared-reading strategy, encouraged students to talk aloud as they engage in the process with the teacher. For example, the teacher asks students to talk about the clues they use to try to identify the text structure.

9. Ask focusing questions targeting text structure. Teachers can use focusing questions as a means of scaffolding the use of strategies or assisting students in the think-aloud process. For example, the teacher asks a student which signal word might be best to show a particular relationship among ideas in a text structure.

10. Use and create non-linguistic representations. For example, during reading the teacher models the drawing of a series of pictures to represent a sequence described in the passage.

Shared by: Kristi Orcutt, Reading & Writing Consultant, kristio@essdack.org
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11. Create and provide pattern guides and teacher-made organizers that reflect that structure of the original text. These tools help students focus on the key elements of the reading selection.

12. Present students with a completed graphic organizer as a pre-reading strategy. Have students write a probable paragraph using a predicted text structure prior to reading. After reading, compare students' probable passages and the original text.

13. Write using the text structures. While students watch, the teacher models writing a paragraph using a particular text structure and describes her actions as she is writing. Then students write their own paragraphs using text structure/paragraph frames as templates.

14. Make the connection between reading and writing. When students read an example of a particular text structure, have them write using that same text structure. Writing can be done as a pre-reading or post-reading strategy.

15. Rewrite a paragraph or passage using a different text structure than the original. Compare the two and analyze why the author might have chosen the original pattern.

16. Read and analyze a variety of text, both single-structure passages and multi-structure passages. Use every opportunity that students read as an opportunity to teach text structure.

17. Have a text structure treasure hunt with a newspaper, classroom magazine, nonfiction book, textbook chapter, or students' independent reading material.

18. Use summary frame questions to guide students' comprehension before, during, and after reading. Each organizational structure suggests questions which readers should consider as they are reading and be able to answer once they've finished reading the passage.

19. Use text coding strategies – highlighters, Post-It Notes, etc. – targeting text structures. Remember to model these strategies in advance and be consistent in your procedures (same color each time, etc.). For additional coding ideas, visit the Text Mapping site: [http://www.textmapping.org/overview.html](http://www.textmapping.org/overview.html)

20. Use text structure sorts to compare different paragraphs on a single topic. Begin by analyzing and sorting only one text structure at a time, then add another and so on.

Remember: Identifying patterns of organization is NOT the ultimate goal of text structure teaching. This ability is only beneficial as students internalize knowledge about text structure and subsequently use it to enhance their comprehension. Teach students to use text structures to improve their reading comprehension and writing organization.

Shared by: Kristi Orcutt, Reading & Writing Consultant, kristio@essdack.org
# Text Structure Signal Questions & Signal Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause and Effect</th>
<th>Compare and Contrast</th>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Problem and Solution</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Cause and Effect Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Compare and Contrast" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Sequence" /></td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Problem and Solution" /></td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Description" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause is why something happened. Effect is what happened. (Sometimes the effect is listed first.)</td>
<td>Shows how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.</td>
<td>Describes items or events in order or tells the steps to follow to do something or make something.</td>
<td>Tells about a problem (and sometimes says why there is a problem) then gives one or more possible solutions.</td>
<td>A topic, idea, person, place, or thing is described by listing its features, characteristics, or examples.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Signal Questions

| What happened? What did it happen? What caused it to happen? | What things are being compared? In what ways are they alike? In what ways are they different? | What items, events, or steps are listed? Do they have to happen in this order? Do they always happen in this order? | What is the problem? Why is this a problem? Is anything being done to try to solve the problem? What can be done to solve the problem? | What specific topic, person, idea, or thing is being described? How is it being described (what does it look like, how does it work, what does it do, etc.)? What is important to remember about it? |

## Signal Words

| So | Because | Since | Therefore | If...then | This led to | Reason why | As a result | May be due to | Effect of | Consequently | For this reason | Same as | Similar | Alike | As well as | Not only...but also | Both | Instead of | Either...or | On the other hand | Different from | As opposed to | First | Second | Next | Then | Before | After | Finally | Following | Not long after | Now | Soon | Question is... | Dilemma is... | The puzzle is... | To solve this... | One answer is... | One reason for the problem is... |
|----|--------|------|----------|--------|------------|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|-------------|--------|--------|-----|----------|----------------|----|--------|--------|------------|----------|-------------|--------|--------|----------|--------|-----------|--------|----------|--------|------------|--------|-------------|----------|
| For instance | Such as... | To begin with | An example | To illustrate | Characteristics | *Look for the topic word (or a synonym or pronoun) to be repeated |

Shared by: Laurie Thisius, USD 268
**Cause and Effect**

*Cause is why something happened. Effect is what happened. (Sometimes the effect is listed first.)*

**Signal Questions**
- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- What caused it to happen?

**Signal Words**
- so because since therefore if...then this led to reason why as a result may be due to effect consequently for this reason

**Compare and Contrast**

*Shows how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different.*

**Signal Questions**
- What things are being compared?
- In what ways are they alike?
- In what ways are they different?

**Signal Words**
- same as similar alike as well as not only...but also both instead of either...or on the other hand different from as opposed to

**Sequence**

*Describes items or events in order or tells the steps to follow to do something or make something.*

**Signal Questions**
- What items, events, or steps are listed?
- Do they have to happen in this order?
- Do they always happen in this order?

**Signal Words**
- first second next then before after finally following not long after now soon

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Text Structure Flip Cards / O-Ring Cards

Shared by Annette Weems, Peabody-Burns Elementary, USD 398
Problem and Solution

Tells about a problem (and sometimes says why there is a problem) then gives one or more possible solutions.

Signal Questions
What is the problem?
Why is this a problem?
Is anything being done to try to solve the problem?
What can be done to solve the problem?

Signal Words
question is... dilemma is...
the puzzle is... to solve this...
one answer is... one reason for the...

Description

A topic, idea, person, place, or thing is described by listing its features, characteristics, or examples.

Signal Questions
What specific topic, person, idea, or thing is being described?
How is it being described (what does it look like, how does it work, what does it do, etc.)?
What is important to remember about it?

Signal Words
for instance such as... to begin with an example to illustrate characteristics
Signal Words for instance have does

has about in front

most important in addition

for example to begin with

also such as another

is beside near

furthermore to illustrate

Describes something (Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)
Description

Examples are

Feels like

Sounds like

Tastes like

Smells like

In front

In addition

Most important

To begin with

For example

Example words are

Charsactistics are

Also

Such as

Another

Beside

Is

Have

Does

Are

Near

Furthermore

To illustrate

In fact

For instance

(has)

About

(inside)
finally
after that
before
at the same time
not long after
second
first

then
next
on (date)

Sequence
Provides a series or steps
Sequence

Signal Words

first
then
next
on (date)

second
not long after
at the same time

before
after that
finally

Provides a series or steps

(Adapted from Tompkins, 2006)

Shared by Becky Cox, Valley Center
Identifies a problem and a solution to the problem
Therefore one answer is this resulted in solutions are a solution is

Possibly perhaps so if

Problem one reason for the accordingly nevertheless so that this led to as a consequence

The question is the dilemma is the puzzle is the problem is because

Identifies a problem and a solution to the problem

Problem and Solution
Present cause and effect relationships

Because and Effect
Signal Words

hence, however, nevertheless consequently as a result

thus effects of because of so that since then

for this reason may be due to accordingly this leads to therefore because

Present cause and effect relationships

Cause and Effect
Comparison and Contrast

Compares and contrasts the similarities and differences between two things.

Compare

same as
also
not only...but
likewise
either...or
similarly
compared with
as well as
ressemble

Contrast

don't be more than
less than
in contrast
although

Contrast

different
from
however
instead of

(Adapted from Tomkins, 2006)
1. All crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. Members of the crocodilian family include alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and gavials. Crocodilians live in warm weather throughout the year and they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Almost all crocodilians grow to be very large, with the largest more than twenty feet long. There are two kinds of alligators, 14 kinds of crocodiles, eight kinds of caimans, and one kind of gavial.

Overall Text Structure: ______________. Underline signal words.

1. All crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. Members of the crocodilian family include alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and gavials. Crocodilians live in warm weather throughout the year and they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Almost all crocodilians grow to be very large, with the largest more than twenty feet long. There are two kinds of alligators, 14 kinds of crocodiles, eight kinds of caimans, and one kind of gavial.

Overall Text Structure: ______________. Underline signal words.
2. Recently, scientists have gained an understanding of a crocodile’s reproductive activity. Crocodiles mate in the water, where the buoyancy keeps them from crushing each other. Prior to mating, there are stylized postures, jumping, submerged bubble blowing, and snout contact. After mating, hard-shelled eggs are laid in a nest, in a hole scooped in the sand. When it is time to hatch, the infant crocodiles begin a loud chirping sound that leads the female to the nest, which she excavates. Finally, when all the babies are accounted for, the mother crocodile transports them to the shallow water where they will remain under adult protection for weeks or months.

Overall Text Type: ___________________. Underline signal words.

2. Recently, scientists have gained an understanding of a crocodile’s reproductive activity. Crocodiles mate in the water, where the buoyancy keeps them from crushing each other. Prior to mating, there are stylized postures, jumping, submerged bubble blowing, and snout contact. After mating, hard-shelled eggs are laid in a nest, in a hole scooped in the sand. When it is time to hatch, the infant crocodiles begin a loud chirping sound that leads the female to the nest, which she excavates. Finally, when all the babies are accounted for, the mother crocodile transports them to the shallow water where they will remain under adult protection for weeks or months.

Overall Text Structure: ___________________. Underline signal words.

3. On the river banks of the Nile River, home to some crocodiles, there are many kinds of birds, sometimes called crocodile birds because they are always hopping around crocodiles. The big crocodiles and the birds are useful to each other for several reasons. The birds eat flies and leeches that they find on the crocodiles’ skin and mouths. In this way, the birds get a good mean and the crocodiles get rid of the leeches and flies. Sometimes an enemy frightens the birds who scream and fly away. As a result of the noise, the birds give the crocodiles a warning of danger.

Overall Text Structure: __________________. *Underline signal words.*

4. In most parts of the world there are not as many crocodiles as there used to be. This is a problem because crocodiles are becoming endangered and also crocodile are necessary to the balance of nature. Many crocodiles have died because people dried up the swamps and marshes where the crocodiles live. Poachers have also contributed to the dilemma as crocodiles have been desired for their strong, smooth, leathery skins. In order to preserve these mighty creatures, people must take care of the crocodiles' environment and help put a stop to the needless shooting of these animals.

Overall Text Structure:________________________. Underline signal words.

5. Alligators and crocodiles, along with their relatives the caimans and the gavials, are very much alike. These crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. There are some differences, however. Gavials have the longest snout and the most teeth. Some people say that alligators and crocodiles differ in the shape of their snouts and the positioning of their teeth. Zookeepers say that crocodiles move faster than alligators and have nastier dispositions.

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*Overall Text Structure:* ______________. Underline signal words.
KEY #1

1. All crocodilians are reptiles with long snouts, long tails, four short legs, tough skin, and sharp teeth. Members of the crocodilian family include alligators, crocodiles, caimans, and gavials. Crocodilians live in warm weather throughout the year and they spend part of their time in the water and part of their time on land. Almost all crocodilians grow to be very large, with the largest more than twenty feet long. There are two kinds of alligators, 14 kinds of crocodiles, eight kinds of caimans, and one kind of gavial.

Overall Text Structure: DESCRIPTIVE. Underline signal words (the features are, some characteristics are, for example, etc.)
2. Recently, scientists have gained an understanding of a crocodile’s reproductive activity. Crocodiles mate in the water, where the buoyancy keeps them from crushing each other. Prior to mating, there are stylized postures, jumping, submerged bubble blowing, and snout contact. After mating, hard-shelled eggs are laid in a nest, in a hole scooped in the sand. When it is time to hatch, the infant crocodiles begin a loud chirping sound that leads the female to the nest, which she excavates. Finally, when all the babies are accounted for, the mother crocodile transports them to the shallow water where they will remain under adult protection for weeks or months.

Overall Text Structure: **SEQUENCE**. Underline signal words.
KEY #3

3. On the river banks of the Nile River, home to some crocodiles, there are many kinds of birds, sometimes called crocodile birds because they are always hopping around crocodiles. The big crocodiles and the birds are useful to each other for several reasons. The birds eat flies and leeches that they find on the crocodiles’ skin and mouths. In this way, the birds get a good meal and the crocodiles get rid of the leeches and flies. Sometimes an enemy frightens the birds who scream and fly away. As a result of the noise, the birds give the crocodiles a warning of danger.

Overall Text Structure: CAUSE AND EFFECT. Underline signal words.

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Overall Text Structure: _____________________. Underline signal words.
4. In most parts of the world there are not as many crocodiles as there used to be. This is a problem because crocodiles are becoming endangered and also crocodile are necessary to the balance of nature. Many crocodiles have died because people dried up the swamps and marshes where the crocodiles live. Poachers have also contributed to the dilemma as crocodiles have been desired for their strong, smooth, leathery skins. In order to preserve these mighty creatures, people must take care of the crocodiles’ environment and help put a stop to the needless shooting of these animals.

*Overall Text Structure:* **PROBLEM SOLUTION.** Underline signal words.
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Overall Text Structure: **COMPARISON AND CONTRAST** Underline signal words.

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Overall Text Structure: ___________________. Underline signal words.
Text Structure Paragraphs

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