



Practical Strategies for Teaching Text Structure

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Acknowledgements

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- Johanna Toth, MiMTSS TA Center Literacy Dyslexia Consultant
- Dr. Michael Hebert

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Outcomes

Participants will:

- Explore four common text structures.
- Practice practical instructional strategies for teaching text structure using discipline-specific text.
- Employ a summarization protocol to support understanding subject matter.

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1.0 Why Teach Text Structure?

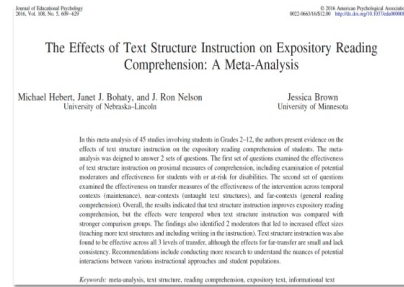
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Evidence for Text Structure Instruction

- Meta-analysis of 45 studies
- Conducted in 2016
- Grades 2-12
- Strong effects on reading outcomes
- Effects maintained over time
- Transfer to untaught structures & general reading

Hebert et al. (2016)



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Expository (Informational) Text Challenges

- Text structure
- Background information
- Specialized vocabulary
- Retention is expected
- Higher readability
- Dense facts and abstract concepts
- Symbols and abbreviations
- Pictures, graphs, and maps carry meaning
- Text might be lower interest

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Current Challenges in Secondary School

- Among 12th grade students, only 35% perform at the proficient level for reading (NAEP, 2024)
- 30% of 8th graders performed at the proficient level in reading (NCES, 2025)
- 29% of 8th graders reported an increased absences since the COVID pandemic (NCES, 2025)
- 31% of students do not read outside of school (NAEP, 2023)

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Activity 1.1: Adolescent Literacy

In the Chat:

Based on everything we have looked at so far, how would you explain to a colleague why we need integrate strategies to help students understand the text used in core subjects?

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2.0 Strategies for Teaching Text Structure

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Teaching Text Structure

1. Build conceptual knowledge of text structures using icons to identify the text structure easily.
2. Teach more than one type of text structure and discriminate between the types.
3. Teach the identifying features of the text structures using signal words.
4. Introduce a clear example using an easier text before adding a more complex text.
5. Ask students guiding questions to help them understand the elements of a type of text structure.
6. Teach students to select and organize information.
7. Use writing to help students understand what they have read.

Hebert et al. (2016)

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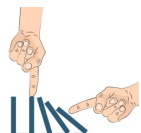
1. Text Structure Student Friendly Definitions and Icon Examples



Sequence

Sequence:

The author's purpose is to explain the sequence of events by placing things in order.



Cause and Effect

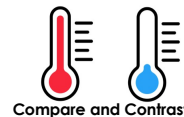
Cause and Effect:

The author's purpose is to explain how one event leads to a specific outcome. The event is the cause, the outcome is the effect, and the focus is on how they are connected.

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1. Text Structure Student Friendly Definitions and Icon Ex. (cont.)



Compare and Contrast

Compare and Contrast:

The author's purpose is to show how two things are related by explaining their similarities and differences.



Simple Description

Simple Description:

The author's purpose is to explain what something is like by using its characteristics or facts.

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Active Participation in Action: Teaching Cause and Effect



www.explicitinstruction.org

- As you watch record:
 - Opportunities to respond
 - Individual or Everyone
 - Best practices
- Be prepared to share out

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2. Discriminate Between Types

- Discrimination training involves analyzing multiple text structures simultaneously and identifying which structure is being used
- It requires the reader to consider both the content of the passage and the author's purpose
- By presenting various text structures close together, teachers can emphasize the features that set each structure apart, helping students differentiate between them.

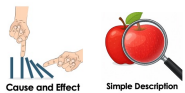
Roehling et al. (2017)

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Activity 2.1: Discriminate Between Types

- Read the text
- Identify the text structure
- Answer using the sentence frame



I believe the text structure is ... because ...

If your phone isn't working well, it could be a sign that it's time for an upgrade. Because this is a costly decision, it is essential to conduct thorough research so you choose a phone that fits your needs and preferences and do not make an expensive mistake. Once you have your new device, protecting it becomes crucial to keep it functioning optimally. If you make an investment in affordable accessories, such as screen protectors, then you can safeguard your phone from drops and accidents, ultimately helping it serve you for years.

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3. Identifying Features: Signal Words

Simple Description

- looks like, sounds like, [size, shape, color, number], for example, for instance, specifically, such as, in particular

Compare/Contrast

- Same as, similarly, both, have in common, likewise, alike different, in comparison, in contrast, however, but, on the other hand

Roehling et al. (2017)

Sequence

- first, second, third..., initially, preceding, before, next, then, finally, now, following, after

Cause/Effect

- because, as a result, outcome, so, therefore, consequently, thus, leads to, is caused by, if...then, produces

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Sequence Signal Words

- first, second, third..., initially, preceding, before, next, then, finally, now, following, after

Identify Signal Words

Before applying the screen protector, you should first clean the surface of your phone's screen with a soft cloth. After your screen's surface is clean, remove the paper backing on the screen protector. Then, apply the sticky side of the screen protector to your phone's screen. Smooth out any air bubbles trapped between the protector and the phone screen. Enjoy the added protection.

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Sequence Signal Words

- ***first**, second, third..., initially, preceding, before, next, ***then**, finally, now, following, ***after**

Signal Words Identified

***Before** applying the screen protector, you should ***first** clean the surface of your phone's screen with a soft cloth. ***After** your screen's surface is clean, remove the paper backing on the screen protector. ***Then**, apply the sticky side of the screen protector to your phone's screen. Smooth out any air bubbles trapped between the protector and the phone screen. Enjoy the added protection.

***Sequence signal words**

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Activity 2.2: Identify the Signal Words

Sequence: first, second, third, initially, after, preceding, before, next, then, finally, now, following

Cause/Effect: because, therefore, as a result, consequently, due to, thus, so, the problem is, the issue is, one solution is, to remedy, to address, a way to solve

Later, Gandhi had to travel by stagecoach. The conductor made Gandhi sit outside of the stagecoach box while the conductor sat inside with the white passengers. Afraid of being thrown off and getting stranded, Gandhi decided to comply. But when the same conductor ordered Gandhi to move out of his seat and sit on the dirty floor footboard, Gandhi refused. The conductor was very angry and hit Gandhi repeatedly, trying to force him off.

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Activity 2.2: Signal Words Identified

***Sequence:** first, second, third, initially, after, preceding, before, next, then, finally, now, following

****Cause/Effect:** because, therefore, as a result, consequently, due to, thus, so, the problem is, the issue is, one solution is, to remedy, to address, a way to solve

Later**, Gandhi had to travel by stagecoach. The conductor made Gandhi sit outside of the stagecoach box ***while** the conductor sat inside with the white passengers. *Afraid** of being thrown off and getting stranded, Gandhi ****decided to comply**. But when the same conductor ordered Gandhi to move out of his seat and sit on the dirty floor footboard, ****Gandhi refused**. The ****conductor was very angry and hit Gandhi repeatedly, trying to force him off**.

***Sequence and **Cause/Effect signal words**

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4. Start with a Clear Example

- Begin by introducing clear, simple example texts that follow a straightforward structure to ensure foundational understanding
- Gradually progress to more complex texts after the basic structure is understood, providing clear examples at each stage to reinforce learning

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Activity 2.3: Start with a Clear Example

Revise this passage into a clear example of the cause/effect text structure.

Cause/Effect Signal Words:

because, as a result, outcome, so, therefore, consequently, thus, leads to, is caused by, if...then, produces

Later, Gandhi had to travel by stagecoach. The conductor made Gandhi sit outside of the stagecoach box while the conductor sat inside with the white passengers. Afraid of being thrown off and getting stranded, Gandhi decided to comply. But when the same conductor ordered Gandhi to move out of his seat and sit on the dirty floor footboard, Gandhi refused. The conductor was very angry and hit Gandhi repeatedly, trying to force him off.

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Activity 2.3: Example of a Clear Example

Revise this passage into a clear example of the cause/effect text structure.

Cause/Effect Signal Words:

***because, *as a result,** outcome, so, therefore, consequently, thus, leads to, is caused by, if...then, produces

Later, Gandhi had to travel by stagecoach. The conductor made Gandhi sit outside of the stagecoach box while the conductor sat inside with the white passengers. ***Because** he was afraid of being thrown off and getting stranded, Gandhi decided to comply. But, when the same conductor ordered Gandhi to move out of his seat and sit on the dirty floor footboard, Gandhi refused. ***As a result,** the conductor was very angry and hit Gandhi repeatedly, trying to force him off.

***Cause/Effect Signal Words**

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5. Guiding Questions

Simple Description

What is being described?
What details are being used?

Sequence

What happens first?
What happens next?
What happens last?

Compare/Contrast

How are the topics the same?
How are they different?

Cause/Effect

What happened?
What happened as a result?

Hebert et al. (2016); Vaughn et al. (2022)

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Activity 2.4: Ask Questions

Which questions best fit this text?

Sequence:

What happens first?
What happens next?
What happens last?

Cause/Effect:

What happened?
What happened as a result?

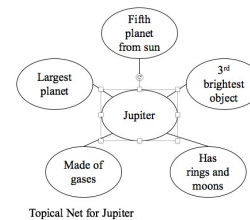
Later, Gandhi had to travel by stagecoach. The conductor made Gandhi sit outside of the stagecoach box while the conductor sat inside with the white passengers. Afraid of being thrown off and getting stranded, Gandhi decided to comply. But when the same conductor ordered Gandhi to move out of his seat and sit on the dirty floor footboard, Gandhi refused. The conductor was very angry and hit Gandhi repeatedly, trying to force him off.

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6. Select and Organize Information

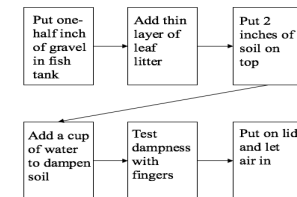
Simple Description



Topical Net for Jupiter

Roehling et al. (2017)

Sequence



Linear String for Making a Terrarium

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Select and Organize Information cont.

Compare/Contrast

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

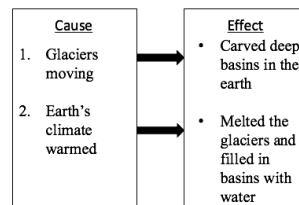
Matrix for Comparing Horses and Oxen

Roehling et al. (2017)

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Cause/Effect



Cause/Effect Organizer about the Formation of the Great Lakes

7. Use Writing to Support Comprehension

- Summary writing has been shown to improve reading comprehension
- Students who have already completed a graphic organizer for the passage can use it to guide their summary
- Summarization strategy: Getting the Gist

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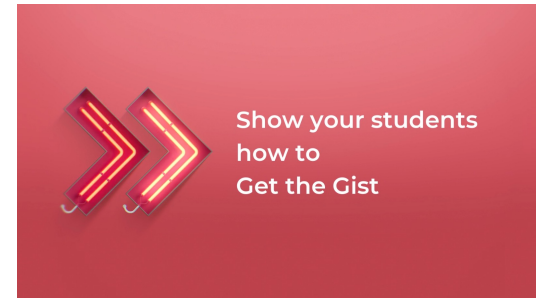
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Find the Main Idea Using Get the Gist

Main idea:

- Understanding it is essential
- Student are frequently asked to find it.
- ...But how do students “find it?”

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[Click for Video](#)

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Determine the Gist of a Short Text

Teach the Routine

1. Name the who or what the paragraph is about
2. Identify the most important information
3. Write the main idea in your own words in a short (using 10 or 15 words), complete sentence that makes sense.

Vaughn et al. (2022)

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Gist Routine

- Name who/what
- 2 or 3 important details
- Write the main idea in 10-15 words

If your phone isn't working well, it could be a sign that it's time for an upgrade. Because this is a costly decision, it is essential to conduct thorough research so you choose a phone that fits your needs and preferences and do not make an expensive mistake. Once you have your new device, protecting it becomes crucial to keep it functioning optimally. If you make an investment in affordable accessories, such as screen protectors, then you can safeguard your phone from drops and accidents, ultimately helping it serve you for years.

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Gist Routine: Identify Subject and Details

- Name who/what If your ***phone** isn't working well, it could be a sign that it's time for an ***upgrade**. Because this is a ***costly** decision, it is essential to ***conduct thorough research** so you choose a phone that fits your needs and preferences and do not make an ***expensive** mistake. Once you have your new device, ***protecting it** becomes crucial to keep it functioning optimally. If you make an investment in affordable ***accessories**, such as screen protectors, then you can safeguard your phone from drops and accidents, ultimately helping it ***serve you for years**.
- 2 or 3 important details

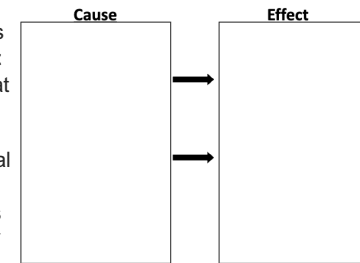
***Who/what and important details**

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Gist Routine: Organize Subject and Details

If your ***phone** isn't working well, it could be a sign that it's time for an ***upgrade**. Because this is a ***costly** decision, it is essential to ***conduct thorough research** so you choose a phone that fits your needs and preferences and do not make an ***expensive** mistake. Once you have your new device, ***protecting it** becomes crucial to keep it functioning optimally. If you make an investment in affordable ***accessories**, such as screen protectors, then you can safeguard your phone from drops and accidents, ultimately helping it ***serve you for years**.



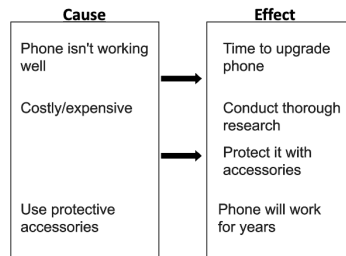
***Who/what and important details**

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Gist Routine: Subject and Details Organized

If your ***phone** isn't working well, it could be a sign that it's time for an ***upgrade**. Because this is a ***costly** decision, it is essential to ***conduct thorough research** so you choose a phone that fits your needs and preferences and do not make an ***expensive** mistake. Once you have your new device, ***protecting it** becomes crucial to keep it functioning optimally. If you make an investment in affordable ***accessories**, such as screen protectors, then you can safeguard your phone from drops and accidents, ultimately helping it ***serve you for years**.



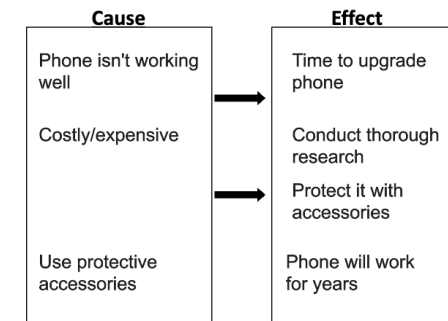
***Who/what and important details**

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Activity 2.5: Write a Gist Statement

Write the main idea in 10-15 words.
Share yours in the chat!



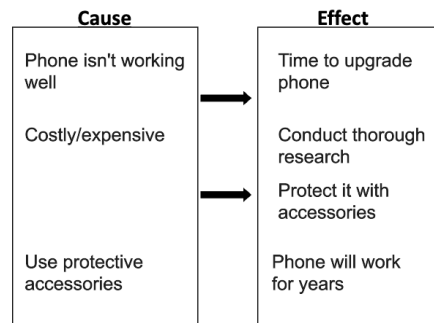
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Activity 2.5: Example Gist Statement

Example:

To replace an expensive phone, research your options and use protective accessories so it lasts.



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3.0 Review

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Closing Review

- Explored four common text structures.
- Practiced effective instructional strategies for teaching text structure.
- Used the Getting the Gist routine to support summarization.

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Sample Informational Text Lesson Plan

- Before Reading
 - Display the organizer; use it as a tool to preview the structure of the text
- During Reading
 - Read the text, fill in the organizer
- After Reading
 - Discuss the organizer
 - Write a gist statement for each paragraph or section of the article

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Activity 3.1: Waterfall

Directions: Respond in the chat; please do not share until prompted.

Reflect on how explicitly teaching text structure and guiding students in summarizing text can enhance comprehension of expository text.

What next step(s) can you take to help this knowledge reach students?

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Activity 3.2: Text Structure Matching

Match the text structure to its definition:

1. Simple Description
2. Compare/Contrast
3. Sequence
4. Cause/Effect

- a. tells us about something using facts/characteristics
- b. describes a connection telling us similarities and/or differences
- c. tells how an event leads to an outcome
- d. puts information in the order in which things happen

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Activity 3.3: Review Teaching Text Structures

Provide the missing word in the chat:

1. Build conceptual ____ of text structures using icons to identify the text structure easily.
2. Teach more than one type of text structure and ____ between the types.
3. Teach the identifying ____ of the text structures using signal words.
4. Introduce a ____ example using an easier text before adding a more complex text.
5. Ask students guiding ____ to help them understand the elements of a type of text structure.
6. Teach students to select and organize ____ .
7. Use ____ to help students understand what they have read.

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Thank You!

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