



Teach students to identify and use the text's organizational structure to comprehend, learn, and remember content



Teaching students to recognize the structure of a text aids in comprehension and recall of content. Providing this type of instruction can help students extract and construct meaning while they are reading. Students can begin to develop a sense of the structure of text as early as kindergarten, and, although instruction in kindergarten is typically based on narrative text, students in the early grades should also be exposed to informational text because its structure can build their understanding and recall of key points. Teachers should guide learning in recognizing text structure by gradually releasing responsibility, keeping the goal of independent reading in mind. This involves guiding students to draw on what they know about structure to help them understand more complex texts.



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Explain how to identify and connect the parts of narrative texts.
2. Provide instruction on common structures of informational texts.

Potential roadblocks

1. Teachers may not have time to analyze texts to determine how they are structured and how learning that structure contributes to students' reading comprehension.
2. Students can apply text structure knowledge in classroom assignments but may not do so independently or with more complex texts.

Reference: Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/14>



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How to carry out the recommendation

1. **Explain how to identify and connect the parts of narrative texts.**

Teachers should both model and explain how to identify and understand the aspects of a narrative text that provide meaning and “shape,” and they should engage students in identifying these elements and using them to guide their understanding of the text. Effective class discussions of recently read books include questions about key elements of the text’s structure. To help students identify and remember the elements of structure, develop tools, such as simple mnemonics. When introducing these tools, explain what the tool is, why it is useful, and how to use it with an overall goal of teaching students to think about the structure *as they read* and not just when required to use one of these tools.

Stay aware of the capabilities and grade levels of students, adapting instruction about text structure for each student. For example, a kindergarten teacher would identify elements of structure using simpler clues (e.g., When and where? Who? What happened? How did the story end?). As students progress, the teacher should encourage them to look at a wider variety of structural elements, using texts that involve multiple conflicts and subplots, as they extract and construct meaning from a story.

Other ways for students to build capacity in identifying structural elements include making up their own stories, developing stories from story maps, illustrating each episode in the story, or participating in a dramatic retelling.

Elements of structure in a narrative text

Element	Description
Characters	Who the story was about
Setting	Where and when the story happened
Goal	What the main character was trying to do
Problem	Why the main character took certain actions
Plot or Action	What happened to the main character or what she or he did to try to solve a problem
Resolution	How the problem was solved and how the story ended
Theme(s)	General lessons or ideas

Note. Adapted from page 19 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

2. **Provide instruction on common structures of informational texts.**

When teaching text structures, teachers should introduce students not only to the structural elements in narrative text but also to those of informational, or expository, text. Informational text structures typically apply to paragraphs or passages, and, when considering the entire text, students may encounter multiple structures, as well as multiple repetitions of the same structure. Teachers should use ideas and topics familiar to the students when teaching about the structure of informational text and should initially use texts that provide clear, easy-to-recognize examples of a given structure. During a reading of the text, the teacher should ask students to identify clue words in a passage that signal the use of a certain structure. An approach advocated by many researchers is to instruct students to organize information from expository text using graphic tools (e.g., concept maps, Venn diagrams, fishbone charts, and sequence diagrams or flow charts).

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Once students can comfortably identify the structure of a passage and recall its content, the teacher can replace more direct, guiding questions (“What was the cause? What was the effect?”) with complex questions that do not include clue words, such as “How did the author organize the information in this text?”

Structures of informational text

Structure	Description	Common Clue Words
Description	What something looks, feels, smells, sounds, tastes like, or is composed of	
Sequence	When or in what order things happen	first, then, next, after, later, finally
Problem and Solution	What went wrong and how it was or could be fixed	because, in order to, so that, trouble, if, problem
Cause and Effect	How one event leads to another	because, therefore, cause, effect, so
Compare and Contrast	How things are alike and different	both, alike, unlike, but, however, than

Note. Adapted from page 20 of the practice guide.

Narrative texts portray a story, or sequence of related fictional or nonfictional events involving individuals or fictional characters; in the elementary grades, narrative texts can include historical fiction, fables, and autobiographies.

Informational texts include expository writing, pieces that argue in favor of one position or another, and procedural texts and documents. In the elementary grades, informational texts can include news articles, speeches, and timelines.

Note. Taken from page 17 of the practice guide.

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Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Teachers may not have time to analyze texts to determine how they are structured and how learning that structure contributes to students' reading comprehension.</i>	Use common planning time to collaborate on identifying texts that offer clear examples of particular structures and structural elements and to develop clue words to go along with these texts. This work allows teachers to develop a broader range of texts than if they were working alone, and the knowledge can be spread across many teachers and even put into a repository for future teachers. Additionally, the school library is a good resource for trade books that identify texts that are good choices to teach particular elements.
<i>Students can apply text structure knowledge in classroom assignments but may not do so independently or with more complex texts.</i>	Encourage students to pay attention to text structure across a wide variety of reading experiences. Students who can use text structure successfully during a reading lesson may forget to do so when reading a social studies book or reading on their own. Providing a quick reminder of the value of structure just as such a reading is about to begin can help. Also, encourage students to bring you any texts whose structure they cannot figure out. Use these opportunities to clarify structure and help students resolve problems with more complex texts.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.