

Using Heinemann Classroom Books to Support Nonfiction Instruction



What is text structure?

Text structure is the way in which an author organizes the text in order to communicate the content. Often, an author uses more than one text structure. For example, a recount of an event might be told sequentially, but an author might also compare and contrast information within the sequence of events.

Some common nonfiction text structures are:

Cause and Effect: provides reasons or gives explanations for how or why something happens

Problem and Solution: problems are identified and solutions are discussed

Question and Answer: a question is posed, followed by a specific answer

Compare and Contrast: discusses two ideas and examines how they are alike and/or different

Description: main ideas are supported by descriptive details

Sequence: information is given in a particular order

Why is text structure important?

When students understand how a text is organized, they are more likely to identify the relationship of ideas, comprehend, and retain the information read. Also, students who develop an understanding of text structure are more likely to transfer this knowledge to their writing.

How can you support student understanding of text structure?

Most nonfiction texts contain language that signals the reader about how the text is structured. For example, words such as *while*, *but*, *either*, and *unlike*, signal the reader that the author is comparing and contrasting information. Words such as *because* and *since* signal a cause and effect structure. Adjectives and prepositional phrases often signal a descriptive text structure. Call students' attention to how the author uses language to organize the text, and discuss with students why the author might have chosen a particular structure to communicate the content. Use the mini-lessons provided in the Teaching Notes to support the instruction of nonfiction reading skills in your classroom.



Text Features

What are text features?

Some common nonfiction text features are:

- Table of contents
- Glossary
- Index
- Headings and subheadings
- Text boxes and sidebars
- Photographs and illustrations
- Captions and labels
- Graphics (maps, diagrams, charts, etc.)

Why are text features important?

Also called access features, text features make the text more accessible to the reader and often provide additional information to help students comprehend the content.

How can you support student understanding of text features?

Before reading, text features can also be used to help students evaluate the text and make predictions about what they will read. During reading, point out different text features and think aloud what information you can gain from each. Saying, for example, “*When I look at this diagram that shows the different layers of the earth, I read the labels and can see how thick each layer is. Then, when I read in the text about the earth’s core, I can look at the diagram and have a better understanding of where it is in relation to the other layers.*” Explicitly teaching students how to use the table of contents, index, headings, and glossary will better enable them to use nonfiction materials as references for future learning.

For further reference, consult:

- Duke, N., & Bennett-Armistead, V.S. (2003). *Reading and writing informational text in the primary grades: Research-based practices*. New York: Scholastic
- Harvey, S. (1998). *Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
- Hoyt, L. (2002). *Make it real: strategies for success with informational texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hoyt, L., Mooney, M., & Parkes, B., eds. (2003). *Exploring informational texts: From theory to practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kurkjian, C. & Livingston, N. (2005). Learning to read and reading to learn: Informational series books. *The Reading Teacher*, 58 (6): 592-600.
- Palmer, R.G. & Stewart, R.A. (2005). Models for using nonfiction in the primary grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 58 (5): 426-434.
- Yopp, R. & Yopp, H. (2000). Sharing informational text with young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 53 (5): 410-423.