

Reading Informational Texts

Objectives:

- Identify various types of informational texts
- Analyze the structure of informational text
- Recognize text features

Text Structures

When workers are constructing a building, the frame must be completed first, in order to have a base for the ceilings and floors. The frame of the building is what holds everything together. Different buildings have different frames, because not all buildings look alike. You are able to differentiate a house from a mall, for example.

A text, just like a building, has a structure. Writers use different “frames” to indicate to readers the type of informational piece they are going to read. For instance, a technical writer – someone who writes instructions to help people use a product – would want to begin with instructions about how to build the base of an entertainment center before explaining how to install the shelves. The frame this type of writer would use is called **sequence**. An author who uses the sequence structure writes about tasks according to the order in which they should be completed. You may also see the sequence structure used in history textbooks, because events are best understood when they are presented in the order in which they occurred. The table that follows explains some other text structures.

Structure	Description
Compare and contrast	A compare-and-contrast structure demonstrates how two or more things are similar or different. Some words that alert the reader that this structure is being used are <i>similar, different, same, contrast, alike, and both</i> .
Cause and effect	A cause-and-effect structure explains the reason something has occurred and what happened as a result. Some words and phrases that alert the reader that this structure is being used are <i>therefore, as a result of, because, and so, and therefore</i> .
Problem and solution	A problem-and- solution structure presents a problem and offers solutions that might fix the issue being addressed. Some words that alert the reader that this structure is being used are <i>problem, answer, reason, and question</i> .
Description	A description structure illustrates a person, place, thing, or idea by using vivid details and imagery. This structure uses plenty of details and contains many adjectives that the reader can use to identify that something is being described.

The ability to identify specific text structures will help readers form a greater understanding of a piece of writing. Text structures help readers to better align their thinking with that of the author of the piece, which improves comprehension of the material being presented.

Text Features

If text structures are the frames that hold writing together, then text features are the doors and windows of the writing. Text features enable the reader to “look outside” of a piece of writing for additional clues and information that cannot be found within the actual text. Look closely at your textbook. You will notice that some words are in color, some are in boldface text, and some are larger than others. These are all examples of text features. Text features make it easier for the reader to locate specific information. If you were using a book entitled *The Animals of China* to research the red panda, then you would not need to read information about the clouded leopard. The table of contents will indicate the chapter in which information about red pandas can be found. If you are looking for information specifically related to the diets of red pandas, the index will be most useful. The index lists topics alphabetically and breaks them into subtopics, showing the page numbers where the information can be found. Look at the chart below to find out more about types of text features.

Informational Text Features

Informational text features help the reader more easily navigate the text and often provide additional information to help students comprehend the content.

Organizational Aids <i>Help readers find important information</i>		Print Features <i>Guide readers through the patterns of organization</i>		Graphic Aids <i>Represent information in some specific way</i>	
Feature	Helps the Reader...	Feature	Helps the Reader...	Feature	Helps the Reader...
Bold Print	By signaling the word is important and/or found in the glossary	Table of Contents	Identify key topics in the book and the order they are presented in	Diagrams	Understand a more detailed or simplified view of information
Colored Print	Understand the word is important	Index	See everything in the text listed alphabetically, with page numbers	Flow Diagram	Understand a complex sequence of movements or actions
Italics	Understand the word is important	Glossary	Define words contained in the text	Sketches	Visualize an important concept
Bullets	Emphasis key points/concepts	Preface	Set a purpose for reading, get an overview of the content	Comparisons	Understand the size of one thing by comparing it to the size of something familiar
Titles	Locate different categories in the text	Pronunciation Guides	Say the words	Graphs	Understand relativity between elements
Headings	Identify topics throughout the book as they skim and scan	Appendix	By offering additional information	Figures	Combine text information with graphical aids
Subheadings	Navigate through sections of text	Illustrations <i>Expand the meaning of the text</i>		Maps	Understand where things are in the world
Captions	Understand a picture or photograph			Charts/Tables	Summarize/compare information
Labels	Identify a picture or photograph and/or its parts			Cross Sections	Understand something by looking at it from the inside
Sidebars	Gather additional or explanatory information			Overlays	Understand additional information
				Time Lines	Understand the sequence of time

Text features used in nonfiction texts help readers understand information that is not easily presented in words alone.

Summary

Text structures and text features are invaluable tools for the reader, so good readers should be able to identify the ways in which an author organizes information. Differentiating between text structures helps the reader to determine the type of information being given. The ability to identify text features enables the reader to quickly locate relevant information in a text and helps the reader save time when looking for very specific information.

Concept Reinforcement

1. Where would you look to locate information about the Renaissance in a book entitled *A Complete History of England*?
2. How can you determine the meaning of the word *onomatopoeia* in a literature textbook?
3. What text structure should be used to write an essay entitled “Factories and the Environment”?
4. Why would you look for subheadings in an article about planting vegetables when trying to find information about planting rutabagas?