

RI5: Structure of a Text

The term “text structure” refers to how information is organized in a passage. The structure of a text can change many times in a work and even within a paragraph. Students are often asked to identify text structures or patterns of organization on state reading tests. Also, understanding text structures can help students make and interpret arguments. This page will briefly explain the **eight commonly used patterns of organization** and provide examples.

Cause and Effect:

The results of something are explained.

Example: The dodo bird used to roam in large flocks across America. Interestingly, the dodo wasn’t startled by gun shot. Because of this, frontiersmen would kill entire flocks in one sitting. Unable to sustain these attacks, the dodo was hunted to extinction.

Chronological: information in the passage is organized in order of time.

Example: Jack and Jill ran up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after.

Compare and Contrast: two or more things are described. Their similarities and differences are discussed.

Example: Linux and Windows are both operating systems. Computers use them to run programs. Linux is totally free and open source, so users can improve or otherwise modify the source code. Windows is proprietary, so it costs money to use and users are prohibited from altering the source code.

Order of Importance: information is expressed as a hierarchy or in priority.

Example: Here are the three worst things that you can do on a date. First, you could tell jokes that aren’t funny and laugh really hard to yourself. This will make you look bad. Worse though, you could offend your date. One bad “joke” may cause your date to lash out at you, hence ruining the engagement. But the worst thing that you can do is to appear slovenly. By not showering and properly grooming, you may repulse your date, and this is the worst thing that you can do.

Problem and Solution: a problem is described and a response or solution is proposed or explained.

Example: thousand of people die each year in car accidents involving drugs or alcohol. Lives could be saved if our town adopts a free public taxi service. By providing such a service, we could prevent intoxicated drivers from endangering themselves or others.

Sequence / Process Writing: information is organized in steps or a process is explained in the order in which it occurs.

Example: Eating cereal is easy. First, get out your materials. Next, pour your cereal in the bowl, add milk, and enjoy.

Spatial / Descriptive Writing: information is organized in order of space (top to bottom, left to right).

Example: when you walk into my bedroom there is a window facing you. To the right of that is a dresser and television and on the other side of the window is my bed.

Question and Answer: information is organized in a way that a question is asked and then the author goes on to answer the question in the text.