



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Video: Ready for Take Off *Sequence Nonfiction Text Structure (timeline)*



The Evidence is Clear

Students' awareness of text structure improves their reading comprehension. Generally, it is easier for students to understand narrative (stories) than expository (nonfiction) text and some types of expository text are easier than others. Sequence is easier than description, which in turn is easier than compare/contrast.

Using Graphic Organizers to Enhance Sophisticated Thinking

Graphic organizers are visual representations that allow students to "see" facts from a content area in meaningful patterns. Simple graphic organizers can lead students through more sophisticated thought processes in order to develop wise conclusions and informed solutions. Important questions for secondary students to consider include:

- Are the facts sufficient to support the conclusion?
- Are the connections valid?
- Are alternative interpretations possible?
- What is the "weight" of evidence supporting a conclusion?

Combining Timelines and Venn Diagrams

Sequencing and compare/contrast text structures are typically considered to be of easy to medium difficulty when compared to all the nonfiction (expository) text structures. Instead of providing students with a summary of facts in chronological order, or a loose comparison of historical facts, the associated graphic organizers (timeline and Venn Diagram) can be used to support secondary students as they work through complex steps of historical analysis. The following high-school history lesson required sophomores to use higher-order thinking to sequence and compare information in order to draw conclusions. The use of timelines and Venn diagrams helped them to "see" patterns and develop thoughtful conclusions.

The old saying says, "history repeats itself." In order to test this hypothesis, teachers posed the following questions to students, "What patterns, if any, are implied by the idea of 'empire'?" In order to develop a model for all empires that would allow them to predict the future of a particular empire, students developed a focus question, "Will the United States follow the Roman path into decline?" To develop their essays, students had to gather facts, make connections among those facts, and then interpret the connections in light of some general model.

Students placed the events of Roman and United States history adjacent to one other by creating double timelines. By first connecting similar events on the timeline and then constructing Venn diagrams, students weighed the evidence for and against the idea that Rome and America are twins in history. Using their Venn diagrams, students wrote essays predicting the future of the United States based on their understanding of "empire."



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The students determined that United States and Rome had a great deal in common, including militarism, economic problems, and public corruption. They did not share, however, a reliance on powerful tyrants. Students concluded that diffusion of power in the democratic United States might prove sufficient to avoid or hold off the decline that follows the Roman model of empire. In the factual portion of the test that followed, the class as a whole achieved higher grades than earlier classes that had not used sequenced graphics to guide their inquiry.

References:

Clarke, J., Martell, K., & Willey, C. (1994). Sequencing graphic organizers to guide historical research. *The Social Studies*, 85(2), 70-76.

Dickson, S. V., Simmons, D. C., & Kmmeenui, E. J. (n.d.) *Text organization and its relation to reading comprehension: A synthesis of the Research*. Retrieved from: <http://idea.uoregon.edu/~ncite/documents/techrep/tech17.html>

