

Grade 8 Playlist: Analyzing the Structure of Specific Paragraphs

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.5:

- Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

Welcome

Authors intentionally structure their texts to convey the specific meanings they intend for their readers. Each paragraph communicates a main idea, or key concept, about a topic. By organizing a paragraph with care, authors are able to ensure that the details in each sentence add meaning to the text and support the paragraph's main idea. By analyzing the structure of specific paragraphs, readers will be able to identify how particular sentences develop and refine a paragraph's key concept.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- identify various structures and structural components used for informational texts.
- evaluate the role of particular sentences in developing and refining key concepts.

Review

Key Terms

- A **text structure** is an organizational pattern used to achieve a specific purpose in writing.
- **Refining** is the process of improving something, like an idea in a piece of writing, by making small changes to make it more subtle and accurate.
- Something is said to be **causal** if it relates to or acts as a cause.

Exploring the Standard

The paragraphs in an informational text work together to communicate the author's message about a topic. Each paragraph presents a key concept related to that message, and the individual sentences in a paragraph help to develop and refine that concept. For example, if the topic sentence of a paragraph presented the idea that schools should offer healthier lunch options, the other sentences would likely provide supporting details such as research statistics or student testimonials. By being able to recognize the structure and purpose of a paragraph as well as the roles of individual sentences, readers will better understand how an author organizes information and develops ideas.



Watch!

Watch this video about some of the techniques used to identify the main idea of a paragraph:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=42&v=zoBuQgefNZg>

Watch this video about how to identify supporting sentences that explain, develop, and refine a paragraph's main idea:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yoF-MnJYTo>

Watch this video about how to identify concluding sentences that remind the reader about the paragraph's main idea:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfV_yM7A1SY

A Closer Look: Identifying Paragraph Structures

Most paragraphs in an informational text include a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding sentence. However, there are still a variety of ways to structure these key ingredients within a paragraph. Authors use these different organizational patterns to achieve different purposes. Here are some of the most common ways to structure a text, as well as some examples and signal words for each:

- **Description**

This type of structure is often used to provide a vivid or thorough description of something. The detailed description allows readers to form a mental picture of what they are being told about. Some words and phrases to look out for that signal the use of descriptive structure include *behind*, *across from*, *next to*, *below that*, *above that*, *to the right of*.

Descriptive paragraphs are mostly used when an author wishes to say how something looks. The descriptive structure often organizes information with respect to space or location. For example, an article about blue whales may have a paragraph that describes the animal's physical features from the top of its head to the bottom of its tail. Likewise, an essay about the life and work of Steve Jobs might include a paragraph that describes the contents of his office from left to right.

- **Sequence**

This structure presents readers with a chronological sequence. It can be used to show events in the order in which they happened, or to explain a process by listing the steps to follow. Some words to look out for that signal the use of sequential structure include *first*, *next*, *before*, *then*, and *last*.

The sequential way of organizing text is most often used for directions or instructions, but it can also be used to explain processes that take place in nature or human society. For example, an essay about the life cycle of insects might include a paragraph that lists the steps of a caterpillar's metamorphosis into a butterfly. Likewise, an essay could use sequential structure to show how a series of important battles led to eventual victory for a nation at war.



Teaching Notes: Analyzing the Structure of Specific Paragraphs

The goal of RI.8.5 is for students to be able to analyze the structure of a specific paragraph in a text and the role of specific sentences in developing a concept in the text. These teaching notes contain ideas and resources for instruction around this standard.

Activities

1. Ask students to work with a partner or in a small group. Then direct students to discuss the Supreme Court's decision concerning *Brown v. Board of Education*, including an explanation of Chief Justice Warren's claim and the evidence he uses to support it in paragraph 2. Encourage students to take turns answering the following questions and supporting their answers with quotations from the text:
 - Which sentence best expresses the key concept in paragraph 2?
 - How do the sentences in paragraph 2 develop the idea that equal educational opportunities are extremely important?
 - What are some ways that society recognizes the importance of education, according to paragraph 2?
2. Assign students an informational text that makes use of several organizational patterns to develop or refine main ideas. Direct them to think about how the writer uses these structures to achieve different purposes. Then ask students to label each organization pattern they identify using the following terms:
 - description
 - chronological sequence
 - problem and solution
 - cause and effect
 - compare and contrast

Writing Prompts

1. Direct students to choose a topic and write a brief informational text, such as a persuasive or explanatory essay, that uses multiple organizational patterns in the structure of the paragraphs. Ask them to identify where in the text they use these patterns and the purposes they hope to achieve by doing so.
2. Direct students to conduct research on the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. Remind students that the case dealt with a topic of social injustice that required interpreting the Constitution and considering the place of education in the modern world. Ask students to use direct quotations and other evidence they find to write a brief essay answering this question: Why was it important for the Supreme Court to rule on this issue?

