

## Grades 9–10 Playlist: Analyze Text Structure

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5*:

- Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

### Welcome

Good writers think carefully about how to structure their texts. They might ask themselves these questions:

- Should I tell events in time order, or should I move back and forth in time?
- Should I give readers all the facts, or should I withhold some information?
- Should I include a lot of description, or should I focus on characters’ actions?

An author’s decisions about a text’s structure can help to create effects such as mystery, tension, and surprise. As a result, the structure of a text influences how readers respond to the story.

### Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- think critically about the structure of a story.
- explain how an author builds suspense.
- analyze the pacing of a story.

### Review

#### Key Terms

- The **structure** of a story is the way in which it is put together. When thinking about structure, pay attention to how a story begins and how it progresses.
- The **narrator** is the voice or character an author adopts to tell a story.

### Exploring the Standard

One of the most basic ways to analyze a text’s structure is to think about what happens at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Unlike real life, the events in the story may not happen in time order. Instead, an author may choose to use **flashbacks** to reveal information about the past. During a flashback, the setting jumps back in time from the main story. Flashbacks may change or develop a reader’s understanding of a character. Similarly, an author may reveal a clue early in the text about future events in the story. This technique is called **foreshadowing**.



**Watch!**

In this video, the presenters talk more about foreshadowing and flashbacks:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0Ykk6FL-bc>

**Read!**

Read some examples of flashbacks from literature at this website:

<http://www.literarydevices.com/flashback/>

When analyzing text structure, it is also important to think about the author's choice of narrator. What does the narrator reveal? Which characters can the narrator tell readers about? Does the narrator stay the same throughout the text? The narrator greatly affects how readers understand the world of the story. The way the narrator tells events can create effects such as humor or suspense.

**Example 1**

The passage below is an excerpt from Edgar Allen Poe's short story, "The Cask of Amontillado." Poe is known for his ability to create suspense through the way he structures his writing. Read the introduction to the story and think about its structure. How does this structure affect readers' emotions?

<sup>1</sup>The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved, precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

<sup>2</sup>It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.

**Listen!**

Listen to this excerpt of *The Cask of Amontillado* by clicking on the link below (listen from 0:30-1:32): <https://librivox.org/short-story-collection-002/>

Notice that Poe chooses a narrator who only gives limited information. The narrator lets readers know that something bad will happen to Fortunato, but he does not give any specifics about what exactly will happen to him. In addition, the narrator begins his story in the middle of the action so the reader only knows part of the story. The narrator does not reveal what Fortunato has done to deserve punishment. These two structural choices—to begin the story by letting the reader know something bad will happen, and to start the narrative in the middle of the action—both create suspense. They evoke feelings of curiosity and concern in the reader.

