SOS: Nonfiction Text Structures

Skill: Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific events or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

When reading informational texts, you may notice certain patterns in the sentences and paragraphs. Texts can be organized in different ways. Understanding how a text is structured can be key to understanding the text.

An example of SEQUENCING:

Lumberjacks start the logging process by using axes and saws to get trees to fall. Then, workers saw off the branches, leaving just the solid trunks. These giant logs are dragged, rolled, or floated away on rivers to be loaded into trucks, trains, or ships. Next stop: the sawmill.

A sequence is an order of events. Texts about people or events in history often are organized by sequence to help show you the order of events.

An example of COMPARE AND CONTRAST:

Apples and oranges are two kinds of fruit. Apples are usually red, yellow, or green in color and have thin skin. Oranges are orange in color. Like apples, oranges grow on trees. Unlike apples, oranges have thick skin. Although they are different, they both taste good and are good for you.
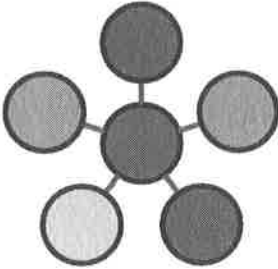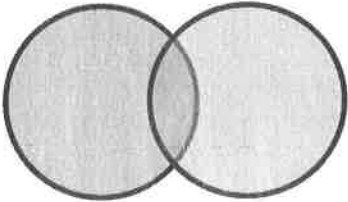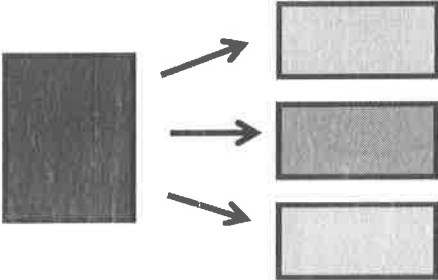
Comparing and contrasting helps authors talk about two or more things and show how they are similar or different.

An example of CAUSE AND EFFECT:

Mark woke up late for school. He hurried out the door and forgot his umbrella. Later that day it rained hard. Mark got wet on his way home. The next day, Mark woke up with a cold.

Authors will also sometimes organize a text by cause and effect. This shows how one event makes another event happen. A cause makes something happen. An effect is the result of the cause.

Non-Fiction Text Structures

Text Structure	Signal Words	Visual
Description	for example, for instance, characteristics include, specifically, in addition	
Sequence & Order	before, in the beginning, to start, first, next, during, after, then, finally, last, in the middle, in the end	
Compare & Contrast	similar, alike, same, just like, both, different, unlike, in contrast, on the other hand	
Cause & Effect	since, because, if, due to, as a result of, so, then, leads to, consequently	
Problem & Solution	problem, issue, cause, since, consequently, therefore, as a result, because of, leads to, due to, solve, so, then	