



RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Unraveling Expository Texts: Effective Strategies for Middle-School Students with LD

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Students with learning disabilities (LD) struggle with reading comprehension; more so in higher grades, where students are expected to “read to learn” instead of “learn to read” (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997). Saenz and Fuchs (2002) noted that students had significantly poorer comprehension of expository or content-area texts than of narrative texts.

Why Comprehending Expository Text May Be Difficult

Unfamiliarity with the different expository text structures contributes to students’ weaknesses in comprehension. According to Richgels, McGee, Lomax, and Sheard (1987), there are four main types of expository text structure (see Figure 1):

1. Compare and Contrast
2. Collection (enumeration and sequence)
3. Causation
4. Problem and Solution

Expository texts may use one or more of these structures within the same text, or even chapter, depending on information to be conveyed. For example, a science chapter on the concept of evaporation could structure text to enhance the sequential nature of the evaporation cycle. The same chapter could highlight the underlying causes and resulting consequences of the different stages in the cycle or emphasize the similarities and differences between evaporation and condensation. Saenz and Fuchs (2002) posited that an inadequate knowledge of expository text structure, as well as (a) an unfamiliarity with the content and vocabulary being read and (b) poor background knowledge about

the topic, have a negative impact on students’ comprehension.

What Can Be Done

Students need *direct and explicit instruction* regarding how to read expository text to help them understand the underlying text structure and become familiar with vocabulary and relevant background knowledge. Researchers have found that several expository text intervention strategies are effective for middle school students with learning disabilities (LD; see Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, Dimino, & Peterson, 2006; Jitendra, Hoppes, & Xin, 2000; Klingner & Vaughn, 1996). Because the decisions about which intervention to use and when to use it are value judgments made by the teacher (Deshler et al., 2001; Gajria, Jitendra, Sacks, & Sood, 2007), teachers must understand the potential value of the different interventions in order to make informed decisions.

Instructional Modifications and Strategy Instruction

Two categories of expository text instruction are *instructional modifications* and *strategy instruction*. Instructional modifications seek to reorganize text to make it more accessible to students; modifications tend to be specific to the content being taught and may not be generalizable to other

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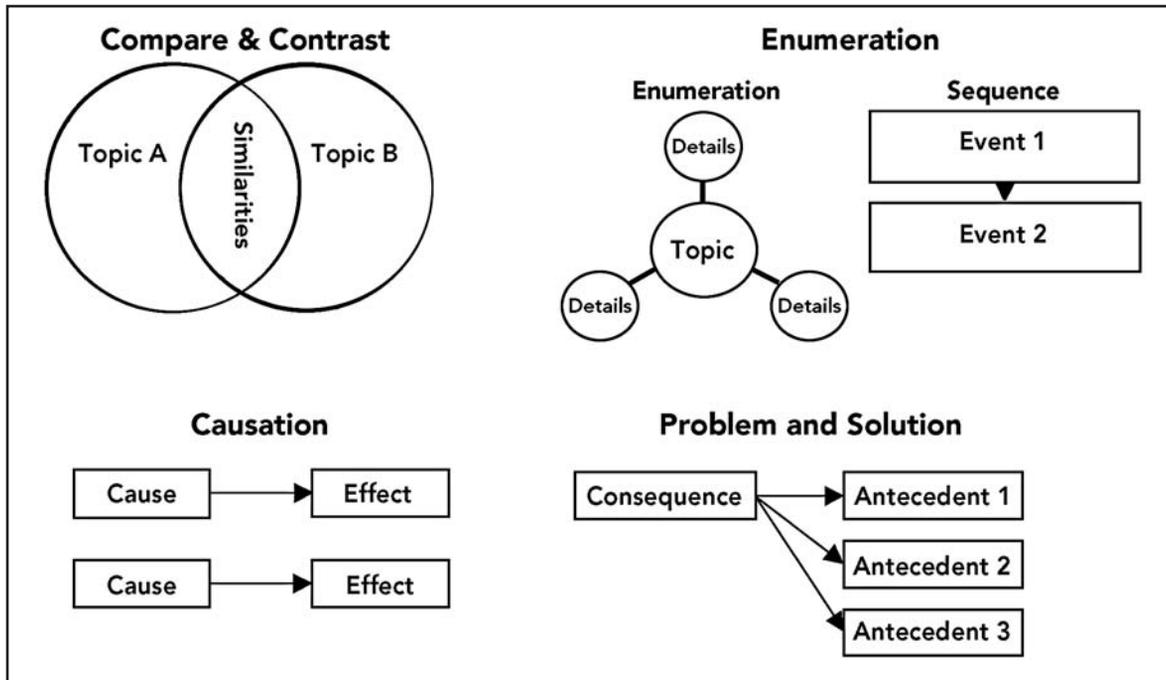


Figure 1. Expository Text Structures

texts. The most commonly used instructional modifications are *graphic organizers* (GOs). These are visual and spatial displays of content in which underlying relationships and key concepts from the text are highlighted (Kim, Vaughn, Wanzek, & Wei, 2004). GOs can take different forms, depending on the content and the relationships to be emphasized. Teachers can create their own GOs or make use of the many electronic resources that offer ready-to-use organizers.

Video clips have also been used as an effective instructional modification. Gersten and his colleagues (2006) employed video from a documentary on the Civil War to teach social studies to students with LD. The authors wanted to make use of materials that would reduce reliance on reading comprehension and provide access to the curriculum for these students. Rather than supplanting text information, the video clips enhanced it and helped build background knowledge. Teachers can also make use of Internet resources that provide 2- to 5-minute video clips organized by topics that teachers can download and use in their classrooms to enhance content-area instruction (see Resources sidebar).

Strategies provide students with the tools to unravel text themselves. While instructional modifications help organize material for students, strategy instruction primarily helps students become independent readers and comprehend text on their own. Unlike instructional modifications, strategy instruction is meant to be generalizable to different content areas (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

Research has shown that using *multiple strategies* is more effective than single-strategy instruction (Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998) and that *main idea generation* and *self-monitoring of comprehension* appear to be the most commonly used multiple strategies. Jitendra and her colleagues (2000) effectively combined summarization and self-monitoring to teach students to select and generate the main idea in paragraphs. After mastering the strategy, students were taught to monitor their comprehension by checking off steps on a cue card indicating whether they had first read the paragraph, used the strategy, and identified the main idea.

Another multistrategy package, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR; Klingner & Vaughn, 1996; Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; see also Kim et al., 2006) combines *reciprocal teaching* (Palincsar & Brown, 1984) and *cooperative learning*. It has been used effectively with elementary and middle school students with LD and also with English Language Learners. CSR incorporates before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading strategies, in which students first *preview* material, then attempt to *get the gist* while monitoring comprehension using *click and clunk*, a strategy to help identify unknown words. They complete their use of CSR by generating questions using the *wrap-up* strategy. Once students have mastered the different strategies, they work in collaborative groups in which each student is assigned a specific role. The

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teacher serves as a facilitator, monitoring activity in the groups as students apply the strategy to understand expository content.

Practical Use Guidelines

While both instructional modifications and strategy instruction are effective, the question still remains: When should each be used? An important consideration when choosing an intervention is the amount of time involved. Instructional modifications tend to be less time-consuming and can easily be fit into daily routines; however, because they are content-specific and may be more teacher-directed, they increase students' dependence on the teacher. Strategy instruction, on the other hand, requires more time initially while students are still mastering the strategy. Once proficient, though, students can take learning into their own hands with minimal support from teachers. A more thorough understanding of the both types of interventions and their purposes can help teachers make appropriate selections to best serve their purposes.

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INTERNET RESOURCES

Instructional Modifications

Graphic Organizers

- EdHelper

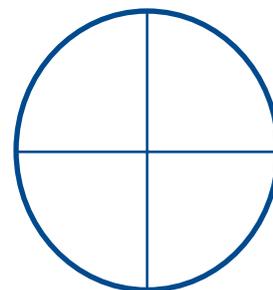
http://edhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm

- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

<http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer>

- Greece Central School District

<http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/tools/index.htm>



Video Clips

- PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/film/video.html>

http://www.pbs.org/keramexicanwar/resources/video_library.html

<http://www.pbs.org/cgi-registry/2wgbh/evolution/library/search.cgi?video=yes>



Strategy Instruction

Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading
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- LD Online

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/5912>

- Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts

http://www.texasreading.org/downloads/middle_school_instruction/RTS_Ch6.pdf

AWARDS NOMINATIONS

2009 OUTSTANDING TEACHER AWARD

Purpose and Nature of Award

As part of an effort to encourage and recognize quality instruction, each year the Council for Learning Disabilities recognizes Outstanding Teachers from local chapters.

Winners receive a certificate presented at the annual International Conference on Learning Disabilities as well as a complimentary conference registration and a stipend.

Selection Criteria

Individual chapters develop criteria for selection of an outstanding teacher. Applicants should contact either the national CLD office or the president of their state/regional CLD chapter for application materials and criteria. Please use additional paper if needed. Attach letters of support from students, parents, teachers, administrators, and others. Include any information that highlights the contributions of this person.

Notification Process

Application materials are reviewed by procedures determined by individual chapters.

Information on award winners must include a one-page summary of accomplishments and contributions of the award winner to the field of learning disabilities. As part of the annual CLD conference, award winners will be asked to participate in a Master Teacher Showcase poster session, which is an opportunity to highlight their expertise.

To obtain the name/address of your CLD Chapter President, contact:

Mary Provost, Conference Director
Council for Learning Disabilities
P.O. Box 2266
Mount Pleasant, SC 29465
843/971-2980

2009 FLOYD G. HUDSON OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

Purpose and Nature of Award

The Floyd G. Hudson Service Award is granted by the Council for Learning Disabilities for outstanding performance and commitment to individuals with learning disabilities demonstrated by professionals who are not necessarily special education classroom teachers. One professional is selected from nominees submitted from local chapters. The winner will receive a complimentary one-year membership in the Council for Learning Disabilities.

Selection Criteria

Nominees are judged based on the following criteria:

1. Extent and quality of professional service to the field of learning disabilities
2. Exemplary service to the field of learning disabilities for a minimum of 5 years

Review Process

Nominees are submitted to the Leadership Development Committee by local chapters. Final approval of nominations rests with the Leadership Development Committee, with assistance from the Executive Committee. The Leadership Development Committee selects the final award winner.

Application Procedure

All nominations must include:

1. Completed application form and related materials (forms may be obtained from the national office or your regional representative)
2. Letter of nomination outlining the extent and quality of the nominee's professional contributions to the field of learning disabilities as based on letters of support from colleagues, parents, students, etc. (self-nominations are accepted)
3. Two-page vita

DEADLINES FOR BOTH AWARDS:

1. **Chapter deadline** to be determined by individual chapters.

2. **Send nomination materials by May 15 to:**

Mary Provost, Conference Director
Council for Learning Disabilities
P.O. Box 2266
Mount Pleasant, SC 29465
843/971-2980

2009 CLD OUTSTANDING RESEARCHER AWARD

To promote and recognize research, the Council for Learning Disabilities annually presents an award for an outstanding manuscript-length paper on learning disabilities based on a doctoral dissertation completed within the last five years.

The winner will receive a plaque to be presented at the
J. Lee Wiederholt Distinguished Lecture,
Saturday, October 3, 2009,
during the
31st International Conference on Learning Disabilities, Dallas, Texas.
In addition, the paper will be considered for publication in
Learning Disability Quarterly.

Six copies of the APA-style paper (maximum 25 pages in length) should be submitted to:

Council for Learning Disabilities
11184 Antioch Road, Box #405
Overland Park, KS 66210
913/491-1011

Deadline for submission of papers: Must be received by May 1, 2009

The winner will be notified by August 15, 2009.

COMMITTEE/CHAPTER REPORTS AND NEWS

The RESEARCH COMMITTEE seeks faculty support in soliciting manuscript-length papers on learning disabilities from a doctoral dissertation that was completed within the last five years. We request your assistance in encouraging recent doctoral graduates who have completed an outstanding

research study to submit their work to the Council (See the 2009 CLD Outstanding Researcher Award announcement in this issue for details). The Research Committee will select the work that is rated as most worthy of the prestigious research award.

Visit the CLD Web Site:
<http://www.cldinternational.org>

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CLD Annual Membership Form



The Council for Learning Disabilities

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Revised 10/17/06

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CLD INFORMATION CENTRAL

CLD Mission, Vision, & Goals

Mission Statement: The Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD) is an international organization that promotes evidence-based teaching, collaboration, research, leadership, and advocacy. CLD is composed of professionals who represent diverse disciplines and are committed to enhancing the education and quality of life for individuals with learning disabilities and others who experience challenges in learning.

Vision Statement: Our vision is to include all educators, researchers, administrators, and support personnel to improve the education and quality of life for individuals with learning disabilities and others who experience challenges in learning.

External Goals

1. Promote the use and monitoring of evidence-based interventions for individuals with learning disabilities (LD) and others who experience challenges in learning.
2. Foster collaborative networks with and among professionals who serve individuals with LD and others who experience challenges in learning.
3. Expand our audience to educators, researchers, administrators, and support personnel.
4. Promote high-quality research of importance to individuals with LD and persons who experience challenges in learning.
5. Support leadership development among professionals who serve individuals with LD and others who experience challenges in learning.
6. Advocate for an educational system that respects, supports, and values individual differences.

Internal Goals

1. Ensure efficient, accountable, responsive governance to achieve the CLD mission.
2. Mentor future CLD leaders.
3. Maintain sound fiscal planning and practice.
4. Recruit and retain CLD members.
5. Increase the diversity of our organization.

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Author Guidelines

The strategic goals of CLD include the dissemination of research that promotes effective practices for individuals with learning disabilities (LD) and supports the education of students from diverse backgrounds. In light of these goals, CLD's newsletter, *LD Forum*, includes a Research to Practice column and in this issue will introduce a new column, *5 Ways To ...*, offering evidence-based tips for teachers.

LD Forum

invites articles from the full range of professionals who serve individuals with LD, including classroom teachers, graduate students, researchers, teacher preparation faculty, consultants, and others. Manuscripts are accepted on an ongoing basis.

Research to Practice Column

- **Purpose:** translate evidence-based research findings on effective interventions and practices in the field of learning disabilities to a practitioner-oriented format that offers educators the guidelines needed to integrate research findings into classroom instruction.
- **Article submission:** electronically to the *LD Forum* editor for peer review. Appropriate articles should offer a brief summary of supporting research, classroom guidelines, and implications that will enable educators to easily implement effective practices. Evidence-based lessons, scripts, and activities will be featured, with a focus on information that easily translates into classroom practice. **Length:** no more than 4–6 double-spaced pages, including a cover page, references, and tables/figures; formatted per APA guidelines

5 Ways To ... Column

- **Purpose:** provide educators with quick access to 5 high-quality, easy to implement, evidence-based tips for teaching organized around a specific theme, such as 5 ways to manage challenging behavior or 5 ways to build reading fluency.
- **Article submission:** electronically to the *LD Forum* editor for peer review. Appropriate articles should provide a single paragraph introduction/statement of the problem, followed by a brief listing of 5 research-supported techniques related to a specific theme. **Length:** No more than 2 double-spaced pages, including a cover page, references, and graphics.

Send manuscripts to: Cathy Newman Thomas, PhD,
LD Forum Editor (cthomas57@mail.utexas.edu)