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Teaching ELLs to Navigate Textbooks Effectively

By: Colorín Colorado (2010)

Knowing how to navigate a textbook effectively is an important part of a student's ability to access new content. Conversely, being unable to read and use a textbook is a major obstacle for students when presented with new material and concepts across the curriculum, especially if a class calls for extended independent reading and review of the textbook.

For English language learners (ELLs), learning how to use a textbook can be a powerful tool in increasing their comprehension of material in all of their academic work and particularly in the content areas. While it may seem to be a basic skill, ELLs may be students with:

- no formal educational experience
- extensive schooling in a different country
- long-term experience in the U.S. system for many years but with limited exposure to a mainstream curriculum.

In each of these cases, it is quite possible that the students don't have experience with the kinds of textbooks they will be using in a U.S. classroom, or that they haven't learned how use textbooks as a tool to support their learning.

The good news is that many textbooks — especially those designed for ELLs or struggling readers — contain elements that can be used to help preview new material before starting a lesson. Once students learn what these elements are and how they can be used, students can begin to preview content and build background knowledge independently in their classes on a regular basis.

In order to help you get started building this skill, this article offers some strategies for teaching the parts of a textbook, the organization of a chapter within a textbook, as well as a strategy for previewing content with a "**chapter walk.**"

Part I: Teach students textbook and chapter elements

Textbooks

At the beginning of the school year, introduce students to the elements of their textbooks and how they can be used, such as:

- Cover
- Author
- Table of contents
- Glossary
- Index

- Appendices

Show students examples of these elements in their own books, and ask them questions that check their comprehension of the differences between these tools, such as:

- "I want to know which chapter is about whales. Where should I look for that information?"
- "I want to learn about killer whales. How can I find the right page number for that information?"
- "I want to know what 'spout' means. Where can I find that definition?"

In addition, be sure to point out the specific features of textbooks that your students are using (a bilingual glossary, for example), as well as content-related tools (the Periodic Table of Elements in a chemistry textbook). Provide students with examples of the ways those tools can be used.

Each time students begin using a new textbook, review the elements they have already learned and point out any different features or elements of the new book. You may wish to use an activity to review the different parts they have learned such as the worksheets in the **Hotlinks**.

Chapters

Once students have mastered the main parts of a textbook, they are ready to move on to the parts of the chapter that will aid their informational reading, such as:

- Titles
- Chapter objectives
- Headings and subheadings
- Vocabulary lists
- Bold print (key vocabulary in context)
- Captions
- Side bars
- Maps
- Graphs (Circle, pie, bar, picto-gram, etc.)
- Pictures
- Bullets
- Review questions
- Quizzes

Show students examples of these elements and talk about their function. What is the difference between a graph and a picture? What is the difference between a bullet point and a bold heading? Help students understand how these elements are used to organize text and to highlight important information. One way to do so is by providing a blank outline that students can fill in with key headings and topics.

Review these elements before each chapter, and be sure to point out these elements in other expository

texts, assessments, or articles that students encounter.

Part II: Use a "chapter walk"

Now that students know the basics, they can begin to preview content more and more independently as the school year progresses by using a "chapter walk."

Step 1: Have students look for:

- the objectives of the chapter
- key vocabulary
- visual elements (pictures, maps, diagrams, and graphs)
- headings and subheadings
- captions.

Step 2: Based on what they find, ask students to predict what the chapter will be about.

Step 3: Guide students to some key concepts and vocabulary words by asking questions about their predictions (see example below).

Step 4: Ask students to share what they know about the chapter topics.

Step 5: As students get more practice with this technique, ask them to use the review questions at the end of the chapter to help them predict what they will learn before they begin to read.

An activity like this may take some time at first because it's time-consuming to teach. If you use it with regularity, however, it will become easier and quicker, and students will be able to do this on their own at the beginning of a new chapter.

From the Classroom: Teacher Example

In this example, Amber Prentice describes how she uses the chapter walk:

"When we get to a new chapter in the text, the first thing I do is to ask students to open their book to the first page of that chapter. I ask questions about what they will learn based on what they see on that page, such as 'What do you think this chapter is about? What do we know about that topic?' or 'What do you see in this picture?' Students offer their ideas, and I then ask them to take those ideas a step further so that we can begin to build background knowledge.

"In a unit about Native Americans in North America, my students looked at a picture that showed a couple Native American men in canoes, one with a net and fish at the bottom of the canoe. The students said, 'I see a boat, I see a man, I see a net, I see water, etc.' And I asked them what that taught them about Native Americans.

"After a few guesses, I asked them if they could guess what kind of food they ate. Right away they made the connection that the people in the picture ate fish. They also noticed the 'long boats,' and so I was able to introduce the word 'canoes.'"

As you move through these activities on a regular basis, students will become more confident with their

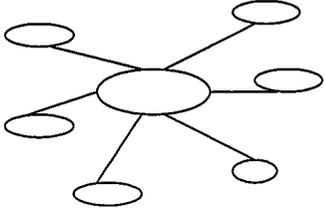
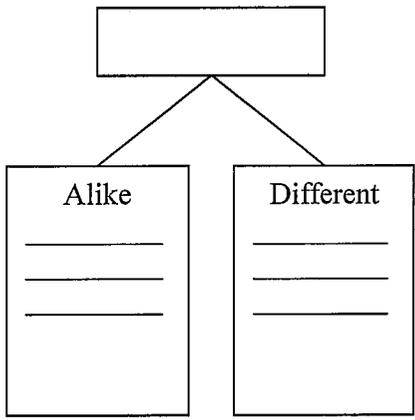
ability to find information independently. Help student understand that this is a skill that they can use in all of their classes and that it will be very helpful to them throughout their academic career, especially as they get to more difficult courses and more difficult textbooks. They will appreciate the tools and skills you are giving them to learn and succeed!

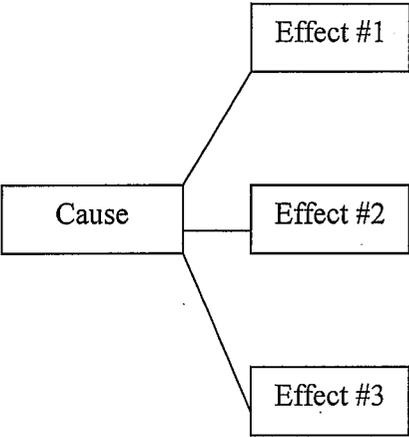
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/35949?theme=print>

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Five Expository Text Structures and their Associated Signal Words

Pattern	Description	Cue Words (signal words)	Graphic Organizer
Description	The author describes a topic by listing characteristics, features, attributes, and examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for example • characteristics • for instance • such as • is like • including • to illustrate 	
Sequence	The author lists items or events in numerical or chronological sequence, either explicit or implied	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first • second • third • later • next • before • then • finally • after • when • later • since • now • previously • actual use of dates 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____
Comparison	Information is presented by detailing how two or more events, concepts, theories, or things are alike and/or different	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • however • nevertheless • on the other hand • but • similarly • although • also • in contrast • different • alike • same as • either/or • in the same way • just like • just as • likewise • in comparison • where as • yet 	

<p>Cause and Effect</p>	<p>The author presents ideas, events in time, or facts as causes and the resulting effect(s) or facts that happen as a result of an event.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if/then • reasons why • as a result • therefore • because • consequently • since • so that • for • hence • due to • thus • this led to 	
<p>Problem and Solution</p>	<p>The author presents a problem and one or more solutions to the problem</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem is • dilemma is • if/then • because • so that • question/answer • puzzle is solved 	