To get the main idea of a nonfiction article, you need to understand not just the facts that are presented, but the relationships among them. These clues will help you to identify the type of relationship, or structure, that holds those facts together.

Four general types of relationship are described here: Time Order, Comparison, Cause and Effect, and Question and Answer. You might expect to find one or all of these relationships in a nonfiction article.

I. **Time Order** (or Sequencing) – describes the order in which things happened.

   **Words that signal Time Order**
   - after
   - at (time)
   - before
   - during
   - finally
   - first, second, third, etc
   - last or lastly
   - next
   - on (date)
   - then
   - until
   - while

II. **Comparisons** (or Compare and Contrast) – describes how two things are different, or how they are the similar.

   **Words that signal Comparison**
   - as...as
   - alike
   - and yet
   - as opposed to
   - better, best
   - but
   - compared to
   - despite
   - different, difference
   - either, or
   - however
   - likewise
   - more, less
   - in contrast to
   - in spite of
   - instead of
   - nevertheless
   - on the other hand
   - rather than
   - same
   - similar to, similarly
   - still
   - though
   - unlike
III. Cause and Effect – describes how one thing is the reason for another thing.

Words that signal Cause and Effect

as a result of
because so
consequently
due to
for this reason
in order to
may be due to
on account of
since
the cause
then, so
therefore
this led to
thus

IV. Question and Answer – describes a question or problem and may also give the answer or solution.

Words that signal Question and Answer

answer
how, how many
it could be that
one may conclude
perhaps
problem
question
solution
the best estimate
what
when
who
where
why