

Eastside Literacy Tutor Support  
Student Handout – **Structural Clues in Nonfiction**

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	more, less
alike	in contrast to
and yet	in spite of
as opposed to	instead of
better, best	nevertheless
but	on the other hand
compared to	rather than
despite	same
different, difference	similar to, similarly
either, or	still
however	though
likewise	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