

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