Text structure, sentence function and rhetorical purpose

Original skill preparation; versioned source scope

Text Structure, Sentence Function and Rhetorical Purpose

- Describe the overall structure of a text as a sequence of actions.
- Identify the **sentence function** 句子作用 of one sentence or phrase.
- State the text's **rhetorical purpose** 修辞目的.
- Tell a reported **proposal** 提案 from the writer's own **argument** 论证, and notice a **qualification** 限定.

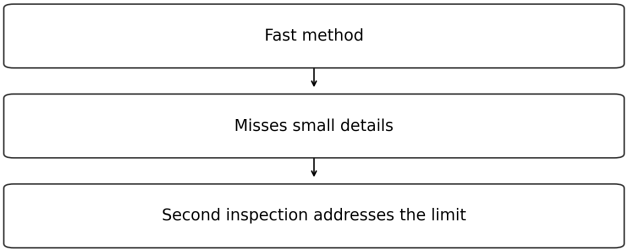
Describing structure with verbs

- Describe what each part does, not what it is about: "introduces a problem", "reports a solution", "qualifies a result", "describes a refinement".
- Common shapes: problem → solution; claim → evidence → limit; old view → new finding; general → example.
- The right answer follows the order of the passage.

The function of a sentence

- Ask what would be lost if the sentence were removed: an example, a reason, a contrast, a limit?
- Words like "however", "although" and "instead" often mark the function: a contrast or a qualification.
- A qualifying phrase limits a claim; it does not reverse it.

Figure: The function of a sentence



- Worked steps: Fast method → Misses small details → Second inspection addresses the limit
- Match each part of the diagram to the text.

Purpose and point of view

- The purpose is usually a verb phrase: "to describe how a design was improved", "to challenge an assumption".
- Separate what others proposed or believed from what the writer states.
- A passage that reports a proposal does not necessarily support it.

Practice passage

- **Passage.** Early walking maps marked every route with the same solid line.
- This kept the map simple, but walkers could not tell whether a route included steps.
- Some designers proposed adding a written note beside every staircase.
- A trial instead used a distinct line pattern for routes without steps and explained it in a clear legend.

Worked example: the overall structure

- Sentence 1 describes an earlier design; sentence 2 names its problem.
- Sentence 3 reports one proposal; sentence 4 a different solution that was tested.
- Sentence 5 gives the result, with a qualification; sentence 6 describes a refinement.
- Purpose: to describe how a map design was improved through a trial.

Worked example: function and point of view

- "Although some readers needed help noticing the legend" qualifies the improved accuracy by naming a remaining problem. It does not show the trial failed: accuracy still improved.
- Does the writer recommend written notes beside every staircase? No. That is a reported proposal; the design tested and retained was the line pattern.
- An answer that says "the writer argues for written notes" mixes up two stages of the story.

Common errors

- Describing the topic when the question asks for the function.
- Treating a qualification as a reversal.
- Giving a reported proposal to the writer.

Common errors (2)

- Choosing a structure whose order does not match the passage.
- Naming a purpose that fits only one sentence.

Key terms

- **sentence function**: The job a sentence does in a text, such as giving an example or a limit.
- **rhetorical purpose**: What the writer is trying to do with the whole text.
- **proposal**: A suggested plan or solution.
- **argument**: A claim supported by reasons.

Check yourself

- A passage gives an old belief, then a study that contradicts it. What is the function of the study?
- "The plan cut costs, although it took longer." What does the "although" clause do?
- A passage says "Some critics suggested closing the road." Does the writer support closing it?