Storyboarding

The purposes of writing
A writer needs to know the different ways in which ideas or facts are organised and presented so they make sense to readers. To tell a story or give information involves understanding how to structure texts. Knowing words and grammar alone does not achieve this.

Our modern understanding of structure in writing was described by academics who came to be known as the ‘genrists’. They researched the ways in which texts are organised for different social purposes. These purposes include storytelling, giving instructions, persuading, reviewing and reporting information.

The benefit of understanding text types
Children often know what they want to say, but do not know how to present their ideas in a way that the reader will understand. They often begin to tell a story, but lose their way after writing the initial ideas.

Understanding how texts are organised for different purposes is important for children to know how to arrange their ideas. It gives them a plan for their writing and helps them to know what needs to be said for their ideas to make sense.

Planning a text by summarising the ideas is often called ‘storyboarding’. Early cartoons were planned by drawing scenes and main actions of characters on boards. Once the story is planned, then the details can be created. The storyboard is a kind of map for the details.

The genrists explained the storyboards for different types of texts. Each text type has its own pattern or structure. Once the writer knows the purpose of the writing, then a suitable storyboard can be chosen for mapping that kind of text.

Storytelling
The easiest way to describe a story structure is to say it must have a beginning, middle and an end. Of course this is very simplistic, but it is as much as very young children can understand.

Very young children do not need to write words to plan a very simple story. They can use a series of pictures. For example, the following three images can be the basis of a simple story, but they must be placed in a particular order to tell that tale. Children move the pictures into a sensible order and then tell their story.

The following three pictures can be re-organised to tell a story. This makes children think about which of the three scenes would be the beginning, the middle or the end of the story.
One obvious story children might think of is about a sheep that it having fun, but becomes too adventurous and has an accident.

Other children might interpret the pictures in different ways. For example, in the following sequence the story might be about a sheep that makes a mistake and then changes his ways by playing safer.

Storyboards such as this can be gradually increased in difficulty by increasing the number of pictures that are part of the story sequence. Here is an example with four pictures.

The more pictures or frames that are given, the more options there are that could make sense as a story. But the beginning and the end must make sense of the series of events.
Classic story structures

Traditional stories are excellent examples of story structures that work well. It is useful for children to understand that stories they know well have structures and that they, too, can use these structures in their storytelling.

Bad luck, good luck

A very simple traditional story pattern is the ‘bad luck, good luck’ story. Here is an example:

In this story type, there can be many events or episodes in the story, but each episode is very short. There is a problem (bad luck) and then a solution to that problem (good luck). Then another problem happens and there is a solution to that problem, and so on.

This story type is easy for young children in a class to each do one problem (What bad luck!) and then a solution (What good luck!). Children can be given a framework or plan for doing this.

Their drawings (and text if possible) can be bound together into one large book to tell a story.

Stories using this structure might come from experiences the children have had. The teacher could begin the story and the children invent different events that happen.

One day, a teacher took her class to the zoo to see the animals.
What bad luck. The gates were shut.
What good luck. A man came with the key.
What bad luck. Eddy got lost in the lion’s cage.
What good luck. The lion was asleep.
**The rule of three**

Another example of a common story structure is known as the ‘rule of three’. The storyboard for such a story is *The Billy Goats Gruff*.

In this story type:
1. the setting, the characters and the problem are introduced *(where, who and what)*
2. there are three events or episodes that happen *(who and what)*
3. the problem is solved *(who and how)*

Other traditional tales that follow this pattern include:

*The Three Little Pigs*

*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*

*Little Red Riding Hood*

*The Mouse Bride*

**The hero tale**

A slightly more complex story structure is the classic ‘hero tale’. This structure has been used for thousands of years by cultures around the world. A typical example is the Japanese traditional tale of *Momotaro, the Little Peach Boy*. 
In this story:
1. An old man and woman find a giant peach floating down a river.
2. They save the peach and open it, but find a small boy inside. They adopt and raise the boy.
3. Evil giants attack the village and steal all the possessions of the old people
4. The grown boy bravely fights the giants and uses his cleverness to beat them

When this story plot is compared to the following stories, there is a high degree of similarity in the events and the main theme of the story – good succeeds over evil.
   Perseus the Gorgon-slayer (Greek mythology)
   Moses in the Bulrushes (the Bible)
   Romulus and Remus (Italian legend)
   The Sword in the Stone (British legend)
   Pecos Bill (US traditional tale)
   Superman (US modern tale)
   Harry Potter (UK modern tale)

The elements of similarity can be mapped in this way:
1. A baby or very young child is placed in a cocoon (blanket, basket, box, container, etc)
2. The cocoon is transported over water, air or space to a foreign place
3. The baby is found, adopted and raised by a stranger
4. The baby grows to become a brave character with special skills or powers
5. The character uses these special skills or powers, but also with uses bravery and clever thinking, to fight evil.
Nonfiction

Nonfiction texts have a larger range of social purposes than fiction and therefore have a wider range of text types. Understanding how these text types are structured certainly helps children to learn different ways to write.

Information reports

Information reports serve the social purpose of presenting facts about a topic in an organised way. Perhaps one of the simplest structures for this is a question-and-answer text.

This simple technique can be used for any topic children are studying. The question type can also have various structures, for example, True or false?

Each child in the class could be given a sheet of paper with a writing framework printed on both sides of the paper. The children’s pages can then be bundled together and bound into a class book.

The framework for this type of text could look something like this:
**Procedural texts**

Procedural texts serve the social purpose of explaining how to do or make something. Special features of the structure of a procedural text include:

1. Name/description of project
2. List of things needed
3. List of instructions in numerical or chronological order

Here is an example:

**Fabric hand puppets**

**What you need:**
- a piece of fabric
- approx. 60 cm x 80 cm
- sewing needle
- cotton thread
- scissors
- collage materials
- markers, wood, leave
- craft glue
- paper
- pins

**Instructions:**
1. Photocopy the pattern on page 32 and cut it out.
2. Fold the fabric in half. Place the pattern on the folded fabric. Trace a line around the paper pattern.
3. Cut out the two layers of fabric.
4. Decorate one piece of fabric by sewing or gluing on hair, eyes, clothes, etc.
5. Put the two pieces of fabric together and sew around the edge. Leave the base edge free for your hand.
6. Turn the puppet right side out through the opening.

**Variations**

Use a mitten.
Use a glove.

With older children, a teacher might focus on certain aspects of grammar and punctuation. The text uses a dot point list, which is introduced by a phrase and a colon. The numbered instructions are all commands, beginning with action verbs (*photocopy, fold, cut, decorate, put* and *turn*). However, if the pictures are detailed enough, this type of text can be just a set of pictures in the correct order.

**Summary**

After thinking of a topic to write about, professional authors make decisions about how they are going to structure their story before they worry about whether their grammar or spelling is correct.
It is the structure of the writing that will make it easy or difficult for the reader to follow the sense of the writing.

The different ways in which writing can be structured must be taught. It is not immediately obvious to a child how they should do this. They have to learn how to think about the ‘big picture’ of their writing; its purpose and how they can organise the details of their ideas to make this easy for the reader to understand.

The genrists showed the various ways in which writing is organised to make meaning. The author must know the purpose of the writing and then choose a suitable structure and style to fit that purpose.

This knowledge can begin with pictures and very simple structures that children can find in the stories they know well. They can then use pictures to create their own stories following these methods of organising their ideas.

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2014
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