



## Literacy at Hartford Public High School

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### Knowing What's Important

from What Smart Kids Know, Adams

Most writers use some fairly reliable signposts to tip off readers about important ideas. Here are some places to look and some things to look for.

1. **The beginning and the end:** Authors open and close with their most important ideas. You will find them at the beginning and the end of the book, of each chapter, of each section, and of each paragraph.
2. **Anything emphasized graphically:** Anything in bold or italics is being stressed by the author for a reason. You can't rely solely on authors, however, because what they deem important may not be important for your purposes. Still, do not disregard the author's emphasis.
3. **The gist of any chart or diagram:** Charts and diagrams are another form of graphic emphasis. The chart or diagram itself may not be important, but the idea it conveys probably is.
4. **The chapter summary:** The whole point of a summary is to include only the most important information, but keep in mind that it represents the author's point of view, not yours. Don't rely on it blindly.

### Cause—Effect Order

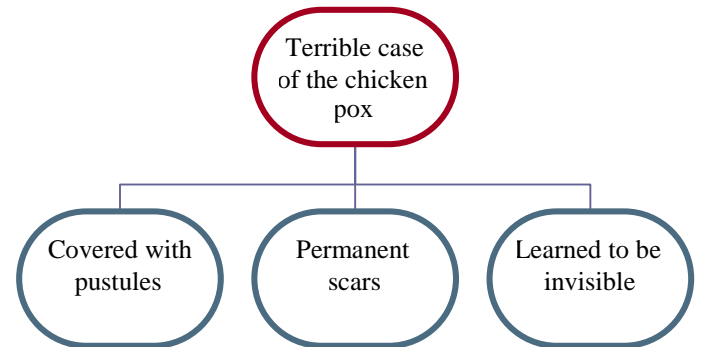
from Reader's Handbook, Great Source

In a cause-effect paragraph, the writer established a logical relationship between a cause or causes and one or more effects. Sometimes a writer explains the effect first and then offers information about the causes. Other times, the writer begins with the causes and then explains the effects.

In the following sample, notice how the writer explains the effects of a terrible case of the chicken pox had on her as a child.

I started out life as a pretty baby and learned to be a pretty girl from a pretty mother. Then, at ten years of age, I suffered one of the worst cases of chicken I have ever heard of. [*This sentence explains the cause of what comes next.*] My entire body, including the inside of my ears and in between my toes, was covered with pustules [*effect 1*] which in a fit of panic at my appearance I scratched off my face, leaving permanent scars [*effect 2*]. A cruel school nurse told me I would always have them—tiny cuts that looked as if a mad cat had plunged its claws deep into my skin. I grew my hair long and hid behind it for the first years of my adolescence. This was when I learned to be invisible [*effect 3*].

The following graphic organizer helps the reader to plot out the key points of the paragraph.



Many of our students do better when they can visualize the materials that are being presented to them. Using graphic organizers such as this one can help students analyze and recall what they are reading. Using them in class is an effective strategy for improving comprehension and for helping recall of important points.

### Character Education

<http://www.goodcharacter.com/ISOC/>

Helping our students to develop important character skills will improve their commitment to education. The following writing suggestions address the trait of trustworthiness. Think of how you might relate them to your bell work, your class work when you are absent, extra credit work, or as fillers at the conclusion of a lesson.

1. Are you a trustworthy person? In what ways are you trustworthy? In what ways are you, perhaps, not so trustworthy? What could you do to improve?
2. Write an essay describing what this society might be like if nobody were trustworthy, if suspicion, dishonesty, and betrayal were the norm, if nobody could be counted on to keep commitments.
3. Write about someone you trust. Why do you trust that person? How important is that trust to you? How do you reciprocate?
4. If your school doesn't have a peer counseling program, find out what peer counselors do, and then write an essay or an editorial for your school newspaper advocating that your school start such a program. If your school does have a peer counseling program, write a short article describing the program and its benefits to the school community.
5. Keep a journal for a month that focuses on your relationships with your friends and family in the area of trustworthiness. If there are things that displease you, develop some ideas for improving the situation.
6. Write about a time you lost somebody's trust or somebody lost your trust. Was this trust ever regained? How? What did you learn from the experience?