Organizational Conundrums:

Helping Language Learners Make Sense of Organization in Writing

Woodburn School District

Diverse in Culture - Unified in Mission

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Presentation Overview

- District Overview
- Why do language learners have such difficulty with organization?
- How is organization tied to flexibility of thinking?
- What do students need to think about prior to determining how to organize their ideas?
- How can we help students to organize their thinking in a way that will help their audience to make sense of their thinking?

Diverse in Culture

- 5680 Students Grades K-12
- 75% Hispanic
- 10% Russian
- 52% ESL
- 12% Special Ed
- 78% Minority
- 9% Talented & Gifted
- 84% Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch

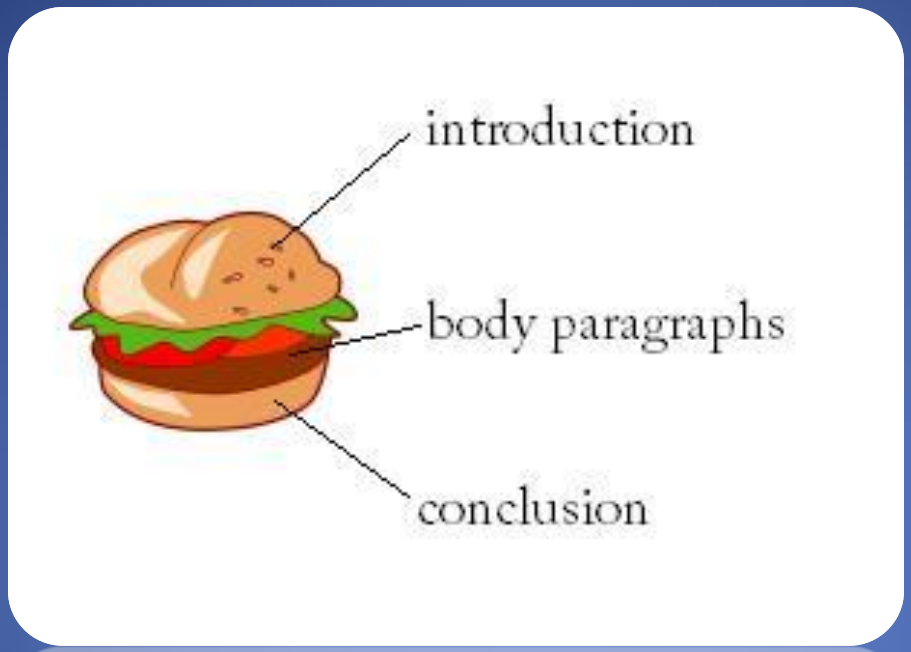
Unified In Mission

Our promise is to engage, inspire, and prepare all students to learn and lead in a global society.

Activity 1

Silent Sort

1. Find activity 1 envelopes
2. Take out the cards and paper strips
3. Sort the cards into columns of “like-minded” cards
4. Using the paper strips, give each column a title



Students are frustrated too…

HOW IS THAT BURGER WORKING FOR YA?

Why do language learners have such “difficulty” with organization?

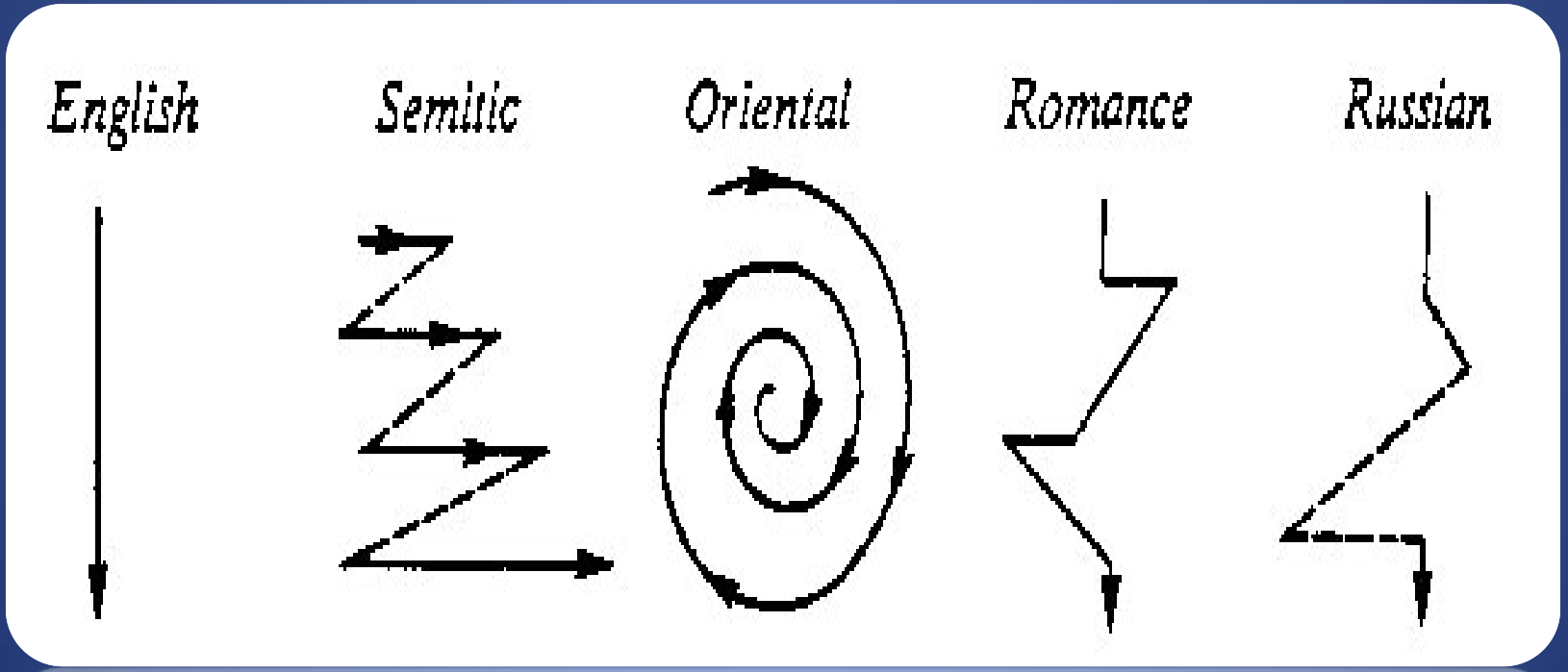
Contrastive Rhetoric in a Nutshell

- Language and writing are cultural experiences

Logic (in the popular, rather than the logician's sense of the word) which is the basis of rhetoric, is evolved out of a culture; is not universal. Rhetoric, then is not universal either, but varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture. It is affected by canons of taste within a given culture at a given time. (Kaplan, 1966).

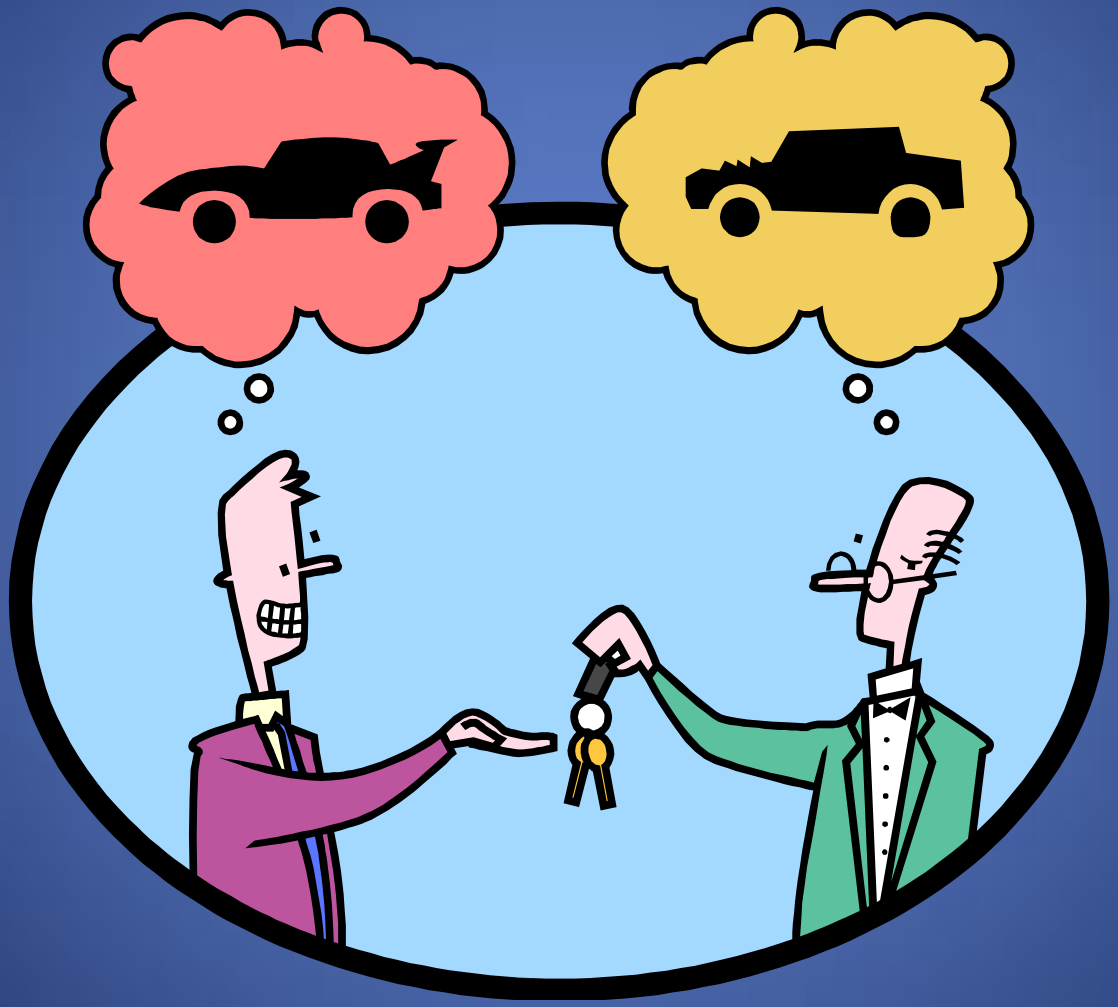
- Rhetorical conventions are developed in the culture within which one resides

Contrastive Rhetoric in a Nutshell

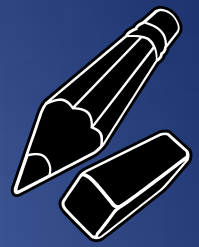


Kaplan, R.B. (1966). *Language Learning.* Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education.

Who is right?



How is organization tied to flexibility of thinking?



- No one rhetorical pattern is better than another.

- There is **choice** involved as to when to use one rhetorical pattern over another or when to combine them.

- Students must see the **variety** of ways that ideas can be organized and choose a structure that will work best for conveying their meaning to their intended audience.

Activity 2

Sort…and resort

What you'll need:

A picture file with a variety of photos

1. Ask students to stand in a circle and without talking, sort the photos into groups.
2. Lead the students to providing titles for the groups.
3. Ask them to come up with another way of grouping the photos.
4. Ask for again another way to organize the photos.

Activity 3

Building Towards Speed and Efficiency

What you'll need:

- Dry erase boards and markers
- Timer
- Topics

1. Ask students to create a plan for writing for the topics you will provide. Sub-categories are up to them.
2. Time students as they develop their graphic organizer (cutting down the amount of time they receive over time).
3. After students have become efficient in their thinking and able to sort and resort an idea, we really want to push them to consider the topic, audience, and purpose in a connected way.
4. Ask students to organize the topic for a specific audience.

What do students need to think about prior to determining how to organize their ideas?

Audience

Topic

Purpose

Activity 4

Clarifying and Aligning : Topic, Audience & Purpose

Helpful Tools:

- Topic/Audience/Purpose pages laminated
- Tissue paper
- Overhead markers

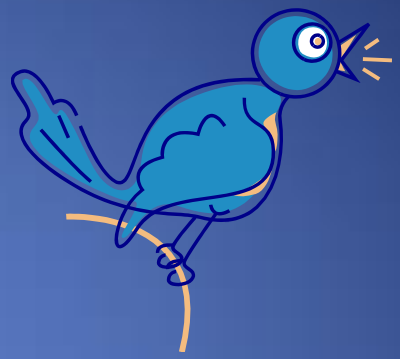
1. Provide students with two pieces of (topic/audience/purpose) information and have students determine the missing piece of information.
2. Over time, provide less and less information to the students until they are capable of determining a coordinated topic, audience, and purpose independently.

How can we help students to organize their thinking in a way that will help their audience to make sense of their thinking?

Activity 5

Writing to a Topic/Prompt
Timed Organization

1. Provide students with a topic, an audience, and a purpose.
2. Have students practice organizing the topic.
3. Change the audience or the purpose.
4. Have students reorganize the topic.

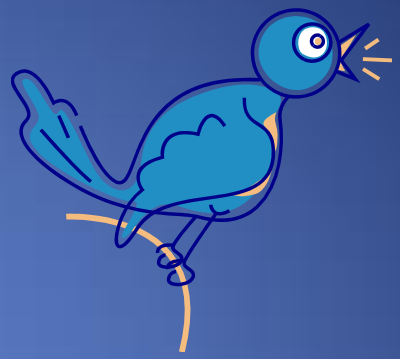


Activity 5

Topic: Birds

Audience: Children

Purpose: To get kids to notice birds in the sky



Activity 5

Topic: Birds

Audience: Oregonians

Purpose: To get Oregonians to notice the variety of birds in Oregon

Activity 5

Topic: Birds

Audience: Cat owners

Purpose: To explain the affects of the predatory nature of domesticated cats on bird populations.

A parting thought…

- *Red Smith was asked if turning out a daily column wasn't quite a chore. …"Why, no. You simply sit down at the typewriter, open your veins, and bleed."*

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