

Sample Specific Background sections

Here is an excellent Specific Background section with commentary (from Broughton & Flores, 2007).

Prior knowledge. Prior knowledge of a subject or field has been known to improve text comprehension (Chiesi, Spilich, & Voss, 1979; Voss, & Silfies, 1996; Voss, Vesonder, & Spilich, 1980), and its effect is independent of IQ (Langer & Nicolich, 1981; Lipson, 1982). There are three types of prior knowledge an individual can possess. Domain knowledge is the understanding about an entire field. Topic knowledge encompasses one part of the domain. Finally, knowledge about the text itself allows the reader to easily pick out important information from the text (Surber & Schroeder, 2007).

However, familiarity does not always enhance learning (Nelson & McEvoy, 2002). When testing a new product, consumers with high prior knowledge actually learned less about the product than those with low prior knowledge. This was attributed to a lack of motivation and inattention to the product information. Individuals with higher background knowledge felt more confident in their ability to learn, which in turn worked against them. Those with low background knowledge were eager to learn and therefore encoded and recalled more effectively (Wood & Lynch, 2002).

Text signaling. Text signaling are writing devices that assist readers in identifying the most important parts of a text. Extensive research demonstrates that text signals increase retention of information (Dee-Lucas & DiVesta, 1980; Lorch & Lorch, 1985, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Lorch, Lorch, & Inman, 1993). This may be because readers who use signals encode information differently than those who do not use signals. Types of signaling include headings, previews, and summaries. Additionally, each type of signaling tends to exhibit the same positive result (Lorch & Lorch, 1995). One way signaling improves memorization is through the structure strategy effect. Using a structure strategy allows the reader to categorize the author's ideas based on hierarchical organization so that only the most important parts are remembered (Meyer & Poon, 2001). Some hypothesize that readers switch to the structure strategy when signals are present, which allows them to remember more from the text. Those who read texts without signals merely create a mental list of facts, which is an inefficient system (Lorch & Lorch, 1995).

One type of signal —headings— contributes to a person's understanding of and capacity to retain information. When a group of students, instructed to make a mental outline, read a passage with headings, they recalled more than the students who received no instruction and read a passage with no headings (Sanchez, Lorch, & Lorch, 2001). The frequency of heading repetition is also implicated in accurate recall. When researchers randomly assigned students to a high- and low-heading-frequency group, those students in the high-frequency group scored better on recall measures (Surber, 2001). However, not all studies agree that headings are essential for comprehension. In one study researchers devised four experimental conditions in which randomly assigned groups of students read (1) an entire news article, which consisted of the headline, summary, and text; (2) the headline and text; (3) the summary and text; or, (4) the text alone. They did not find any significant differences that suggest text structure plays a crucial role in recall abilities (León, 1997).

Prior knowledge and Text signaling. Research indicates that prior knowledge and organization of written text affect the accuracy of recall. When the two factors are studied at the same time, accuracy of recall for written text depends on the level of prior knowledge. The frequent use of a topic label increased the recall for that specific topic in high and low prior knowledge readers (Surber, 2001). However, text organized by headings increased the overall recall for high prior knowledge readers only (Surber & Schroeder, 2007). In addition, highly structured texts increased the recall for high prior knowledge individuals (Wylie & McGuinness, 2004).

For low prior knowledge readers, headings are not effective in their recall for written text (Surber & Schroeder, 2007). However, these individuals are influenced by headings that indicate importance even if the information is not important to the overall text (Surber, 2001). This finding is consistent with other studies and may indicate that low prior knowledge readers have difficulty using headings to retain and recall text information (Willhite, 1989).

<Factor 1 (prior knowledge)

<Note that a source is cited for almost every fact mentioned.

<This part shows that the factor doesn't always have the same kind of effects.

<Factor 2 (text signals)

<Note how the authors clarify the terminology to help the reader.

<They also explain *why* the effects were found, not only *which* effects.

<Specific example of Factor 2 (headings) - they go into more detail about their factor

<This part shows that the factor does not always have the same kind of effects.

<Factor 1 & Factor 2

<How signals affect high prior knowledge readers

<How signals affect low prior knowledge readers