

Advance Organizer

An instructional technique that helps people understand new information in terms of what they already know.

Advance organizers are brief chunks of information—spoken, written, or illustrated—presented prior to new material to help facilitate learning and understanding. They are distinct from overviews and summaries in that they are presented on a more abstract level than the rest of the information—they present the “big picture” prior to the details. Since the technique depends on a defined entry point, it is generally applied to linear presentations (e.g., traditional classroom instruction), and does not work as well in nonlinear, exploratory learning contexts (e.g., free-play simulation).¹

There are two kinds of advance organizers: expository and comparative. The decision to use one or the other depends on whether the information is new to people or similar to material they already know. Expository advance organizers are useful when audiences have little or no knowledge similar to the information being taught. For example, prior to presenting information on how to control a forklift to an audience that knows nothing about them, an advance expository organizer would first briefly describe the equipment and its function.²

Comparative advance organizers are useful when audiences have existing knowledge similar to the information being presented. For example, in teaching experienced forklift operators about how to control a new type of forklift, an advance comparative organizer would compare and contrast features and operations between the familiar forklift and the new forklift.

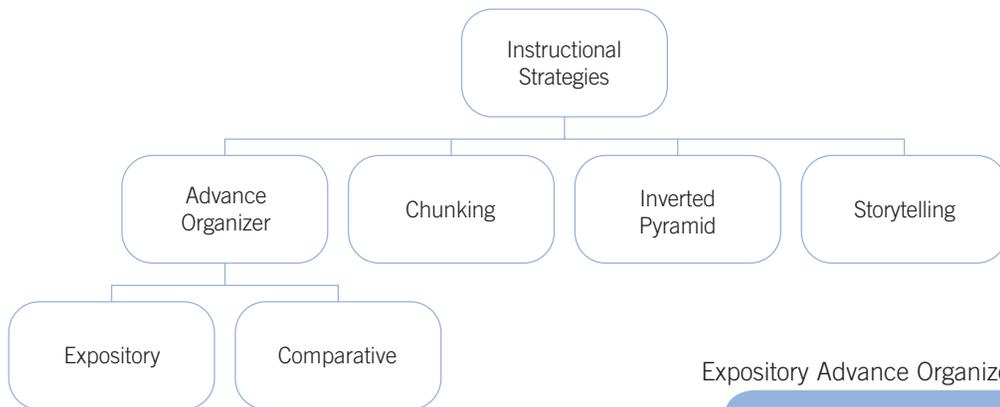
The technique’s effectiveness has been difficult to validate, but it does appear to have measurable benefits. Use advance organizers in learning situations that begin with an introduction and present information in a linear sequence. When presenting novel information, use expository advance organizers. When presenting information that is similar to what people know, use comparative advance organizers.³

See also Inverted Pyramid, Rosetta Stone, and Wayfinding.

¹ The seminal work on advance organizers is *The Psychology of Meaningful Verbal Learning*, Grune and Stratton, 1963; and *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View* (2nd ed.), Holt Reinhart, 1978, both by David P. Ausubel. See also, “In Defense of Advanced Organizers: A Reply to the Critics” by David P. Ausubel, *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 48 (2), p. 251–257.

² An overview or summary, by contrast, would just present the key points on how to control a forklift.

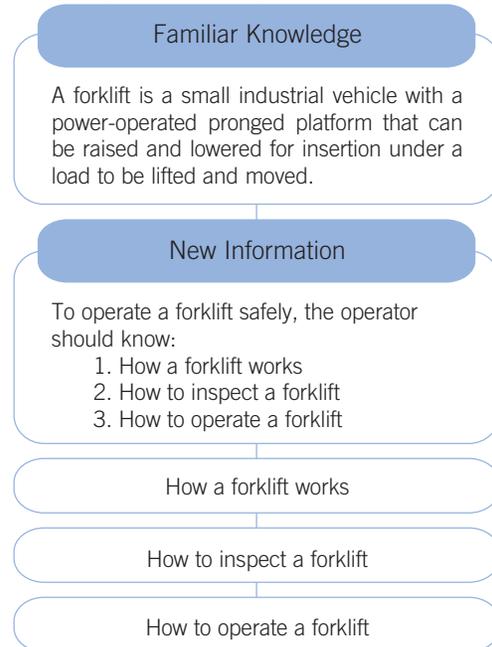
³ See, for example, “Twenty Years of Research on Advance Organizers: Assimilation Theory is Still the Best Predictor of Effects” by Richard E. Mayer, *Instructional Science*, 1979, vol. 8, p. 133–167.



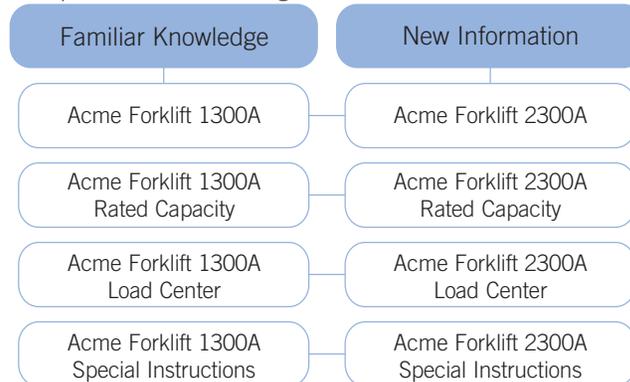
This is an expository advance organizer for advance organizers. At an abstract level, it illustrates that advance organizers are a kind of instructional strategy (like chunking, inverted pyramid, and storytelling) and that there are two types.

An expository advance organizer defines a forklift using familiar concepts (e.g., vehicle) prior to presenting specific information about forklift operation.

Expository Advance Organizers



Comparative Advance Organizers



A comparative advance organizer leverages familiarity with the 1300A model forklift to introduce the 2300A model.