

The Hennings Sequence

The Hennings Sequence (Hennings, 1982) provides eight steps for teachers to use to help guide students through understanding informational text.

1. **Factstorming:** Help students become familiar with a new topic, such as vertebrates, by exposing them to videos, teacher read-alouds, reading materials, field trips, hands-on materials, and guest speakers. Next, ask students to “factstorm” what they know about the topic of vertebrates. Record the information on the board.
2. **Categorizing facts:** Explain to students that they will be organizing their ideas by creating a data chart. Ask students to look at the results of their factstorming and suggest categories or “big ideas” which describe some of their ideas. Write these possible categories on the board. Organize this information onto a blank data chart. Provide time for students to work in groups to fill in the data chart. Encourage them to use information from their factstorming, but also provide additional resource materials, including content texts to help students fill in the data chart. Share and discuss the information students included on their data charts. A sample data chart format for vertebrates is shown below.

Data Chart for Vertebrates

	Where they live	What they eat	Natural enemies	Warm or cold-blooded	Examples
Fish					
Amphibians					
Reptiles					
Birds					
Mammals					

3. **Drafting cohesive paragraphs:** Discuss the characteristics of a good paragraph. Remind students that a paragraph focuses on one main idea, includes details and examples about the main idea, and contains at least 4-5 good sentences. Guide the students through writing a paragraph about fish. Next, divide students into groups of 2-3. Ask each group to write a paragraph about one of the types of animals. For example, one group will write about amphibians using the information from the data chart.
4. **Sequencing paragraphs into a logical whole:** Provide time for each group of students to share their paragraphs. Tell students that the class will be writing a report about vertebrates based on the data chart. Discuss how to order and organize the paragraphs

into a report. Encourage students to consult the data chart for ideas about how to organize the paragraphs.

5. **Drafting introduction and conclusions:** Guide students through writing and introduction and conclusion for the report. Explain to them that the data chart and organization of the paragraphs will help them write the introduction and conclusion. This can be done as a teacher-guided, group writing activity.
6. **Organizing the parts into a cohesive report:** Discuss how to determine a good title for the report, how heading and subheadings can be used to make the report clearer, and how illustrations can enhance the report. Encourage students to make revisions which will make the report clearer or more informative. Divide students into groups of two to write a final copy of the report, including titles, headings, and illustrations.
7. **Interpreting similar pieces of discourse:** Provide opportunities for students to use data charts to organize ideas after they have read content texts. Explain that data charts are helpful as a post-reading strategy as well as pre-writing strategy.
8. **Summarizing, synthesizing, and evaluating:** Help students connect some of the steps in the Hennings sequence to their independent reading by having them engage in writing. Ask students to read a content text selection related to vertebrates. Have them write a summary of key ideas from their reading. Encourage them to use the data chart to focus their writing.

Practice and Reinforcement Activities

1. Implement learning logs so students can reflect on and document their own learning.
2. Incorporate informational trade books into the content areas.
3. Students can become editors and experts on a specific topic by creating skinny books.
4. Encourage students to write “wish you were here” letters to clarify their learning about new places, important events, and important people.
5. Share content-related alphabet books with students.

Johns, J.L., & Lenski, S.D. (1997). Improving reading: a Handbook of strategies (2nd ed.). Dubuque: Kendall Hunt.