Making a synthesis (1): identifying text sequences; recognizing types and levels of information

One useful first step in synthesizing a text is identifying text sequences, *i.e. dividing the text into sections according to the* topic (*or* aspect *of a topic*) *which is treated in each of them. A* sequence *often coincides with a* paragraph, *but sometimes a paragraph covers more than one (aspect of a) topic, and, conversely, a topic may be dealt with in several paragraphs.*

1. A. **Read the following text, taken from an English secondary school biology textbook, and think of a suitable title to reflect the *main topic*.**

The cell membrane forms a very thin covering to the cell. It controls what enters and leaves the cell: it allows oxygen and dissolved food substances to get in and waste substances to get out. The cytoplasm makes up most of the inside of the cell. In the cytoplasm, many important chemical reactions take place. Some of these reactions release energy which helps to keep the cell alive. If you look at the cytoplasm carefully under the microscope, you will see that it contains numerous tiny dots. We call these granules: some of them consist of stored food. The nucleus is the dark blob in the centre of the cell. It is the control centre of the cell, regulating everything that goes on inside it. The nucleus contains special chemical structures called genes which are passed from parents to offspring. The genes determine the person's features such as the colour of his or her eyes. The nucleus and cytoplasm together make up the protoplasm.

B. **Divide the text into paragraphs, so that each paragraph is a *sequence* focussing on *one* aspect of the main topic.**

C. **Which *key-words* helped you to identify text sequences? Which other terms do you consider particularly important? Underline them, then use them to label the picture and to complete Section A of the table on the right.**
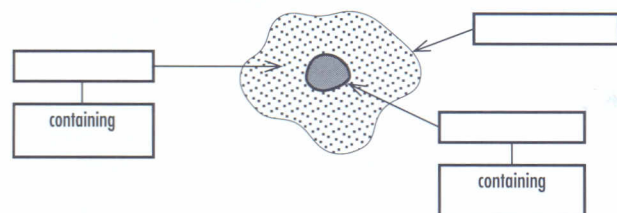
	A Name of part	B Function
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____

containing

containing

D. **Find the words in the text that best describe the *function* of each part and complete Section B of the table.**

2. A. **Read the following text. How many *sequences* would you recognize?**

Germanic languages are used as a first language by over 500 million people, largely because of the world-wide role of English. They are usually classified into three groups. East Germanic languages are all extinct, and only Gothic is preserved in manuscript to any extent – most recently, in a few words recorded in the Crimea in the 16th century. North Germanic includes the Scandinavian languages of Swedish and Danish (East Scandinavian), Norwegian, Icelandic, and Faeroese (West Scandinavian), and the older states of these languages, most notably the literary variety of Old Icelandic known as Old Norse – the language of the Icelandic sagas. West Germanic comprises English and Frisian (often grouped as Anglo-Frisian), and German, Yiddish, Netherlandic, or Dutch (including local, Flemish dialects in Belgium), and Afrikaans (often grouped as Netherlandic-German). Dialect similarities, however, often blur the distinctions suggested by these labels.

B. **The languages mentioned in this text could be classified into *three general groups*: what terms refer to these groups? Double underline them.**

C. *Two* **of these general groups are then further divided into *sub-groups*: underline the terms that refer to these sub-groups.**

D. **Copy and fill in the following diagram using the terms you have underlined in B and C above and adding the names of the individual languages. Which term would you put in the top box?**

(all extinct)

older versions
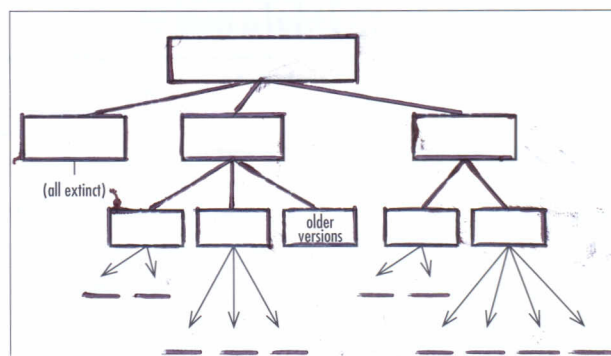
As we have seen in Exercises 1 and 2 above, not all items of information in a text are at the same level: for example, a general structure such as a cell includes more specific parts, each with a particular function; a classification of languages includes several levels, from the most comprehensive to the most specific. It is up to us to decide which items to keep and which to reject (cf. Unit 8), but in any case we must first distinguish different levels of information.

3. A. Read the following text and find a suitable title.

Some large buildings can be demolished in a few days, but to remove a nuclear power station may take a century or more, because of the danger from radioactivity.

When a nuclear power station is shut down, the first step is to remove all the nuclear fuel. It is taken out of the reactor – the heart of the power station – by the same machinery that has been used throughout its operating life to regularly replace old fuel with new. This remotely operated equipment places the old fuel into special containers for taking to a reprocessing plant. There it is turned into enriched fuel for use in other reactors. A small amount of radioactive waste is also produced and stored for future disposal.

As a reactor contains anything from 23,000 to 43,000 highly radioactive fuel rods – depending upon its design – and each has to be removed separately, this part of the job may take up to five years. But when the fuel has gone, 99 per cent of the station's radioactive content has been removed.

The next stage is to remove all the conventional plant, equipment and buildings. This will involve some radioactivity – in the boilers, for example – and will take another five to seven years to finish.

The final stage is the most controversial, and plans vary from country to country. Usually, a sealed reactor will be left for 100 years or more to «sleep it off», so that the radioactivity inside it can decay.

Although remote-controlled robot equipment already exists to demolish the reactor from the inside out, other robots would be needed to service and maintain them. In 100 years' time, radioactivity will be low enough for human maintenance teams to look after the robots in the reactor. Therefore, in most cases the reactor will remain encased in concrete like some ancient monument 160ft (50m) high.

By 1986, 34 nuclear power stations had been taken out of service round the world. Most are beginning to «sleep off» the radioactivity.

GLOSSARY

remotely operated equipment (par. 2) = machinery activated from a distance (e.g. by radio signals)
disposal (par. 2) = removal; elimination of something unwanted
rod (par. 3) = bar (cf. *sbarra*)
seal (par. 5) = close tightly (cf. *sigillare*)
encase (par. 6) = cover completely
concrete (par. 6) = a mixture of sand, small stones, cement and water (cf. *calcestruzzo*)

B. The text consists of several *paragraphs*. Divide it into *sequences*, each focussing on a different aspect of the main topic. Remember that a *sequence* can include more than one paragraph.

C. Double underline the words that most succinctly *define* the *three basic stages* in the process. *Do not* underline detailed explanations or descriptions of sub-processes. Which expressions clearly «signal» these three stages in the text?

D. The first stage includes some *more detailed* steps. Underline *only* the words that best describe these steps. (*Verbs* describing *actions* are particularly important.)

E. Copy and complete the following diagram to summarize the process. Boxes highlight basic stages; circles highlight sub-stages. For the basic stages, mention the approximate time needed and the reasons for it.

(time needed: _____) **1** removing _____ → taking _____ out of _____ ↓ placing it _____ ↓ _____ to a reprocessing plant ↓ _____ into _____
reasons: _____

(time needed: _____) **2** _____
reasons: _____

(time needed: _____) **3** dismantling the reactor → _____ is produced ↓ and _____
reasons: _____