

Equipping Retrieval-Augmented Large Language Models with Document Structure Awareness

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Abstract

While large language models (LLMs) demonstrate impressive capabilities, their reliance on parametric knowledge often leads to factual inaccuracies. Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) mitigates this by leveraging external documents, yet existing approaches treat retrieved passages as isolated chunks, ignoring valuable document structure that could enhance knowledge acquisition and utilization. Motivated by this gap, we propose *Retrieve-DocumentRoute-Read (RDR²)*, a novel framework that explicitly incorporates document structure throughout the RAG process. RDR² employs an LLM-based router to dynamically navigate document structure trees, jointly evaluating content relevance and hierarchical relationships to assemble optimal evidence. Our key innovation lies in formulating document routing as a trainable task, with automatic behavior curation and structure-aware passage selection inspired by human reading strategies. Through comprehensive evaluation on three challenging datasets, RDR² achieves state-of-the-art performance, demonstrating that explicit structural awareness significantly enhances RAG systems' ability to acquire and utilize knowledge, particularly in complex scenarios requiring multi-document synthesis.

1 Introduction

Large language models (LLMs) (Brown et al., 2020) have demonstrated remarkable capabilities across a wide range of natural language processing (NLP) tasks, yet even state-of-the-art models continue to generate factually incorrect responses (Mallen et al., 2023; Min et al., 2023; Ji et al., 2023) despite their growing scale and capability (Ouyang et al., 2022). Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) (Lewis et al., 2020; Guu et al., 2020; Borgeaud et al., 2022) addresses these limitations through a *Retrieve-and-Read* paradigm, which first retrieves relevant passages then uses

them as context for generation (Lewis et al., 2020; Izacard and Grave, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Shi et al., 2024). This approach combines the strengths of information retrieval and generative models, proving particularly effective for atomic-fact question answering (QA) (Joshi et al., 2017; Thorne et al., 2018; Kwiatkowski et al., 2019; Mallen et al., 2023) where *a single precise retrieval suffices to answer clear information needs*.

Recent advances in RAG have extended its capabilities to complex knowledge-intensive scenarios requiring multi-perspective responses, particularly for factual-inductive queries that demand coherent synthesis of multiple knowledge fragments (Fan et al., 2019; Stelmakh et al., 2022; Amouyal et al., 2023). However, current RAG frameworks process retrieved passages as isolated chunks, discarding their inherent document structure - a limitation stemming from both *structure-agnostic pipeline design* and the *flat-context paradigm of standard retrieval methods*.

While fixed chunking ensures retrieval efficiency, it restricts query-adaptive content selection, discarding the document's native organization which humans naturally exploit for information navigation and relational reasoning. At the reading phase, retrieved passages are simply ordered by relevance scores, potentially disrupting their original sequence in the source document. Even with useful information, this loss of structural priors forces the model to implicitly reconstruct relationships that were explicitly encoded in the source hierarchy. This structural blindness constrains RAG's knowledge acquisition and synthesis capabilities.

In this paper we ask: *can LLMs leverage document structural information*, and *can RAG systems benefit from such structural awareness*? We propose *Retrieve-DocumentRoute-Read (RDR²)*, where a structure-aware LM performs document routing through three behaviors inspired by how

humans selectively read sections, expand promising headings, and skip irrelevant parts when browsing articles. Through this process, RDR² dynamically assembles query-oriented passages for better knowledge acquisition and utilization.

We evaluate RDR² on three representative datasets requiring multi-document synthesis, covering ambiguous (ASQA (Stelmakh et al., 2022)), list-style (QAMPARI (Amouyal et al., 2023)), and in-depth (ELI5 (Fan et al., 2019)) question answering. Across all datasets, RDR² achieves new state-of-the-art results with only the router trained on questions from the ASQA training set (without answer supervision), while keeping the retriever and reader off-the-shelf. Additionally, RDR² enables test-time scaling without weight updates and demonstrates generalization across different RAG components (i.e., retrievers and readers).

Our main contributions are:

- The proposal of RDR², the first RAG framework explicitly incorporates document structure throughout the retrieval and reading process, to enhance both knowledge acquisition and utilization;
- A novel formulation of document routing as a trainable task, with an automatic behavior curation pipeline and LLM-based router training;
- Comprehensive experiments on ASQA, QAMPARI, and ELI5 establishing RDR²’s consistent superiority over state-of-the-art methods.

2 Related Work

Retrieval-Augmented Generation (Lewis et al., 2020; Guu et al., 2020; Borgeaud et al., 2022) (RAG) augments language models with non-parametric knowledge through retrieved passages, demonstrating significant improvements in knowledge-intensive tasks (Ram et al., 2023; Asai et al., 2023a). The standard *Retrieve-and-Read* framework operates in two stages: (1) a dense retriever (typically a bi-encoder architecture (Karpukhin et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024)) retrieves passages relevant to the input question, and (2) an LM reader processes these passages either as an off-the-shelf model (Ram et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025) or through task-specific fine-tuning (Izacard et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023; Jain et al., 2023; LUO et al., 2024; Gan et al., 2024) to generate grounded re-

sponses. While effective for simple tasks with clear information needs, RAG systems show limitations in complex scenarios, necessitating more advanced methods.

Knowledge Acquisition. To achieve more comprehensive knowledge acquisition, recent works develop enhanced retrieval mechanisms. FLARE (Jiang et al., 2023) prompts an LLM to actively decide when and what to retrieve based on the model’s confidence (i.e., token probabilities). Ma et al. (2023) introduces query rewriting to bridge the gap between user questions and retrieval requirements. CoRAG (Wang et al., 2025) fine-tunes an LLM to generate intermediate retrieval chains, enabling step-by-step multi-hop querying. Unlike prior works that focus on pre-retrieval query optimization, our approach enhances knowledge acquisition through post-retrieval document routing - iteratively exploring document hierarchies to uncover useful information.

Knowledge Utilization. For knowledge utilization, effective RAG requires critical evaluation and integration of retrieved knowledge. SELF-RAG (Asai et al., 2023b) fine-tunes LLMs to critique retrieved passages via self-reflection, assessing their relevance, supportiveness, and utility. RankRAG (Yu et al., 2024) instruction-tunes a single LLM for the dual purpose of context ranking and answer generation, improving end-to-end knowledge grounding. Departing from static chunk filtering, our method dynamically assembles node-level information units within document hierarchy, achieving both structural integrity and adaptive flexibility.

Structure Information. Several approaches have attempted to incorporate structural information into RAG frameworks. GraphRAG (Edge et al., 2024) processes documents into a knowledge graph with hierarchical community summaries, establishing a RAG paradigm distinct from semantic retrieval over flat text chunk. RAPTOR (Sarathi et al., 2024) constructs hierarchical document embeddings through recursive node-level clustering and summarization, capturing progressively abstracted semantic content across tree levels. While existing approaches *offline-encode* hierarchical information into *fixed representations* (e.g., summaries or embeddings), our framework *online-perceives* document structure through dynamic routing.

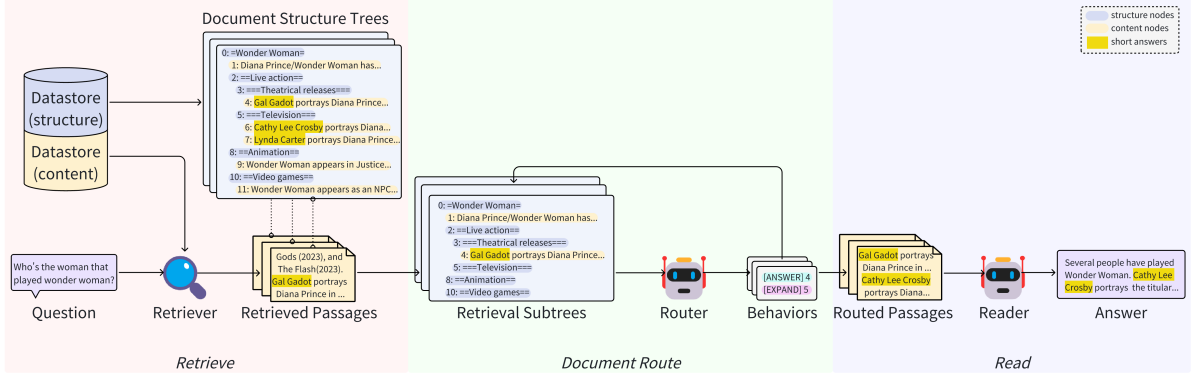


Figure 1: Overview of the RDR² framework. RDR² extends standard *Retrieve-and-Read* with document-structure-aware routing for iterative, fine-grained knowledge retrieval.

3 Methodology

We propose *Retrieve-DocumentRoute-Read* (RDR²), a framework that iteratively assembles informative and complete passage chunks via a structure-aware LLM to enhance RAG pipeline with better knowledge acquiring and utilization. In this section, we first present the overview of the RDR² framework, as illustrated in Figure 1. Then we define a tree structure that represents the document hierarchy while maintaining stable scope and adaptive contextual focus. Lastly, we give the scheme of how to construct an LLM-based routing module, as the core component of our proposed framework.

3.1 Retrieve-DocumentRoute-Read

The *Retrieve-DocumentRoute-Read* (RDR²) framework consists of three stages:

Retrieve. Given an input question q , retrieve the top- k most relevant passage chunks $C_{re} = \{c_{re}^{(1)}, \dots, c_{re}^{(k)}\}$ by the Retriever.

$$C_{re} = \text{Retriever}(q) \quad (1)$$

Document Route. For each passage subset $C_{re}^{(i)} \subseteq C_{re}$ grouped by their originating document d_i , reconstruct a routed passage $c_{ro}^{(i)}$ conditioned on the question q and the document d_i via the Router.

$$C_{ro} = \{c_{ro}^{(i)}\}_{i=1}^m \quad c_{ro}^{(i)} = \text{Router}(q, d_i) \quad (2)$$

Read. Generate the answer a to the question q , leveraging both the routed passages C_{ro} and the parametric knowledge of the Reader.

$$a = \text{Reader}(q, [c_{ro}^{(1)}, \dots, c_{ro}^{(m)}]) \quad (3)$$

3.2 Document Structure Representation

While standard RAG frameworks process only flat content chunks, our approach preserves critical structural information through formal tree representations. To capture hierarchical relationships in documents, we define two types of nodes: (1) *Structure nodes* represent organizational hierarchy (i.e., headings), and (2) *Content nodes* contain substantive textual information (i.e., passages).

Document Structure Tree. A Document Structure Tree (DST) encodes the full document hierarchy, where each node is represented as:

$$\text{DST-node} = \langle id, text, \tau, parent, \mathcal{C} \rangle \quad (4)$$

Here $\tau \in \{\text{structure}, \text{content}\}$ denotes the node type, and \mathcal{C} indicates the ordered set of child nodes. Each node is defined by a unique identifier (id), associated text content - either a heading title (for structure nodes) or passage text (for content nodes) - and a pointer to its parent node's id (null for the root). The root node, always a structure node, corresponds to the document title.

Retrieval Subtree. A Retrieval Subtree (RST) is a subtree derived from the DST designed to maintain stable retrieval scope while adaptively updating contextual focus. An RST consists of (1) all structure nodes (complete document hierarchy), and (2) selected content nodes (partial content coverage).

During inference, the RST is first initialized with content siblings of retrieved passages, then iteratively updated by replacing them with content nodes under a single router-selected heading while preserving all structure nodes (See Algorithm 1 in Appendix A.2). This constrained derivation strat-

egy ensures stable RST size while dynamically refining the contextual focus.

3.3 Routing Module

As shown in Figure 2, the routing module synergistically combines document tree structure with an LLM-based router, enabling structure-aware retrieval-augmented generation.

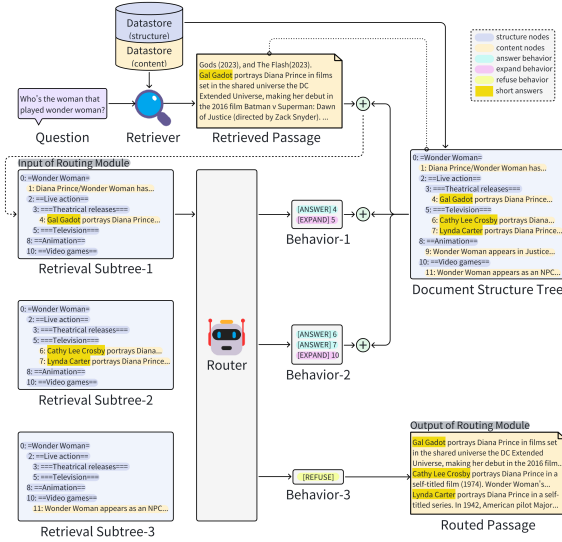


Figure 2: Workflow of the routing module. Given a user input q and a document structure tree (Section 3.2) anchored by retrieved passage, RDR² maintains a retrieval subtree s where: (i) all structure nodes persist, (ii) only content nodes under currently selected headings are expanded (previous fold). At step t , the router generates behavior $b_t = \text{Router}(q, s_t)$ to: (a) select useful content nodes, (b) unfold a promising structure node, or (c) stops routing.

Task Formulation. We define document routing task as iterative navigation through a document structure tree, dynamically assembling fine-grained passage chunks with both content relevance and structural integrity. This process emerges through compositional application of three atomic behaviors at each step:

- [ANSWER]: Select a visible *content node* when its text directly answers the question;
- [EXPAND]: Unfold a collapsed *structure node* if its heading text or contextual position suggests potential relevance;
- [REFUSE]: Stop exploring the current subtree when no nodes satisfy [ANSWER] or [EXPAND] criteria.

Behavior Curation. Standard RAG datasets consists of a question with a reference answer, without providing the intermediate routing trajec-

tories. We propose an automatic method for curating routing behaviors *solely* from the question, requiring no necessary access to the answer. Specifically, given a question q , we first retrieve top- k passages via an off-the-shelf retriever, access their originating document, and derive corresponding retrieval subtrees S . We condition an LLM respectively on each subtree $s_i \in S$, along with the question q to generate a single-turn routing behavior b . Finally, the routing dataset cruated consists of $\langle q, s, b \rangle$ triples.

Training. The training paradigm focuses on equipping the model with fundamental decision-making capabilities through exposure to individual routing behaviors (as opposed to complete iterative procedures). We fine-tune an LLM on the curated routing dataset using the standard next-token-prediction objective under supervised-fine-tuning (SFT), where the cross-entropy loss \mathcal{L} is computed only on the target output tokens. This approach provides the necessary components for multi-step exploration during inference.

$$\mathcal{L} = -\log P(b|q, s) \quad (5)$$

We convert document hierarchy into LLM-understandable text representation. Specifically, the input retrieval subtree uses the newline-delimited "id: text" format, where each level of hierarchy is represented by an additional indentation unit preceding the node identifier. The output behavior follows the "[BEHAVIOR] id: text_prefix" format to ensure semantic grounding to the original id-text binding.

4 Experiments

4.1 Datasets and Metrics

We evaluate RDR² on three datasets: ASQA (Stelmakh et al., 2022), QAMPARI (Amouyal et al., 2023) and ELI5 (Fan et al., 2019), all of which emphasize multi-passages comprehension and synthesis.

ASQA (Stelmakh et al., 2022) is a long-form factoid QA dataset featuring inherently ambiguous questions that requires RAG methods to reconcile diverse interpretations and produce coherent responses. The inherent ambiguity of these questions necessitates comprehensive information synthesis from multiple documents. Each question in ASQA is annotated with both long-form answers (avg. 65 words) and extractive question-answer pairs (avg. 3 instances), facilitating fine-

grained correctness evaluation. We adopt the official metrics from the original ASQA paper, including Exact Match (EM), Disambig-F₁ (D-F₁), and ROUGE-L (Lin, 2004) (R-L). Following Gao et al. (2023), we additionally employ MAUVE (Pillutla et al., 2021) (Mau) for assessing response fluency.

QAMPARI (Amouyal et al., 2023) is a list-style QA dataset where answers comprise multiple factual short entities (avg. 13 instances) extracted from diverse passages, requiring RAG methods to perform cross-document fact aggregation. Following the original QAMPARI paper, we evaluate using exact-match *recall* and *precision* (Pre) against the gold answer list. With reference to ALCE benchmark (Gao et al., 2023), we consider *recall* as 100% for predictions with at least 5 correct answers (R-5). We additionally calculate their harmonic mean (F₁-5).

ELI5 (Fan et al., 2019) contains complex, diverse, open-ended questions derived from post titles (with optional elaborations) in Reddit’s "Explain Like I’m Five" forum, requiring RAG methods to elaborate in-depth explanations from multiple documents. The dataset provides web-crawled paragraph-length or longer answers (avg. 131 words) as reference responses, posing unique challenges for comprehensive knowledge integration. Following (Gao et al., 2023), we evaluate answer correctness using Claim Recall (Cla) and fluency with MAUVE (Mau).

4.2 Baselines

We evaluate our framework against three categories of baselines: (1) *No-Retrieval*: the reader directly answers questions using only its parametric knowledge, (2) *Retrieve-and-Read*: the standard RAG pipeline with top-*k* retrieved passages, and (3) *Advanced RAG*: including methods based on proprietary LLMs: ASC and its variant ASC-F (Thirukovalluru et al., 2024), as well as techniques fine-tuned on open-source LLMs: SELF-RAG (Asai et al., 2023b), SELF-REASONING (Xia et al., 2025), OPEN-RAG (Islam et al., 2024), and FRONT (Huang et al., 2024).

4.3 Experimental Settings

For retrieval, we use the Wikipedia dump from Karpukhin et al. (2020). We construct DSTs (defined in Section 3.2) from the corresponding wiki pages, totaling 5.82M documents. Unless otherwise specified (e.g., DPR (Karpukhin et al., 2020), GTR (Ni et al., 2022)), we use the off-the-shelf

Contriever-MS MARCO (Izacard et al., 2022) as the retriever, with top-5 passages for all retrieval-augmented methods.

We curate routing behaviors using Deepseek-v3 (Liu et al., 2024) following the procedure defined in Section 3.3 on ASQA training questions, resulting in 23,827 training samples (14,822 [ANSWER], 3,793 [EXPAND], and 5,212 [REFUSE]) and 500 test samples (287 [ANSWER], 90 [EXPAND], and 123 [REFUSE]). The router is fine-tuned via LoRA (Hu et al., 2022) on Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct (Grattafiori et al., 2024) for 3.5 epochs (see Appendix A.1 for implementation details, Appendix A.2 for training hyperparameters, and Appendix sec:c for prompts).

For open-source models (Llama-2-13B-Chat (Touvron et al., 2023) and Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct (Grattafiori et al., 2024)), we employ greedy decoding with length control to match reference averages, as significant inter-model length variations were observed (consistent with Asai et al. (2023b)’s findings) to ensure fair comparison. For proprietary models (ChatGPT (Ouyang et al., 2022) and Deepseek-v3 (Liu et al., 2024)), we set temperature=0.2 without length constraints, since their output lengths naturally align with the reference (see Appendix C for prompt details).

All experiments run on single NVIDIA A100-PCIE-40GB GPUs.

5 Results and Analysis

We first report overall experimental results across all three datasets, comparing the performance of RDR² against the baseline methods described in Section 4.2. Subsequently, we conduct comprehensive ablation studies to evaluate the contribution of each key component in our framework. Finally, we investigate the framework’s behavior under different test-time scaling conditions and its robustness with various retrievers and readers. A comprehensive case study can be found in Appendix D.

5.1 Main Results

Overall Performance. Figure 3 evaluates the overall performance of RDR² against two fundamental frameworks: *no-retrieval* and *Retrieve-and-Read*. Notably, in RDR² only the router is trained on ASQA questions (without answer supervision), while both retriever and reader remain off-the-shelf. QAMPARI and ELI5 serve as challeng-

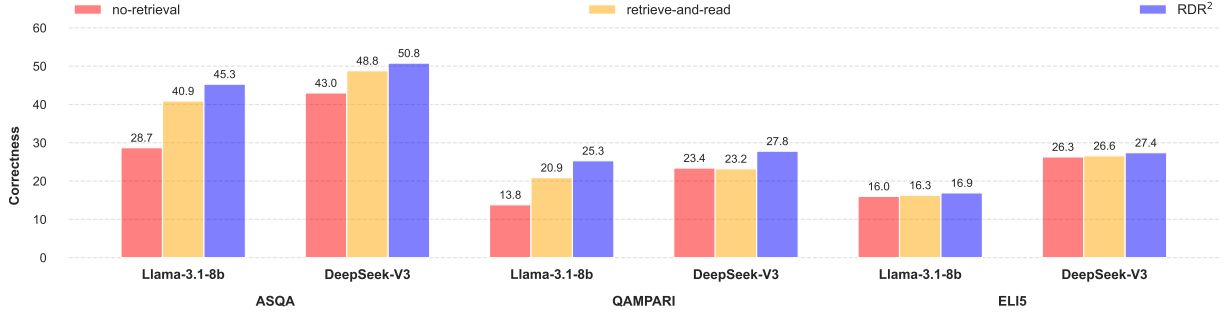


Figure 3: Comparison between RDR² and baselines across all datasets with different readers. We report the primary correctness metric for each dataset: Exact Match for ASQA, F₁-5 for QAMPARI and Claim Recall for ELI5.

	ASQA					QAMPARI			ELI5		
	EM	D-F ₁	R-L	Mau	Len	F ₁ -5	R-5	Pre	Cla	Mau	Len
Reader based on ChatGPT											
ASC-F	45.0	31.9	-	41.3	106.7	18.8	45.0	13.4	22.2	22.7	172.7
ASC	44.1	32.2	-	47.0	101.2	26.2	33.0	23.0	21.4	21.3	163.6
RDR²(Ours)	46.1	37.1	38.5	70.6	49.1	26.4	29.0	30.9	23.3	14.4	155.2
Reader fine-tuned on Llama-2-13b											
SELF-RAG	31.7	-	37.0	71.6	-	-	1.9	1.3	6.1	-	-
SELF-REASONING	35.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
OPEN-RAG	36.3	-	38.1	80.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
FRONT	41.5	-	-	-	-	-	11.9	22.6	9.3	-	-
RDR²(Ours)	41.7	31.6	39.2	61.2	69.6	23.2	24.3	25.0	15.4	23.9	148.3

Table 1: Comparison between RDR² and other RAG methods on ASQA, QAMPARI and ELI5 wrt. corresponding metrics. EM is Exact Match, D-F₁ is Disambig-F₁, R-L is ROUGE-L, Mau is MAUVE, F₁-5 is the harmonic mean of recall-5 (R-5) and precision (Pre), Cla is Claim Recall. **Bold** indicates best results within each reader category. Gray denotes the word-level length (Len).

ing generalization tests, being completely withheld from our router training.

RDR² continuously improves RAG performance. With larger language models, standard *Retrieve-and-Read* shows diminishing returns over *no-retrieval*, suggesting their stronger parametric knowledge reduces reliance on retrieved content. While RDR² also exhibits this scaling trend versus *no-retrieval*, its improvement over *Retrieve-and-Read* remains relatively stable across model scales, confirming the inherent value of document structure awareness in retrieval-augmented generation.

RDR² effectively generalizes to held-out datasets. While RDR² maintains strong performance on QAMPARI comparable to its ASQA results, we observe limited gains on ELI5. This aligns with prior findings (Krishna et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2023) on the intrinsic challenges of open-ended long-form QA, where the expansive space of potentially valid answers poses fun-

damental difficulties for retrieval-augmented approaches and their evaluation.

Comparison with baselines. Table 1 compares RDR² against cutting-edge RAG methods employing either proprietary LLMs (ChatGPT) or fine-tuned open-source Llama-2-13B variants as their backbone readers.

RDR² achieves new state-of-the-art results. Across all three datasets - ASQA, QAMPARI and ELI5 - RDR² consistently outperforms existing approaches, demonstrating strong generalization across diverse QA scenarios. Specifically:

It is noteworthy that among the compared methods based on open-source models, all require reader fine-tuning on carefully annotated question-answer pairs (some including training set of the downstream tasks), whereas our approach achieves superior performance using only readily available questions for router training, paired with an entirely off-the-shelf reader.

Furthermore, methods employing proprietary

LLMs generate significantly longer responses ($2\times$ the gold answer length on ASQA) to achieve high EM recall, while our approach attains better results with approximately 50% shorter outputs. On QAMPARI, this verbosity leads to precision degradation, whereas our method maintains balanced precision-recall performance. These observations collectively validate our framework’s enhanced efficiency in information delivery.

5.2 Ablation Study

Table 2 presents comprehensive ablation studies analyzing three critical dimensions of our framework: *pipeline architecture* (defined in Section 3.1), *router information* (defined in Section 3.2), and *routing behaviors* (defined in Section 3.3). We evaluate both intermediate retrieved passages and final generated answers, measuring factual correctness through Exact Match (EM) and verbosity via word count (Len).

	Passage		Answer	
	EM	Len	EM	Len
RDR²(Ours)	<u>57.3</u>	104.2	45.3	71.3
w/o router	51.7	100.0	40.9	69.2
w/o structure	49.8	67.5	41.3	71.0
w/o similarity	54.8	100.9	<u>43.9</u>	72.3
w/o content	54.2	93.9	43.7	70.0
w/o [EXPAND]	52.9	81.7	42.5	71.9
w/o [REFUSE]	61.2	176.3	42.9	70.7

Table 2: Ablation Study on ASQA. Ablated variants (w/o = without) are defined in Section 5.2. We report Exact Match (EM) and word-level length (Len) for passages and answers. **Bold** and Underline denote best and second best results, respectively.

5.2.1 Pipeline Architecture

Removing the routing module (**w/o router**) reduces the RAG pipeline to standard *Retrieve-and-Read* framework. Our full framework significantly improves factual recall (+5.6 EM) while maintaining comparable passage length (104.2 vs. 100.0), demonstrating enhanced informativeness without compromising conciseness. This improvement carries through to answer generation (+4.4 EM), demonstrating consistent gains across the entire RAG pipeline.

5.2.2 Router Information

The router processes two types of information: (1) *structure* from document headings, and (2) *sim-*

ilarity from retrieved passages. We ablate each component:

Ablating Structure (w/o structure). We discard document hierarchy and use only retrieved passages¹, where the router simply accepts or refuses individual passages. We observe significant drops in both passage retrieval (-7.5 EM) and answer generation (-4.0 EM) versus the full framework, confirming structural cues provide critical gains. Compared to *w/o router*, this ablation yields less informative passages (-1.9 EM) but better answers (+0.4 EM), showing structural awareness enables more effective knowledge organization despite occasional over-filtering.

Ablating Similarity (w/o similarity). We initialize the RST with content nodes under a *random* heading (instead of retrieved passage siblings). A stricter variant (**w/o content**) removes content nodes entirely, despite this configuration being completely unseen during training. *w/o similarity* causes moderate performance drops (-2.5 EM passages, -1.4 EM answers), confirming that providing question-relevant content offers crucial guidance for structural understanding and document routing. The small gap between these variants (0.6 EM passages, 0.2 EM answers) demonstrates the router’s trained structural reasoning generalizes to unseen document formats.

5.2.3 Routing Behaviors

We validate each atomic behavior’s necessity for document routing:

Ablating Expansion (w/o [EXPAND]). The router can only select or refuse among currently visible nodes, losing the ability to explore new subtrees. The noticeable declines versus full framework (-4.4 passage EM, -2.8 answer EM) confirms expansion is crucial for discovering content that can hardly be recalled by similarity alone. Yet still outperforms *w/o router* (+1.2 passage EM, +1.6 answer EM), showing RAG can benefit from basic structure awareness.

Ablating Refusal (w/o [REFUSE]). The router must either answer or expand at least one node in each step, potentially forcing suboptimal choices. Passage informativeness is substantially increased (+3.9 EM), yet its length doubled, introducing noise that ultimately harms answer quality (-2.4 EM), proving selective rejection is vital for concise knowledge organization.

¹To ensure fair comparison, we reconstruct content at the node level to avoid information loss from chunk truncation

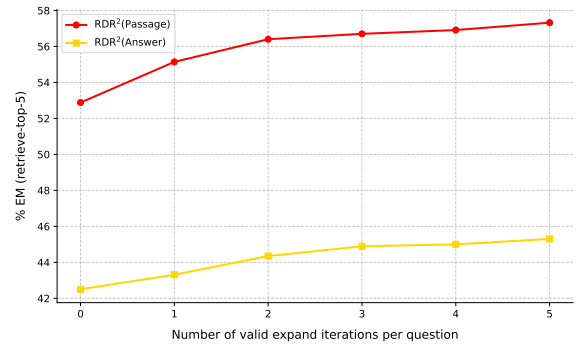
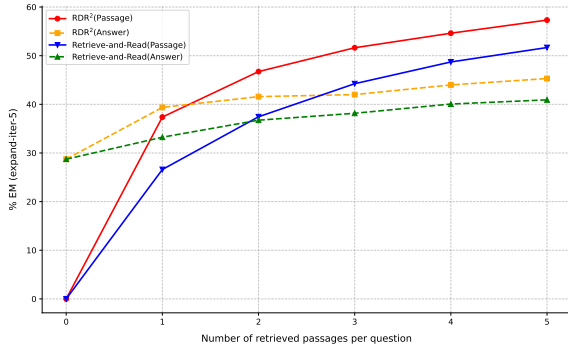


Figure 4: Scaling test-time compute on ASQA for RDR² framework. *Left: top-k scaling. Right: expand-iter scaling.* Exact Match (EM) is reported from both passage/answer-aspect.

5.3 Test-time Scaling

Inspired by OpenAI o1 (Jaech et al., 2024)’s observation, our framework enables dynamic test-time compute scaling without model weight updates. We investigate two scaling dimensions: (1) *top-k scaling* where we vary the number of retrieved passages $k \in [0, 5]$, and (2) *expand-iter scaling* which controls document expansion iterations $iter \in [0, 5]$, With their impacts demonstrated in Figure 4.

Top-k Scaling. As shown in Figure 4 left, increasing k consistently improves both retrieval and answer correctness, as expanding the search space enhances the likelihood of capturing relevant documents. While standard *Retrieve-and-Read* exhibits similar scaling trends, our framework maintains a consistent performance advantage. This suggests that structural awareness potentially enhances the benefits of retrieval test-time scaling.

Expand-iter Scaling. As shown in Figure 4 right, increasing expansion iterations yields consistent improvements in both passage utility and answer quality. Our controlled expansion mechanism introduces a novel RAG scaling paradigm, offering adjustable trade-offs between performance and computational cost - particularly valuable for applications with varying latency-accuracy requirements.

5.4 Robustness

Figure 3 demonstrates RDR²’s robustness to diverse readers and held-out datasets. We further investigate the retrievers compatibility. As shown in Figure 5, RDR² maintains stable performance with different retrievers across datasets, confirming its plug-and-play adaptability. Oppositely, standard *Retrieve-and-Read* exhibits perfor-

mance fluctuations, empirically validates that explicit structure perception enhances RAG’s robustness to component variations - a key advantage for modular deployments.

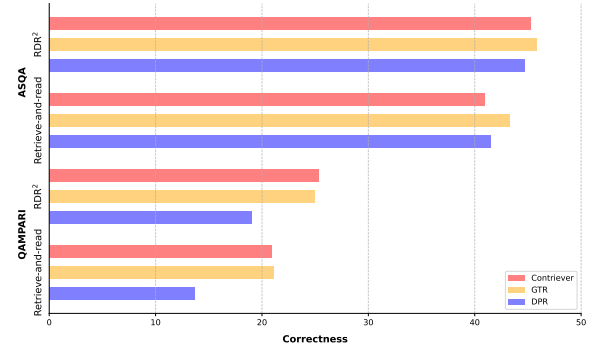


Figure 5: Robustness experiment across different retrievers on ASQA and QAMPARI wrt. corresponding correctness metrics: Exact Match for ASQA and F₁-5 for QAMPARI.

6 Conclusion

This work introduces RDR², a novel framework that enhances RAG systems’ knowledge acquisition and utilization through structure-guided iterative document routing. Our approach dynamically navigates document structure trees using an LLM-based router, which jointly considers content relevance and hierarchical relationships to assemble optimal evidence. Comprehensive evaluations across three datasets demonstrate RDR²’s consistent outperformance of existing methods.

Limitations

We acknowledge three key limitations of this work: (1) While our routing mechanism effectively navigates intra-document hierarchies, it processes each

document independently, lacking explicit modeling of their relationships. The document count is determined by the initial top- k retrieval, potentially limiting inter-document knowledge integration. (2) The framework requires offline construction of Document Structure Trees (DSTs) for the entire datastore. Although dynamic DST construction during inference is possible, this would introduce latency to the routing pipeline. (3) The iterative routing process incurs computational overhead, though this can be partially mitigated through controlled expansion iterations during inference.

Ethical Concerns

This study focuses on improving knowledge acquisition and utilization in RAG systems through document structure awareness. All data, models, and APIs used in our experiments are sourced from publicly available platforms to ensure transparency and reproducibility. We strictly adhere to ethical guidelines throughout the research process, guaranteeing that our work poses no harm to individuals or groups. Furthermore, we commit to avoiding any form of deception or misuse of information in both methodology and application.

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A Implementation Details

A.1 Dataset curation

As shown in Table 3, the automatically constructed routing dataset consists of 23,827 training samples, including 14,822 [ANSWER] instances, 3,793 [EXPAND] instances, and 5,212 [REFUSE] instances.

	Answer	Expand	Refuse	Total
Train	14,822	3,793	5,212	23,827
Test	287	90	123	500

Table 3: Routing Dataset.

For the curation of the routing dataset, we collect queries from the training set of ASQA, which are then fed into the retriever to get top-k relevant chunks. Based on the retrieval result, we identify the original *Document Structure Tree* and utilize the Levenshtein Distance algorithm to map the retrieved chunk to content nodes within the structure tree, using a sliding window with a stride of one. Consequently, we employ the *RST Derivation Algorithm 1* to traverse and preserve all siblings, ancestors and descendants with *content type* of the mapping nodes, resulting in the corresponding *Retrieval Subtrees*. Finally, we use the DeepSeek-V3 API to construct single-turn routing results given the queries and subtrees.

A.2 Training details

We choose Llama-3.1-8B-instruct as the backbone of the routing model and employ LoRA for efficient fine-tuning. Specifically, we set lora_rank as 8, lora_alpha as 16, gradient accumulated batch size as 8, learning rate as 1e-5 and epoch as 5. We also compare different training settings, as shown in Table 4, and finally select the model based on instruct model with tag format prompt.

B More Experiments

B.1 Main results

As shown in Table 5 and Table 6, we report full results of our main experiment. We can observe that:

Algorithm 1 RST derivation

Require: *DST*, *Lighted nodes*

```

1: function LIGHTNODES(Tree, Nodes)
2:   for each node  $\in$  Nodes do
3:     siblings  $\leftarrow$  GETSIBLINGS(Tree,
       node)  $\triangleright$  Acquiring necessary sibling nodes
4:     for each sibling  $\in$  siblings do
5:       if sibling.type = "content" then
6:         sibling.lighted  $\leftarrow$  True
7:       end if
8:     end for
9:
10:    current  $\leftarrow$  node
11:    while current.parent  $\neq \emptyset$  do
12:      current  $\leftarrow$  current.parent
13:      if current.type = "structure" then
14:        break  $\triangleright$  Acquiring necessary
upper ancestor nodes
15:      end if
16:      current.lighted  $\leftarrow$  True
17:    end while
18:
19:    for each sibling  $\in$  siblings do
20:      if sibling.type = "content" then
21:        LIGHTDESCENDANTS(Tree,
       sibling)  $\triangleright$  Acquiring necessary lower
descendant nodes
22:      end if
23:    end for
24:  end for
25: end function

```

(1) With different backbone models, regardless of their openness or parameter scale, our framework consistently outperforms baseline methods across all evaluation metrics.

(2) Compared to state-of-the-art approaches, our framework demonstrates superior performance on most metrics.

(3) Our framework significantly narrows the performance gap between open-source and proprietary models.

(4) Our framework exhibits strong generalization ability on factual reasoning question answering tasks, by learning document routing capabilities.

B.2 Ablation Study

Full results of the ablation study are shown in Table 7. To evaluate the end-to-end ranking correctness of the retrieval process, we propose the **In-**

Prompt	Post-processing	Model	Train	Epoch	ANS-F1	EXP-PRE	REF-ACC	XPL-AVG	COL-RATE
enclose	✓	base	full	7.0	86.3	46.9	82.9	0.6	0.0
enclose	✓	inst	full	7.0	86.1	50.3	83.7	0.6	0.0
enclose	✓	inst	lora	4.5	84.0	55.7	81.3	0.4	0.0
tag	✓	inst	lora	3.5	83.0	57.1	87.0	0.4	0.0
tag	CE	inst	lora	5.0	84.4	51.1	77.2	7.6	0.4

Table 4: Comparison of different training settings. We evaluate performance of fine-tuned routing models on the curated test set. ANS-F1 is the f1 score of [ANSWER] behavior, EXP-PRE is the precision of [EXPAND] behavior, REF-ACC is the accuracy of the [REFUSE] behavior, XPL-AVG is the percentage of expelled output, COL-RATE is the rate of collapsed output. Enclose and tag prompt represent the format of "[expand]" and "<expand></expand>", respectively.

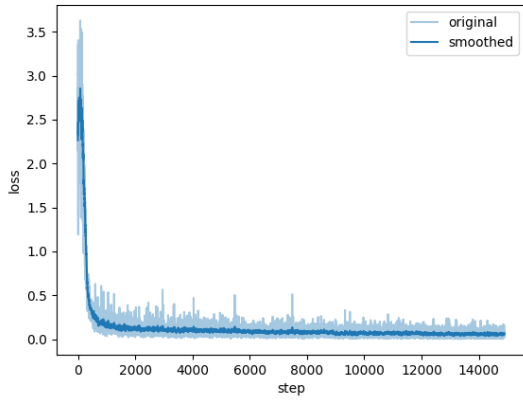


Figure 6: Training loss curve of routing model.

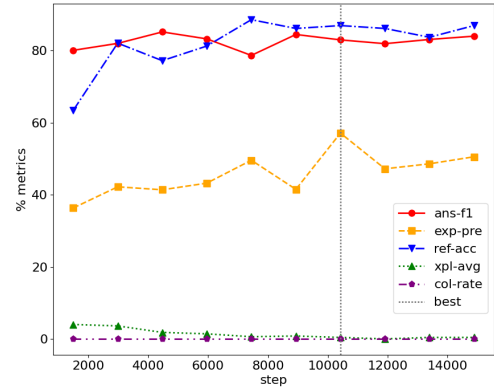


Figure 7: Routing model dev performance.

verse Information Rank Score Score_{psg} . Given the set of retrieved passages $C = \{c_i\}_{i=1}^{\text{top}_k}$ and the set of reference short answers A , the score is defined as follows.

$$\text{Score}_{psg} = \frac{\sum_{i=1:|C|} \frac{1}{i} \cdot \text{EM}(c_i, A)}{|C|} \quad (6)$$

This metric models the gain of correctness information with a position-based decay, which aligns with the tendency of both retrieval and generation modules to favor top-ranked results.

B.3 Test-time Scaling

We report statistics of test-time scaling in Table 8 and Table 9, including top-k and expand-iter scaling.

Methods	ASQA				
	EM(HIT)	D-F ₁	ROUGE	MAUVE	LEN
Reader based on text-davinci-003					
No-retrieval	33.8	24.2	33.3	-	-
Retrieve-and-Read	40.0	27.1	34.0	-	-
FLARE	<u>41.3</u>	<u>28.2</u>	<u>34.3</u>	-	-
Reader based on ChatGPT					
No-retrieval	34.1(9.7)	27.4	35.7	18.2	57.5
Retrieve-and-Read	42.8(16.1)	34.4	38.0	57.0	51.1
ASC-F	45.0	31.9	-	41.3	106.7
ASC	44.1	32.2	-	47.0	101.2
RDR²(Ours)	<u>46.1(18.6)</u>	<u>37.1</u>	<u>38.5</u>	<u>70.6</u>	49.1
Reader based on GPT-4o					
No-retrieval	41.4(13.7)	33.9	36.2	23.3	58.8
Retrieve-and-Read	47.0(19.1)	36.5	<u>38.4</u>	39.9	68.4
RDR²(Ours)	<u>48.2(21.0)</u>	<u>39.0</u>	<u>38.4</u>	<u>48.3</u>	63.8
Reader based on DeepSeek-V3					
No-retrieval	43.0(16.7)	33.1	36.3	21.9	69.2
Retrieve-and-Read	48.8(21.9)	37.4	37.5	36.7	74.2
RDR²(Ours)	<u>50.8(23.2)</u>	<u>39.8</u>	<u>37.8</u>	<u>37.3</u>	68.9
Reader based on Llama-2-13b					
No-retrieval	24.7(6.5)	19.3	35.1	13.4	65.9
Retrieve-and-Read	36.5(13.5)	26.9	<u>39.2</u>	31.4	61.2
SELF-RAG(FT)	31.7(8.4)	26.4	37.0	71.6	27.0
SELF-REASONING(FT)	35.2	-	-	-	-
OPEN-RAG(FT)	36.3	-	38.1	<u>80.0</u>	-
FRONT	41.5	-	-	-	-
RDR²(Ours)	<u>41.7(16.9)</u>	<u>31.6</u>	<u>39.2</u>	61.2	69.6
Reader based on Llama-3.1-8b					
No-retrieval	28.7(7.5)	22.0	34.7	40.7	65.2
Retrieve-and-Read	40.9(15.9)	30.9	37.9	73.6	69.2
RDR²(Ours)	<u>45.3(18.7)</u>	<u>34.9</u>	<u>38.2</u>	<u>79.2</u>	71.3

Table 5: Main results of RDR²(ASQA). We report full results of different API and open-sources models, together with results of no-retrieval and retrieve-and-read baselines.

Methods	QAMPARI			ELI5		
	F ₁ -5(F ₁)	REC-5(REC)	PRE	CLAIM	MAUVE	LEN
Reader based on ChatGPT						
No-retrieval	17.7(12.5)	18.5(10.6)	20.8	<u>23.6</u>	14.4	145.3
Retrieve-and-Read	22.2(15.7)	22.1(13.4)	27.9	22.3	12.2	141.5
ASC-F	18.8(15.7)	45.0(29.8)	13.4	22.2	<u>22.7</u>	172.7
ASC	26.2(19.5)	33.0(20.5)	23.0	21.4	21.3	163.6
RDR²(Ours)	<u>26.4(19.8)</u>	29.0(18.7)	<u>30.9</u>	23.3	14.4	155.2
Reader based on GPT-4o						
No-retrieval	26.0(19.3)	28.7(17.6)	30.5	<u>26.5</u>	<u>20.2</u>	158.4
Retrieve-and-Read	23.7(17.0)	23.2(14.7)	31.0	24.5	17.9	154.7
RDR²(Ours)	28.4(21.4)	<u>30.8(20.3)</u>	34.8	25.3	16.9	165.3
Reader based on DeepSeek-V3						
No-retrieval	23.4(18.4)	28.7(18.8)	23.3	26.3	<u>15.6</u>	137.4
Retrieve-and-Read	23.2(17.1)	24.6(15.7)	27.3	26.6	14.9	132.4
RDR²(Ours)	<u>27.8(21.7)</u>	<u>32.1(21.6)</u>	<u>31.1</u>	27.4	13.2	152.3
Reader based on Llama-2-13b						
No-retrieval	14.9(10.3)	16.4(9.0)	14.3	14.7	21.9	140.2
Retrieve-and-Read	21.0(14.7)	22.0(12.9)	21.6	14.9	20.8	141.2
SELF-RAG	-	1.9	1.3	6.1	-	-
FRONT	-	11.9	22.6	9.3	-	-
RDR²(Ours)	<u>23.2(16.7)</u>	<u>24.3(14.9)</u>	<u>25.0</u>	<u>15.4</u>	23.9	148.3
Reader based on Llama-3.1-8b						
No-retrieval	13.8(10.3)	19.3(11.1)	13.1	16.0	18.8	139.5
Retrieve-and-Read	20.9(15.1)	23.6(14.3)	22.9	16.3	<u>21.6</u>	141.9
RDR²(Ours)	<u>25.3(19.5)</u>	<u>32.3(21.1)</u>	<u>25.7</u>	<u>16.9</u>	20.3	141.6

Table 6: Main results of RDR²(QAMPARI & ELI5). We report full results of different API and open-sources models, together with results of no-retrieval and retrieve-and-read baselines.

Method	P-EM(P-HIT)	P-SCORE	P-LEN	EM(HIT)	D-F ₁	LEN
RDR²(Ours)	57.3(34.2)	12.7	104.2	45.3(18.7)	38.2	71.3
w/o router	51.7(28.3)	10.2	100.0	40.9(15.9)	30.9	69.2
w/o structure	49.8(28.0)	10.6	67.5	41.3(15.0)	32.5	71.0
w/o similarity	54.8(32.7)	11.8	100.9	43.9(17.8)	33.2	72.3
w/o content	54.2(31.3)	11.7	93.9	43.7(18.0)	34.0	70.0
w/o [expand]	52.9(30.8)	11.5	81.7	42.5(16.1)	32.5	71.9
w/o [refuse]	61.2(37.0)	13.4	176.3	42.9(16.4)	32.8	70.7

Table 7: Ablation results of RDR²(ASQA).

Methods	EM(HIT)	D-F ₁	ROUGE	MAUVE	LEN
Retrieve-and-Read					
top-0	28.7(7.5)	22.0	34.7	40.7	65.2
top-1	33.2(11.8)	25.4	35.1	68.1	65.2
top-2	36.7(13.2)	28.2	36.8	70.2	66.6
top-3	38.2(14.0)	29.5	37.3	75.8	69.7
top-4	40.1(14.6)	30.7	37.7	74.0	70.5
top-5	40.9(15.9)	30.9	37.9	73.6	69.2
RDR²(Ours)					
top-0	28.7(7.5)	22.0	34.7	40.7	65.2
top-1	39.4(15.1)	30.2	36.0	69.1	70.5
top-2	41.6(16.5)	32.6	37.7	71.8	69.6
top-3	42.0(16.5)	32.9	37.8	77.7	68.6
top-4	44.0(17.1)	33.9	38.2	76.2	69.4
top-5	45.3(18.7)	34.9	38.2	79.2	71.3

Table 8: Statistics of top-k scaling.

Methods	P-EM(P-HIT)	P-SCORE	P-LEN	EM(HIT)	D-F ₁	ROUGE	MAUVE	LEN
RDR²(Ours)								
iter-0	52.9(30.8)	11.5	81.7	42.5(16.1)	32.5	37.7	76.7	71.9
iter-1	55.1(32.7)	12.1	95.5	43.3(17.1)	33.3	37.9	75.9	72.0
iter-2	56.4(33.2)	12.5	95.4	44.3(18.9)	34.5	38.1	78.7	69.3
iter-3	56.7(33.5)	12.6	98.9	44.9(19.6)	35.1	38.2	78.9	68.9
iter-4	56.9(33.7)	12.6	100.1	45.0(18.6)	34.8	38.2	76.0	71.1
iter-5	57.3(34.2)	12.7	104.2	45.3(18.7)	34.9	38.2	79.2	71.3

Table 9: Statistics of expand-iter scaling.

1010

1011
1012

1013

1014

Prompt C.3: Reader prompt

Instruction: Write an accurate, engaging, and concise answer for the given question. Use an unbiased and journalistic tone.

Paragraph
{paragraph}

Question
{question}

Response

D Case Study

We show a complete demonstration of our **RDR₂** as follows, including comparison of generation and retrieval stage and detailed routing behaviors.

User question	What is the tallest ride at six flags over texas?
Short answers	<i>The Titan, The New Texas Giant, The Texas Giant, Texas SkyScreamer, Superman: Tower of Power</i>
Stand long answer	The Six Flags Over Texas theme park has a number of different rides and roller coasters. The park's tallest swing ride is the <i>Texas SkyScreamer</i> at 400 feet and tallest triple drop tower ride is <i>Superman: Tower of Power</i> at 325 feet. The tallest roller coaster at the park in 2001 was <i>The Titan</i> at 245 feet. The park's tallest wooden roller coaster in 2011 was <i>The New Texas Giant</i> at 153 feet, while its tallest one in 1990 was <i>The Texas Giant</i> at 143 feet.
No-Retrieval output	At Six Flags Over Texas, thrill-seekers can experience the park's tallest ride, the 'Mr. Freeze: Reverse Blast'. However, more recently, it has been surpassed by the 'Dare Devil Dive' in the 'Thrill Zone' area of the park, but that is no longer there.
RAG output	According to the information provided, Six Flags Over Texas has had several record-breaking attractions over the years. In 2003, the park opened the <i>Superman Tower of Power</i> , which was the tallest ride of its kind in the world at the time of its opening. However, it does not specify if it is still the tallest ride in the park.
RDR² output	According to the information provided, the tallest ride at Six Flags Over Texas is the <i>Texas SkyScreamer</i> , which stands at a height of 400 feet. In 2003, the park opened the <i>Superman Tower of Power</i> , which was the tallest ride of its kind in the world at the time. It's also worth noting that the park has had several record-breaking roller coasters, including <i>the Titan</i> , which is the tallest, fastest, and longest coaster in Texas.

Table 10: End-to-end comparison between three frameworks.

Top-3 Retrieval Chunks	
Six Flags Over Texas	bringing back the past when they reopened Casa Magnetica. In 2003 Six Flags Over Texas opened the <i>Superman Tower of Power</i> . This was the tallest ride of its kind in the world at the time of its opening. [...] For 2007 and 2008, Six Flags Over Texas was home to "Cirque",
Six Flags Over Texas	end of the decade, Six Flags Over Texas had added ten roller coasters to its list of attractions. During the first decade of the 21st century, Looney Tunes USA was restructured. In 2001, the park introduced its tallest, fastest, longest roller coaster, <i>Titan</i> . [...] The park has also made steps toward
Titan (roller coaster)	<i>Titan</i> is a steel hyper coaster located at Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington, Texas. Unlike most hypercoasters, Titan is a combination of an out and back roller coaster and a twister roller coaster. It stands at 245 feet and contains a 255 drop at 85 miles per hour. It is the tallest, fastest, and longest coaster in Texas. [...] In August 2000, Six
Routing Passages	
Six Flags Over Texas	During the first decade of the 21st century, Looney Tunes USA was restructured. In 2001, the park introduced its tallest, fastest, longest roller coaster, Titan. [...] In 2003 Six Flags Over Texas opened the <i>Superman Tower of Power</i> . This was the tallest ride of its kind in the world at the time of its opening. [...] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Tallest Roller Coaster in Texas - <i>Titan</i> (245ft) * Tallest swing ride in the world <i>Texas Skyscreamer</i> (400ft) (2013)
Titan (roller coaster)	<i>Titan</i> is a steel hyper coaster located at Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington, Texas. Unlike most hypercoasters, Titan is a combination of an out and back roller coaster and a twister roller coaster. It stands at 245 feet and contains a 255 drop at 85 miles per hour. It is the tallest, fastest, and longest coaster in Texas.

Table 11: Comparison between retrieval chunks and routing passages.

Document Structure Tree	
-1: Six Flags Over Texas	
0: ==Introduction==	
1: Six Flags Over Texas is a 212-acre (86 ha) theme park located in Arlington, Texas, east of Fort Worth and about 15 miles (24km) west of Dallas. [...]	
2: The park is managed by the Six Flags Entertainment Corp., which also owns 53.1% interest of the Texas Limited Partnership that owns the park. [...]	
3: ==History==	
4: ===Initial planning and construction===	
[...]	
16: ===1990s===	
17: The 1990s was a rather rough decade in comparison from decades past. The decade started off with a bang when Six Flags Over Texas introduced the Texas Giant roller coaster. [...]	
18: ===2000s===	
19: During the first decade of the 21st century, Looney Tunes USA was restructured. In 2001, the park introduced its tallest, fastest, longest roller coaster, Titan . [...] In 2003 Six Flags Over Texas opened the Superman Tower of Power . This was the tallest ride of its kind in the world at the time of its opening. [...]	
20: ===2010s===	
29: ==Firsts, bests, and other records==	
30: ===Firsts and ones of a kind===	
40: ===Records===	
41: * Tallest Roller Coaster in Texas - Titan (245ft)	
42: * Fastest Roller Coaster in Texas - Titan (85mph)	
43: * Largest Land Based Oil Derrick - Oil Derrick (300ft)	
44: * Tallest swing ride in the world Texas Skyscreamer (400ft) (2013)	
45: ===Awards===	
48: ==Events==	
54: ==Areas and attractions==	
56: ===Star Mall===	
[...]	
157: ===Tower===	
168: ==Former Attractions==	
Routing Behaviors	
Light content node 17 from retrieved passages.	
1	[EXPAND] 0
Light content node 1, 2 from expand behavior.	
2	[REFUSE]
Light content node 19 from retrieved passages.	
3	[ANSWER] 19 [EXPAND] 40
Light content node 41, 42, 43, 44 from expand behavior.	
4	[ANSWER] 41, 44
Routing Passages: 19, 41, 44	

Table 12: Demonstration of routing behaviors.