Writing persuasive texts
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The ability to use language to influence an audience has been highly valued for many centuries. In classical Roman and Greek civilisations the capacity to use spoken language to influence an audience was known as ‘rhetoric’ (literally meaning the ‘art of an orator’) and considered the most important attribute of an educated man. Rhetoric referred not only to the specific language and grammatical choices that the speaker made in order to sway his audience but also the logic and structure of the argument being presented.

By the Middle Ages rhetoric had become a university discipline and the emphasis was shifting from skills in oracy to skills in writing.

Today the ability to use language skilfully and precisely to persuade and influence others continues to be highly valued within our language repertoire. This e:update will consider how students can be supported to create and interpret a variety of persuasive texts.

Persuasive texts in and out of school

Every day we are bombarded with persuasive texts: oral, written, visual, digital and multimodal. These range from the advertisements that bombard us to the insistences of ‘shock-jocks’; from the opinion columns and pages of our newspapers to the didactic narratives we read; from the speeches of politicians to the trial summations of barristers. Other texts, such as reviews of books, performances, exhibitions, etc also include persuasive elements.

As readers, viewers and listeners we need to deconstruct these messages to determine what point of view is being espoused and how we might stand in relation to that point of view.

Within school settings, students are frequently asked to express opinions both formally and informally for a variety of purposes and to a range of audiences. For example, they engage in class discussions, where the topics are
connected to what is going on in the classroom at the time and the audience is their peers and teacher. As students move through schooling the topics of discussion may become distanced from their everyday experiences and more related to particular areas of learning, e.g. the role of women in Ancient Greek society or the safety of genetically modified food products. However, the topic of the discussion is still determined by the classroom context and the audience is still familiar.

The way students are asked to speak in class can vary greatly. One of the features of class discussions is the way an idea from one student can be picked up and elaborated by another or a tangential or opposing idea might be introduced. The order in which speakers participate is frequently random.

Sometimes, however, students have to speak in a more ordered fashion. For example, they may participate in class or school parliaments, where the topics can range from the everyday (e.g. whether additional bike and scooter racks should be provided) to the more abstract (e.g. whether to increase the number of representatives in the school parliament). In these instances, the setting is more formal and the audience is a little less familiar, though still mainly their peers.

Students may also participate in debates. In this case the structure is formal. Speakers are ordered and have time allocations. As in the previous examples, there is an expectation that the arguments should be logically structured and presented. The language of the speaker will more closely approximate the written mode and the audience may be unfamiliar.

At the same time as students are participating in a variety of oral experiences, they are also encountering persuasive texts in print, digital and multimodal formats throughout their schooling. They will be required to both interpret and create such texts.

The *Australian Curriculum: English* requires that students can identify, form, justify and support their opinions from the first year of schooling. Students need to be explicitly taught how to analyse texts critically in order to determine the messages and assumptions being expressed and to recognise the grammatical and/or visual techniques and language choices that have been selected to convey the intended meaning. Some relevant content descriptors from the *Australian Curriculum: English* are included in this e:update.

**Structural features of persuasive texts**

A persuasive text usually begins with a proposition or contention (often referred to as the ‘thesis statement’) that the speaker or writer wishes the audience to agree with. The position of the thesis at the beginning is important so that the audience is instantly oriented to what will be presented. However, sometimes a speaker or writer prefers not to lead the audience so directly. When this is the intention, the thesis is presented later in the text.

Depending on the context, the thesis may be mundane and everyday, e.g. ‘A child cannot expect to be happy and accepted by his/her peers unless he/she owns a “GoFaster” scooter’, or profound and abstract, e.g. ‘The parliament of Australia must alter the Constitution to establish the Commonwealth of Australia as a republic’.

Then the contention or proposition is elaborated upon using a series of logically sequenced arguments that are supported by evidence.

Imagine that the first example is a multimodal text. The arguments would be presented visually and orally and would be supported by appropriate music – [Scene 1] happy, healthy children riding scooters in a park – a lone child observes from the sidelines looking forlorn and wistful – he is ignored by the group. [Scene 2] child excitedly opens a colourfully wrapped box to reveal a ‘GoFaster’ scooter. [Scene 3] exuberant child rides confidently into park and is welcomed enthusiastically by all. A final voice-over may reinforce the thesis by stating overtly or covertly that all kids need ‘GoFaster’ scooters to be part of the ‘crowd’.

The second example would most likely be a formal piece of writing, which could either be presented in print or as a speech.
The proposition would be followed by a series of arguments. These may refer to the maturity and independence of Australia; the incongruity of having a head of state who is not Australian and does not reside in Australia; that Australians do not have the right to choose who will be their head of state, the multicultural nature of modern Australia, etc. Each argument would be elaborated upon, perhaps by drawing on evidence from Australian history or the experiences of other nations. Finally, the text would draw all the arguments together in a conclusion that supports the original contention. Although the text could be either spoken or written, the register of the language would be quite formal.

In both examples the point of view that the author holds and wishes the viewer or reader to assume is quite clear from the selection of the arguments and supporting evidence.

Supporting students to interpret the propositions or positions advocated by texts

Students need to be given many opportunities to explore how points of view are conveyed through texts. One useful strategy is to use quality literature where the author clearly wishes to deliver a particular message or viewpoint and has chosen the narrative structure for conveying it. By examining the language choices and visual elements of the narrative, students will learn how texts are constructed to influence the reader.

A few examples of literary texts are provided in the box on the right [or left]. They can be used in the classroom to springboard discussion about how authors and illustrators can influence the reader to a particular point of view through their choice of language and images. They have been grouped in broad themes.

The Text Analyst role

Following are some strategies for using the Text Analyst role¹ from the Four Roles or Resources of an Effective Reader.

Animal rights/Animals in captivity
Fenton. C. (2006), Queenie - One Elephant's Story, Fitzroy, Vic: black dog books

Conservation/Endangered Species

Colonisation/Indigenous issues
Marsden. J. (2002), The Rabbits, South Melbourne, Vic: Lothian Books

Refugees
Chau. Y.H. (1983), 'Do You Believe that a Child can Die in the Middle of the Pacific Ocean?' in Someone is Flying Balloons – Australian Poems for Children, Adelaide, SA: Omnibus Books

¹ The Four Roles or Resources of an Effective Reader are: Code breaker (the relationships between spoken sounds and written symbols, the grammar of texts, the structural features of texts); Text user (understanding the purposes of different texts and the structural conventions for achieving these purposes); Text participant (making meaning by drawing on prior knowledge and experience and knowledge of similar texts); Text analyst (understanding how texts position readers, viewers and listeners).
model to determine the ideological position taken by the author of the text and how the ideas, language and images in the texts influence reader perceptions. While the texts selected could be approached using all four resources, only the Text Analyst role is addressed here. For more information on the Four Roles of the Reader see Holliday, M, (2008) Strategies for Reading Success. The strategies will relate to the following three example descriptors from the Australian Curriculum: English, Literature strand. Note: All other relevant extracts from the Australian Curriculum: English in this e:update are set out in similar blue boxes.

1. Discuss the nature and effects of some language devices used to enhance meaning and shape the reader’s reaction ... (Year 3 – Examining literature)

2. Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses ... (Year 5 - Responding to literature)

3. Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view ... (Year 7 – Literature and context)

The complete text of the Australian Curriculum: English can be found at www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English


After reading the book with the students, ask what they have learned about the Theefyspray. Possible responses may include:

● at first there was one Theefyspray living alone in the ocean
● the mother took good care of the baby
● the Theefyspray is a very colourful and beautiful fish
● the Theefyspray is only colourful when it is in the ocean.

Record these responses and tell students that as you read the book again they will be language detectives and look for words and groups of words that the author has used to describe the Theefyspray and its life.

One example is: ... the last Theefyspray looked out from its lonely lair. If students are not already familiar with the term ‘alliteration’, it should be introduced and explained to students. Ask students to listen for other examples of alliteration as you continue reading, e.g. silent scream, every fin fluttering in fear. As students identify further examples, ask them to consider how these language choices indicate what Paul Jennings is persuading the reader to think.

Read the sentence, They hunted together, mother and child. Ask students to suggest who is meant by the word ‘together’ and why the author then added the words ‘mother and child’. Introduce the term ‘emphasis’ and explain that authors will often use this technique to add strength to an idea they want to convey.

Ask students what evidence can be found in the first half of the story for their assertion that the Theefyspray were colourful and beautiful. Students will refer to the illustrations. Use this opportunity to talk about how messages and information can be conveyed in non-verbal ways.

Finally, ask students why they think the fisherman returned the little fish to the ocean and what is Paul Jennings persuading the reader to think and believe by this action.

This may spark a class discussion and further study on sustainability and the conservation of endangered species.


Before reading the book with the class, discuss the possible meanings of the sentence ‘I did nothing’, e.g. It’s not my fault,
I’m not to blame. It wasn’t me. I didn’t intervene. I should have done something.

Read the book to the students, excluding the epilogue.

Discuss with students how they would now interpret the title from the perspectives of Zeek and Cory and how Gary Crew has used these differing interpretations to persuade the reader to a particular point of view.

Use the following focus questions to guide discussion.

- How did Cory react when Alex stood on the frog?
- Why did he feel unable to stop Alex?
- What things did Cory do that show he was disturbed by the behaviour of Alex and Nigel?
- What is Zeek’s response to Cory’s explanation; “… all that was a long time ago … I was just a kid, eh’? Is his response justified from your point of view?
- Why was Zeek less willing to accept that the frog was extinct than his boss?
- Zeek’s boss could be described as cynical. What evidence can be found in the book to support this description?
- What was Gary Crew’s intention when he titled the book ‘I did nothing’?
- How has the author used the events in the story to persuade us to a particular point of view?
- What is your position in relation to the issues raised by the author?

Read the epilogue and discuss the function of the epilogue in the context of the book. Introduce the term ‘didactic’ to describe texts that are written to teach a lesson and ask students to recall any other stories they have read that could be considered didactic.

Text: The Rabbits (Marsden, 2002): Addressing Descriptor 3

Textual analysis of this allegorical picture book is best undertaken in groups that are small enough for each student or pair of students to have a copy of the book.

Ask students to read the book independently and reflect on what it means to them.

Then ask students to offer their interpretation. These would typically include:

- the effects of human habitation on the natural environment
- the impact of feral species on an environment
- the impact of colonisation on indigenous peoples
- the effects of industrialisation on the environment.

Introduce the term ‘allegory’ and tell students that this is a figurative device used by authors, whereby an abstract idea is presented in a concrete way. Explain that it is a powerful way to convey a point of view or concept. Ask students to consider how allegory has been used by the author as a technique for persuading the reader to take a particular position in relation to the issues they have identified.

Ask students to reread the text, considering all interpretations and particularly attending to Shaun Tan’s illustrations. While reading and viewing they should identify symbolic representations and take note of how colour, size and positioning are used to complement and enhance the text.

Students then offer their interpretations of the illustrations and relate these to their first interpretation of the text and those of others. They should reflect on the persuasive impact of the text and illustrations working together.

Ask students to track the use of the pronouns ‘they’ and ‘us’ and to consider what effect is achieved by the juxtaposition of the ‘doer’ and the ‘done to’.

Then ask students to provide their opinion on whether ‘us’ in the final rhetorical question ‘who will save us from the rabbits?’ is the same ‘us’ as in ‘… and some of the animals made us sick.’
This text could form a springboard for many further discussions and research into all the issues raised by the students’ original interpretations.

While writing didactic texts, such as these, is the province of a truly sophisticated writer, generally within the primary and early secondary school context persuasive writing will most often be expository in nature.

**From talking to writing**

Writing persuasive texts within the classroom should flow naturally from topics and issues that are relevant and of interest to the students. They should be preceded by focused learning activities during which students research the topic and gather evidence for the point of view they hold. Oral discussions should also precede writing so that students can try out their ideas, hear the views of others and refine their thinking.

A useful strategy is to record students during an oral discussion, then transcribe their interaction and use the transcription to demonstrate the movement from informal, spoken language to formal, written text.

Consider, for example, a senior primary class discussion on a council’s decision to demolish a heritage building to make way for a block of home units. The numbers below refer to order of individual speakers.

1. They should protect it and not pull it down because it’s very old.
2. Yes, it’s more than a hundred years old
3. and it was one of the first houses built around here.
4. Also, it’s in good condition so people can still live there
5. or it could be used as a place where kids can go after school because we haven’t got much to do around here.
6. If they want more units, they should choose another place to build them
7. like along the main road.

- Point out to students that the pronouns ‘they’ ‘it’ and ‘we’ and the demonstratives ‘here’ and ‘there’ can be well understood in the context of the classroom discussion, but need to be referenced or fully described for an audience that is removed from the immediate environment.

- Jointly construct a text that conveys the same information as the students had volunteered in their oral discussion, but which would be understood by a distant audience, such as readers of the local newspaper, e.g.

  Greenslopes Council should save Tahlia House from demolition because of its heritage value. Tahlia House was built in 1899 and was one of the first residences in Greenslopes.

  The building has been well maintained over the years and is still habitable. Without much work it could be converted to a Youth Centre. Currently there is little to occupy young people after school in this area and a place where they can meet and engage in interesting activities is needed.

  If Council is committed to providing additional high-density housing, then other locations should be considered. Green Parade would be a far more suitable location because it has better access to public transport.

  Before embarking on the destruction of such a fine and historic building, Council should consider the views of the community and the options available.

**Analysing the structure of persuasive texts**

As has been mentioned previously, an expository text begins with a proposition that the writer will then argue for with supporting evidence and using language that aims to convince the reader to take up the same position. Each argument will form
a separate paragraph with the final paragraph summarising the arguments and/or reinforcing the position taken.

Teaching students about these structural features assists them to understand how to paragraph their writing.

Understand that paragraphs are a key organisational feature of written texts (Year 3, Language)

Plan, draft and publish ... persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences (Year 4, Literacy)

Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text. (Year 6, Literacy)

Rhetorical features of persuasive texts

Writers employ a variety of techniques and language devices in order to make their writing more forceful. Some of these devices are:

Language for expressing attitudes

Identify language that can be used for appreciating texts and the qualities of people and things (Year 2, Language)

Examine how evaluative language can be varied to be more or less forceful (Year 3, Language)

Understand how to move beyond making bare assertions and take account of different perspectives and points of view (Year 5, Language)

Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects (Year 6, Language)

Writers can express their attitude towards a proposition, person, action or situation in multiple ways.

- Using emotive or affective language. This refers to the register of language that has been selected to ‘tug at the heart strings’ or otherwise invoke a strong emotional reaction. Nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs can all express both positive and negative attitudes and feelings. e.g. Residents are incensed … The devastating cyclone wreaked havoc … The winner’s jubilation …, … the last Theefyspray looked out from her lonely lair.

During shared reading sessions identify words that describe emotions, both positive and negative. Construct vocabulary lists of the words found, categorised by their word class, i.e. nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs. Encourage students to add to the list with words they encounter in their own reading. The list can then be a resource for students’ writing. Have students ‘play’ with the vocabulary lists to construct effective noun and verb groups.

Affective language can be quite subjective, so as students progress through the years of schooling, they need to be taught how to express their personal points of view in ways that make their opinion appear to be ‘world view’ and objective. Techniques for doing this will be described later.

- Using language to describe or evaluate the worth or quality of things and processes. These are the language choices that indicate the speaker or writer’s view of the merit of something or some action, e.g. Council’s response was quite disappointing … The inefficient use of scarce water resources …, … it was one of the most highly evolved amphibians that ever lived.
Using language to judge or evaluate human behaviour. This refers to the language resources that enable the speaker or writer to judge the behaviour of another in terms of (i) their social esteem, e.g. Her **ground-breaking and innovative** research … The councilor’s **competence** was questioned… The **hard-working** ants …; and (ii) their social sanction, in terms of morality and ethics, e.g. The **wicked** witch … The operation was conducted **covertly** … They won’t understand the **right** ways. When discussing these language features with younger students, it is not necessary to use terms such as ‘social sanction’ but rather to use everyday terms. For example, after reading a text such as *Rose meets Mr Wintergarten* by Bob Graham, ask students to identify some of the words that Bob Graham has used in the first part of the book to tell the reader what kind of person Mr Wintergarten was, e.g. mean, horrible, growled.

**Use of intensifiers**

In addition to using specific words and phrases in order to convey a variety of emotions and opinions, we can also increase or decrease the strength of the message through the use of intensifiers. Consider these three statements: *I am concerned. I am extremely concerned. I am just a little concerned.* Intensifiers can be:

- adverbs, e.g. somewhat, certainly, really, definitely
- adjectives, e.g. scarce, abundant, exquisite, obnoxious

Students can be supported to recognise the gradations of meaning by constructing vocabulary clines. These may describe a concept or attribute from positive to negative, e.g. scent → perfume → fragrance → aroma → odour → smell → stink → stench or an action in terms of its intensity, e.g. saunter → amble → wander → stroll → walk → pace → stride

**Modality**

Understand the uses of objective and subjective language and bias (Year 6, Language)

Modality refers to the language choices that allow a speaker or writer to express degrees of probability, usuality, certainty or obligation of something. It is the language that allows the speaker or writer to open up or close down the options for negotiation. Low modality language expresses tentativeness and allows for negotiation while high modality language expresses certainty and closes off negotiation.

Modality can be expressed through:

- action verbs, e.g. damage, destroy, annihilate
- modal verbs, e.g. might, must; could, shall/will
- modal adverbs, e.g. definitely, possibly; supposedly, certainly
- modal nouns, e.g. likelihood, possibility, certainty
- modal adjectives, e.g. possible, apparent, obvious

Learning how to use modality appropriately will not only assist students to be more effective speakers and writers but is also essential for understanding how the texts they hear and read are positioning them to a particular view. English as another language learners (EAL) may require support in recognising how modality can be used subtly to alter meanings (or not so subtly sometimes).

Vocabulary clines such as those described above will assist students to recognise the gradations of meaning that can be made.
Nominalisation

Understand the effect of nominalisation in the writing of informative and persuasive texts (Year 7, Language)

Nominalisation is the language device that allows verbs or clauses to be changed into nouns. Consider these two sentences from the sample oral and written texts above:

They should protect it and not **pull it down** because it’s very old.

Greenslopes Council should save Tahlia House from **demolition** …

The clause ‘pull it down’ has been nominalised as ‘demolition’. Nominalisation is a feature of persuasive texts because it allows the writer to abstract ideas and concepts and to remove the ‘doer’ or agent from an assertion, thereby making it seem objective and therefore more difficult to refute. Consider these two sentences:

1. National parks are being damaged / because campers are leaving their rubbish behind / and destroying the natural environment.

2. The **result** of irresponsible human activity in national parks is the **destruction** of the natural environment.

Sentence 1 has three clauses while sentence 2 has only one clause. The information has been compacted and abstracted. Clause 1 has been nominalised as ‘the result’, clause 2 as ‘irresponsible human activity’ and clause 3 as ‘the destruction’. The agent responsible for the destruction (campers) has been removed, making the statement a generalisation and therefore appear objective.

Other language devices which can be used effectively in persuasive texts include the use of:

- abstract nouns, e.g. problem, issue, opinion
- repetition, e.g. **To lose** this magnificent building is **to lose** an important part of our heritage.

Up went the little Thieffyspray. **Up** to where no fish should go.

- exaggeration, e.g. Electing Joe Bloggs as mayor **will be the end of life as we know it**.

People kill everything.

Grammatical features of persuasive texts

Cohesion

Understand how texts are made cohesive through the use of linking devices including pronoun reference and text connectives (Year 4, Language)

Cohesion refers to the grammar resources that enable relationships to be controlled and tracked through a text. They include:

Pronouns and other referring words

These are the grammatical items that are used to avoid the constant repetition of nouns, e.g.

**The councillors** have voted to demolish Tahlia House despite protests from this community. **They** are clearly out of touch with our feelings. (personal pronouns)

Green Parade would be a more suitable **location** for the proposed development. The units should be built **there**. (demonstrative)

There are multiple reasons for retaining Tahlia House in its present state. **These** include … (demonstrative)

**The mayor is in favour of** the proposal and the councillors have a **similar** view. (comparative)
Australia’s rainforests are in danger. Such unique habitats ...
(substitution)

One way to teach students about how pronouns and other referring words are used appropriately in a text is to display a sample text on an electronic whiteboard or overhead projector and, using different coloured highlighters, track the references. Students who are learning English as an additional language may require additional support in recognising the references, particularly less obvious ones, such as substitution.

Text connectives
Text connectives serve to guide the reader through a text by linking and making connections between sections of the text and signalling to the reader how the text is developing. They serve a number of purposes, such as:

- clarifying, e.g. in other words, in fact, for example
- showing cause and effect, e.g. therefore, for that reason, consequently
- indicating time, e.g. then, meanwhile, finally
- sequencing ideas, e.g. subsequently, at this point, briefly, to summarise
- adding information, e.g. furthermore, likewise, too, apart from that
- expressing a condition or concession, e.g. otherwise, however, in any case, despite this.

Conjunctions
Unlike text connectives, which operate at a whole-text level, conjunctions can only operate within sentences to link clauses. There are two types of conjunctions.

Coordinating conjunctions
Coordinating conjunctions link two main or principal clauses, e.g.

The building has significant historical value and it is an asset to the community. The main clauses are underlined. This sentence could have been written as two sentences, i.e.

The building has significant historical value. It is an asset to the community.

It could also have been correctly written as:

The building has significant historical value and is an asset to the community. In this case the pronoun ‘it’ has been omitted because it is clear that both clauses provide information about ‘the building’. The omission of the pronoun in this case is known technically as ‘ellipsis’ and is an example of another aspect of cohesion.

Examples of coordinating conjunctions include: and, but, so, or, nor, yet.

Subordinating conjunctions
Subordinating conjunctions initiate a dependent clause, that is, a clause which is dependent on the main clause for its meaning, e.g.

The council passed the development application despite receiving complaints from the community. (The main clause underlined, subordinate conjunction in bold, and the dependent clause is italicised).

This sentence could be rewritten as:

Despite receiving complaints from the community, the council passed the development application.

Writers and speakers will choose which clause to place at the beginning of the sentence depending on which part of the message they wish to emphasise. Note also, the use of the comma to separate the dependent clause from a main clause in this example.

Examples of subordinating conjunctions include: when, whenever, because, for, if, although, as, while, whereas, unless, before, after

Teaching students about how the different types of conjunctions operate in sentences is one way of assisting them to write clear and accurate sentences.
Sentences can be simple, compound or complex.

A **simple sentence** consists of one independent clause. Independent clauses are sometimes referred to as main or principal clauses. Each independent clause is a complete message and usually has three elements: a subject (the doer) a finite verb and an object (the done to). A finite verb is one, which can be located in time, i.e. the present, past or future (build, built, will build). Verbs that cannot be located in time are known as non-finite. For more extended explanations of verbs and tense, including the more nuanced tenses, refer to *A New Grammar Companion for Teachers*.

The following sentence is a simple sentence in the past tense demonstrating a subject-verb-object pattern.

**The council rejected the application.**

Subject: `The council`
Verb: `rejected`
Object: `the application`

A simple sentence may also consist of the subject (or thing), a relating verb and a description. In sentences such as these, the description, sometimes referred to as the ‘complement’, completes the meaning of the subject. For example:

**The building has significant historical value.**

Subject: `The building`
Relating verb: `has`
Description: `significant historical value`

Other simple sentence structures have only a subject and a verb. For example:

**Council is meeting.**

Subject: `Council`
Verb: `is meeting`

Commands have yet another structure. They omit the subject (or doer) and begin with the verb followed by the object (done to). For example:

**Read the petition!**

**A simple sentence may also contain an adverbial element such as a prepositional phrase. For example:**

**Council is meeting with the developers.**

Subject: `Council`
Verb: `is meeting`
Prepositional phrase: `with the developers`

**The building at the corner of Park and Brown Streets has significant historical value.**

Subject: `The building`
Relating verb: `has`
Prepositional phrase: `at the corner of Park and Brown Streets`
Complement: `significant historical value`

A **compound sentence** has two (or more) independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction, e.g. *The residents felt strongly about the council’s actions so they decided to take up a petition and deliver it to the next meeting.* [main clauses underlined]

It is essential that the ideas expressed in a compound sentence are logical and related.

Note: Students need to understand the difference between a successful compound sentence and one which contains too many clauses joined by conjunctions such as *and* and *and then*. Such sentences are often referred to as ‘run-on’ sentences and are not successful.

A **complex sentence** has a main clause and one or more clauses that are dependent on the main clause for meaning. For example:

**The building should be preserved until a proper heritage plan is developed.** [dependent clause in bold type]

As shown earlier, the dependent clause could be placed at the beginning of the
sentence to shift the emphasis, in this case to the fact that council has ignored the residents’ wishes. For example:

**Ignoring the wishes of local residents, the council appears bent on development at all costs.** [non-finite (dependent) clause in first position in bold]

**If council does not listen to reason, residents will block the street on Monday, causing chaos for commuters.** [two dependent clauses, the first is finite and the second is infinite]

Students can be assisted to recognise and construct effective complex sentences by identifying them in the texts they read. Local newspapers are a good resource for finding model persuasive texts. Since they also deal with issues that are often pertinent to the lives of the students, they can stimulate oral discussions. These discussions can then form the basis for constructing more formal, written texts on the topic. Jointly constructing the texts on electronic whiteboards enables the teacher and students to experiment with different ways of combining and linking ideas and altering the language choices to strengthen or soften the message being conveyed.

### Assessing students’ writing

The purpose of assessing texts that students have independently constructed is to determine what students know and can do and to identify areas where additional instruction is required. For information on ways in which students’ ability to write persuasively can be assessed, go to the e:lit website at www.elit.edu.au and follow the link to the Resources section.

Teaching students about the particular structural, language and grammatical features, including visual and other non-verbal elements, of a variety of persuasive texts is an essential life skill. The ability to recognise how the creators of such texts manipulate all the elements above in order to influence their audience to a particular belief, action or point of view is important for negotiating our way in the world. Equally important is the skill of being able to use language precisely and appropriately to influence others and ensure our meanings are understood.

As George Orwell wrote:

*A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?* (‘Politics and the English Language, 1940’)

### REFERENCES


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Penny Hutton has been a classroom and ESL teacher in primary schools. She is currently teaching within the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Sydney and is the Professional Development Consultant to e:lit – the Primary English Teaching Association. She has extensive experience as a senior education officer in the fields of English, literacy, middle years pedagogy and assessment. She has previously managed the English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) and the literacy components of the Basic Skills Test (BST) for NSW DET, and was Senior Manager, Assessment and Research for Educational Assessment Australia, within the University of New South Wales.