INVESTIGATING MODEL TEXTS FOR LEARNING

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Contents

Foreword

It was once thought that providing a model text for students was almost akin to 'cheating' – giving them 'the answer'. If that's the case, I cheat regularly. Whenever I'm confronted with a genre I've not encountered before, I go looking for a model. Assuming that students can somehow intuit what is expected in response to a task leaves many learners vulnerable and mystified.
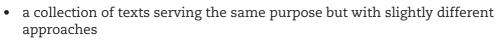
Then there's the concern that to provide a model would stifle students' creativity. While there is a case for free writing and letting the imagination roam, it depends to a certain degree on the genre. Most have an element of predictability because of the job they have evolved to do. The more constrained ones, such as an experiment report, are extremely predictable – and deliberately so. Even poetry – arguably the most fertile ground for the imagination – is typically bound by certain expectations. A cinquain is specified down to the syllable, and diamante poems down to the number and type of words in a line. Free verse has fewer limitations but still follows certain principles.

The idea that a model limits freedom of choice and expression misinterprets the functional model informing much literacy teaching these days. A functional approach is about choice – not 'rules'. In a particular context, which choices are possible? Which are likely to be more highly valued? Which will most successfully achieve the goal of the task? It's about expanding a learner's repertoire of language resources – and knowing which will be more effective in a certain situation. It could even be argued that a confident knowledge about how language works *enables* creativity – how to make unexpected choices, how to combine elements in novel ways. But always in response to the affordances of the context – the social purpose, the relationship with the audience, the subject matter and the mode.

So providing a model needs to be done with sensitivity. Not a recipe to be strictly followed but an exploration of what the task involves.

A model might be:

- a text that shares the same genre as the text to be written by the students (for example, an argument about culling brumbies), but with a shift in field to avoid copying (such as an argument about culling wild dogs)

- a text composed by the teacher (always a revelation in terms of recognising the demands of the task and the kind of support the students will need)

- an exemplary text that highlights the author's choice of particular features

- a published text modified to suit the task

- a synthesis of texts with similar properties from various sources

- a collection of texts serving the same purpose but with slightly different approaches
- a single paragraph, an extended text, or an excerpt from a lengthy text
- a text or texts written by students from a previous year on a similar task
- a multimodal and/or digital text
- a poorly written text that students can critique for improvements
- a set of texts at different levels of achievement, annotated to suggest how to 'bump it up' from one level to the next.

After reading the model text together to ensure comprehension, students might be guided to:

- identify the purpose of the text and provide it with a name (for example, by choosing from a given list of genres)
- analyse how the text is structured to achieve its purpose, labelling the function that each stage plays (for example, in an information report: to define and describe, to provide an example, to classify, to explain a sequence and so on)
- discuss how the stages are sequenced and whether there is scope for changing the order
- decide whether the text has a combination of purposes (a macrogenre) rather than a single purpose (such as a report on obesity that includes explanations of causes and consequences, rules for eating sensibly, an anecdote, suggestions for getting help and so on)
- observe smaller optional phases that they might include in their own text (for example, in a narrative: phases of dialogue, events, reactions, descriptions of characters or setting and so on)
- explore the author's choice of language features or multimodal elements
- compare how different texts engage with the audience or develop the field
- contrast two genres that have different ways of beginning and ending
- evaluate the overall success of the text in achieving its purpose
- consider how they might draw on various aspects of the model text in developing their own draft.

This book is a refreshing reminder of the value of model texts. Through detailed analysis of model texts from across the curriculum areas, it provides a valuable reference for teachers as they source, analyse and compose their own models to teach writing in the classroom.

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PART 1

Introduction

Chapter 1

A functional view of language

In *Investigating model texts for learning*, we explore meanings in a range of texts composed by or for primary students in Australian schools. To do this we draw on a functional view of language in line with the Australian Curriculum: English, and national and state literacy policies in Australia.

A functional view of language is based on a theory called systemic functional linguistics (SFL), which was originally developed by Halliday (Halliday & Hasan, 1985) and has been extended for educational purposes by linguists working with teachers in Australian schools (Callow, 2013; de Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016; Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Humphrey, 2017; Martin & Rose, 2008). A functional view is particularly useful for teachers because it recognises that language has evolved to get things done – so its terminology and descriptions, which we call a **metalanguage**, are tools for teachers and students to discuss how writers and composers make choices to get things done with language!

Because a functional approach views language as a system of choices for making meaning, it has significant implications for the way we teach writing. An enduring challenge in the literacy classroom is how to support all students to develop language and literacy skills that enable successful engagement and progression with curriculum learning. Students bring uneven language and literacy repertoires to our classrooms, with individual students varying in their development and control of language resources for different social and school contexts, as well as in their rates of progress. Teachers play a critical role in ensuring that all learners have the expanded language repertoire they need to successfully interpret and compose texts for curriculum learning. This means providing all students with the opportunity to explore choices for meaning-making in texts others have written, including talking about how successful these choices are, as well as speculating about other language choices that could have

been made to shape a different text. As students engage with shared reading and writing of model texts, we are expanding their available choices for composing effective texts, and also extending their repertoire for interpretation and critique.

In *Investigating model texts for learning*, we take a 'top down' approach to exploring meaning. Rather than approaching texts as words and phrases ordered in correctly structured sentences, building up to paragraphs and whole texts, we begin by considering the contexts in which they are composed and interpreted, including their overall purposes and their role in curriculum learning. We have selected representative texts from the four areas of English (ENG), Science (SCI), History and Social Sciences (HASS), and Health and Physical Education (HPE) – and made connections to their role in the curriculum. They are called model texts because they have been judged by teachers as being effective texts that represent substantial attainment of curriculum standards, and because they include features of structure and language that are highly valued in the Australian Curriculum: English. As such they are rich models to learn language, to learn through language and to learn about language.

The detailed and comprehensive analysis we include in chapters 2 to 6 draws on SFL's layered description of context as genre and register. This analysis aims to draw teachers' attention to the structural and language patterns of the texts from a number of perspectives. We anticipate that teachers will use this analysis to identify a smaller number of features that they would like to model in their own classrooms to meet the particular learning needs and contexts of their students.

Clean copies of the texts are provided as on online resource for teachers to adapt and use in the classroom, or to guide their own work of developing and using model texts (texts available for download at petaa.edu.au).

Genres: Purpose and structure

In Chapter 2 we explore a sample of texts from across the curriculum areas to show how the structure of a text contributes to its unfolding purpose. We use SFL's theory of **genre** (Martin & Rose, 2008), which is glossed as 'the ways people get things done with language in a particular cultural context'.

Text 1 and Text 2, included here, are examples of two genres used frequently in primary schools. Text 1 is a report, which is written to share knowledge about a phenomenon by classifying and describing it. Text 2 is a procedure, which unfolds as steps to help the reader to achieve the goal of making a triangle. We have annotated these texts to show their structure. On the left we identify functional elements called **stages** and, on the right, the smaller, more variable elements called **phases** (see Chapter 2 for further description of phases).

Text 1 Report

STAGES	Triangle	Phases
GENERAL STATEMENT	A triangle is a geometrical shape with three sides and three angles. There are three basic types of triangles: scalene, isosceles and equilateral.	Classification
DESCRIPTION	A scalene triangle has no sides or angles the same. Some scalene triangles are also right-angled triangles.	Type 1
	An isosceles triangle has two sides and angles that are the same, and one that is different. A right-angled triangle has a 90° angle.	Type 2
	In an equilateral triangle, all the sides and angles are the same. Each of the angles of an equilateral triangle is 60°.	Type 3

Text 2 Procedure

STAGES	How to make a triangle	Phases
GOAL	How do you make a triangle in Illustrator 2019?	
STEPS	Select the Polygon Tool.	Step 1
	Click once on the artboard where you want the shape to appear.	Step 2
	In the dialogue box, enter three sides with a 60 mm radius.	Step 3
	Click OK.	Step 4

Identifying both stages and phases allows us to describe and explain ways that genres vary and can be transformed to achieve purpose. For example, we can identify a phase which elaborates the meaning of an item introduced in Step 1 by defining it.

Text 2 Procedure (expanded)

STAGES	How to make a triangle	Phases
GOAL	How do you make a triangle in Illustrator 2019?	
STEPS	Select the Polygon Tool.	Step 1
	The Polygon Tool is a draw/reshape tool, which means that it can reshape (or edit) existing polygons and parallel polygons.	Definition
	Click once on the artboard where you want the shape to appear.	Step 2

As we will see, identifying different stages and phases is a very useful 'way in' to exploring the language patterns that distinguish texts.

The Australian Curriculum: English identifies three broad purposes for writing: imaginative, informative and persuasive. These are useful to name categories of texts, but they do not enable us to explain the connection to language. For example, the texts we have looked at above are informative, but they are different in purpose. Our analysis of stages and phases also shows us that they are very different in the way they use language to achieve their particular goal.

Register and language organisers: Metafunctions

In Chapters 3 to 6, we take a close look at a wider range of texts to show the significant patterns of language in genres. To do this we extend our view of context to include SFL's theory of **register** (Martin & Rose, 2007, 2008). We can describe patterns and variations of the register of a text as a combination of language choices that construct:

- the topic or subject matter (for example, an everyday or a specialised **field**)

- the relationship or stance we take towards our audience (for example, personal, subjective, impersonal, objective, novice or expert **tenor**)

- the medium and the channel of communication (dense, carefully crafted and written-like or free-flowing and spoken-like **mode**).

The systems of language we choose from are called **metafunctions**, which are closely connected to language organisers of the Australian Curriculum: English. Table 1.1 shows the relationships that can be made among these important concepts.

Table 1.1 Relating aspects of context to systems of language

Systemic functional linguistics		Australian Curriculum
Register variables	Metafunctions	Names of language sub strands
Field	Ideational	Language for expressing and developing ideas
Tenor	Interpersonal	Language for interacting with others
Mode	Textual	Language to structure and organise texts

Exploring language through the lens of register gives us tools to explain how language works within and across genres. Let's look again at Text 1 and Text 2 to explore these connections. In this sample analysis (presented on the next page), we have focused only on language features that are introduced at Year 1 level of the Australian Curriculum: English. We have used:

- green highlighting to identify the verb groups that realise **processes** (that is, the happenings and states)
- red highlighting to identify the who or what involved in that process, called **participants** (typically, but not always, noun groups or adjective groups)
- blue highlighting to identify the **circumstances** (the adverbs, adverb groups and prepositional phrases that give details such as when, where and how).

Text 1 Report (revisited)

STAGES	Triangles	Phases
GENERAL STATEMENT	A triangle is a geometrical shape with three sides and three angles. There are three basic types of triangles: scalene, isosceles and equilateral.	Classification
DESCRIPTION	A scalene triangle has no sides or angles the same. Some scalene triangles are also right-angled triangles.	Type 1
	An isosceles triangle has two sides and angles that that are the same and one that is different. A right-angled triangle has a 90° angle.	Type 2
	In an equilateral triangle all the sides and angles are the same. Each of the angles of an equilateral triangle is 60°.	Type 3

Text 2 Procedure (revisited)

STAGES	How to make a triangle	Phases
GOAL	How do you make a triangle in Illustrator 2019?	
STEPS	Select the Polygon Tool.	Step 1
	Click once on the artboard.	Step 2
	In the dialogue box enter three sides with a 60 mm radius.	Step 3
	Click OK.	Step 4

The patterns of language which are revealed by colour coding tell us a great deal about the register of the texts. For example, we can tell by the amount of red on Text 1 that the field is mostly about who or what. The participants that are placed in first position of the sentences, as sentence openers, tell us about the way the text is organised in the written mode to focus on topics. From the perspective of tenor, the sentences are statements and the writer is taking an expert role in giving information. The writer does not include attitudes showing opinions or feelings – so we can also say the text has an objective tenor.

In Text 2, the sentence openers are the verbs that create action processes. This tells us that the focus of the sentences is telling the reader **what to do**. Positioning the action verbs first in most of the steps enables the reader to easily see the next action as they are carrying out the procedure. This is also indicative of an expert tenor, but the sentences are commands and thus establish a relationship of unequal power, with the writer taking up an authoritative stance. Note that in Text 2, circumstances are also included as it is very important that a reader knows the where, how and when to successfully follow the STEPS of the procedure and achieve the GOAL.

Expanding our students' repertoire of genres and registers

As students progress through the primary years, they are developing an expanding repertoire to construct meaning. We can explore this expansion in two ways: firstly, as learning to combine genres as they engage with increasingly complex disciplinary tasks; and secondly, as developing more specialised and flexible ways of using and organising language to write texts on increasingly discipline-specific topics for broadening school, social and civic audiences.

Combining genres

Some of the texts that you will find in this book are combinations of genres, known as **macrogenres**. Text 3 is an investigation or experimental record, which is an example of a macrogenre. The investigation combines the genres of procedure, recount and explanation in order to conduct, record and explain a science investigation. The GOAL, MATERIALS and METHOD stages instruct how to conduct the experiment; the RESULTS stage records or recounts what was observed during the experiment; and the INTERPRETATION stage explains the observed results by connecting them in a causal relationship, drawing on science theory.

The exact nature of the experimental record changes across the school years. For more on types of investigations and inquiry texts see *Teaching language in context* (Derewianka & Jones, 2016, page 280).

Text: SCI 3, investigation (experimental record)

STAGES	Sinking and floating
GOAL	**Aim** To investigate which objects sink or float in water.
MATERIALS	**Materials** • 1 tub of water • waterproof objects, some light, and some heavy, some wide and some narrow

METHOD	**Procedure**
	1. Place each object in the water, one at a time.
	2. Observe the object to see if it sinks or floats.
	3. Record results.
RESULTS	**Observation**
	Some objects (the balloon and the fly swat) floated right on top of the water. Some objects (the wooden block and the rock) sank to the bottom. Some (the pencil) only sank a little bit.
INTERPRETATION	**Explanation**
	If the force of the water is stronger than the force of the object, the object floats.
	If the force of the object is stronger than the force of the water, the object sinks.

Another way of combining genres is by embedding. An embedded genre occurs as a stage or a phase within another genre. For example, a report about an animal may include an explanation of how it breeds, thus embedding an explanation sequence. Likewise, an exposition genre may include an explanation to provide causes and consequences (see Text HPE 9 below).

Expanding registers

Another way students expand their repertoire for composing texts is through expanding their language choices for expressing disciplinary learning, in texts of increasing length and complexity, for a broadening range of audiences. This means they are developing more specialised ways of using language to meet the demands of curriculum learning across the years of schooling. It also means they are developing ways of communicating in other spheres of their lives.

The two texts below, from Chapter 6, show a movement into specialised understandings about the field of health. The student has adopted an expert tenor role and crafted the text to guide the reader, as is needed in the written mode.

Text: HPE 1, protocol

STAGES	How to stay safe	Phases
GOAL	How to stay safe at the playground	
INSTRUCTIONS	1. Go with an adult.	Rules 1 to 6
	2. If you think it might be dangerous, stop, look, listen and think.	
	3. If you get stuck on the climbing bars, ask for help before you fall.	
	4. If a stranger tries to talk to you, move away.	
	5. Don't ever go with a stranger.	
	6. If there is trouble, tell an adult.	

Text: HPE 3, descriptive report

STAGES	My friend Amira	Phases
GENERAL STATEMENT	My friend Amira has many good qualities.	Preview
DESCRIPTION	**Appearance** Amira has a lovely smile and white teeth. Her hair is black with plaits.	Feature 1: physical appearance
	Physical qualities Amira is really good at running and climbing on the monkey bars. She can skip to 100 with the skipping rope. She knows how to do hand-clapping games and she is in the choir.	Feature 2: physical qualities
	Social qualities Amira is a good friend and she is very kind and helpful. She is always happy to see me. When I'm sad, she gives me a hug. If people tease me, she sticks up for me. She is friends with everyone.	Feature 3: social qualities

The exposition shown as Text HPE 9 represents a meeting point between everyday and education domains. It moves into a highly specialised expression of field through condensing activities as abstract concepts, for example, 'overuse of alcohol' and 'the three major causes of teen death'. The Proposals phase requires students to apply specialised knowledge about alcohol to provide specific advice. Such tasks require a flexible understanding of register for students to appropriately position themselves, both within the school field of learning and the social domain of advice for peers.

Text: HPE 9, analytical exposition

STAGES	The use and dangers of alcohol	Phases
POSITION	**Introduction** The overuse of alcohol can cause significant harm to adolescents. Even though the Australian alcohol guidelines recommend that young people delay their first drink until they are 18 years old, more than 40% of 12–17 year-olds in Australia have had a full drink of alcohol before that age. In many social groups, binge drinking and being drunk proves that Saturday night has been successful, and young people forget its harmful effects.	Problem

ARGUMENTS	**Short- and long-term effects of alcohol abuse**	Effect 1: short-term
	In the short term, alcohol exposes young people to a greater risk of injury and harm, and doing things they may later regret.	Explain
	Because of their developing brains, adolescents are more likely to take risks than adults. For this reason, alcohol contributes to the three major causes of teen death: injury, homicide & suicide.	
	(*Note: Effect 2 and Effect 3 in the arguments have been omitted*)	
RECOMMEND-ATION	**How to say no**	Proposals
	It can be very embarrassing for young people to reduce alcohol consumption when everyone around them is drunk and having a good time. If you are given a drink, you can just hold it, pretend to drink it, and tip out a bit every few minutes behind a bush. You can hold a can of Coke in your hand and just say that it has been charged with vodka. You can say you have to play an important game the next day, or that you are on antibiotics, or that your dad will smell it on your breath when he picks you up.	
	You may be able to avoid difficult situations if you do different things with your friends, like go shopping, or camping, or a sleepover. We can make healthy choices for ourselves, instead of giving in to peer pressure.	

A number of the texts that we have included in the book, particularly in the later primary years, shift register in this way to strategically achieve their aims. These texts demonstrate a complex weaving of meanings, from the academic to the civic and the everyday. As you explore the model texts in Chapters 2 to 6, we draw attention to the ways students' expanding literacy repertoires (for composing and responding to texts) enables them to apply an increasingly flexible range of registers as well as increasingly complex genres and macrogenres (see also *Grammar and meaning*, Chapter 6, page 157).

Using model texts in the classroom

Considering what to model and how to model writing in the classroom must take into account what students already know and can do with language, as well as what they will need to know and be able to do, in order to meet the language and literacy demands of any planned learning experiences.

An important starting point is to identify the genre focus for a unit of work or series of lessons. How will students demonstrate achievement of the learning

outcomes? For what purposes will they be composing texts and what will they be required to write? Once the targeted genre or macrogenre has been identified, there are a number of considerations to plan for writing. A range of quality texts in different forms will likely be used to build the field or knowledge of subject matter for the curriculum unit.

A distinction needs to be made at this point between a **model text**, which reflects the expectations of the writing task, and a **source text**, which students may need to draw on in developing their understanding of the content. Students might, for example, read and make notes from a range of source texts on recreational drugs, exploring their effects and statistics of use, whereas the model text will need to prepare students to write an exposition. The model text therefore might draw on a related topic, such as the harmful effects of alcohol (see Chapter 6) to model the features of an exposition.

To model the genre, teachers need to select or create model texts that are worth investigating, guided by questions such as:

- Does the text provide a valuable model for extending the students' repertoire of **language for writing in the selected context**?

- Is the text useful for learning through language, by **engaging students with new content from curriculum areas of schooling**?

- Is the text **a valuable resource for talking about the language itself**, including the verbal and visual representations that contribute different kinds of meaning?

It may be preferable to have more than one model text, with an accumulation of model texts likely to include material written by the teacher, material sourced as authentic models, and quality material written by students and adapted, if necessary, for teaching. Exploring more than one example of the focus genre provides multiple illustrations of how purpose can be achieved. It also creates opportunities to learn new field-specific language, to support differentiated learning and to compare the way that different texts achieve their purpose. It enables students to consider typical features of the genre and may include the following questions:

- What stages and phases and language features are common to all examples of the genre (what is obligatory)?

- What stages and phases and language features do most of the model texts share (what is likely or typical)?

- What unique stages or phases or language features appear in some of the texts and what function does that serve (what is optional)?

This kind of talk about texts draws students' attention to key features of the genre, while also fostering a view of genre as flexible and variable according to purpose and context. Foundational to such talk about model texts is the development of a

shared metalanguage, so that while exploring model texts students are learning new language, learning about language and, importantly, developing a language to talk about texts.

Metalanguage provides students with a portable toolkit that enables them to generalise from the specific instance of language to the language system, developing understandings about when and why particular language choices are made. It also provides a tool to reflect on their own and others' composing, and their growing understandings about language. As students develop an expanding repertoire for writing throughout the primary school years, use of a consistent metalanguage to talk about texts in the classroom is a critical feature of whole-school approaches to teaching writing. Metalanguage encountered in Chapters 2 to 6 is drawn from the Australian Curriculum: English. Readers are also referred to PETAA grammar texts for further reading to enhance understanding and consolidate metalanguage.

Using this book

In this book, we assume knowledge of the teaching and learning cycle. See for example Derewianka and Jones (2016) for an illustration of how this pedagogic approach is applied to scaffold learners towards independent writing. However, possible approaches to using the model texts in Chapters 2 to 6 are discussed here.

One common approach is for teachers to write their own model text at the start of the unit and use that as 'something to shoot for' with their students. The benefits of writing one's own model text, and using this as a basis for recursive modelling of the language structures and features of the targeted genre, include the expert insight they provide the teacher into those aspects of genre and register that might prove challenging to students. Writing one's own model text also ensures the model text is pitched at the appropriate level of challenge. In this approach, the model text is revisited throughout the unit as a focus for mini lessons examining specific features more closely. This can particularly suit classrooms working with English Language Learners because it provides multiple opportunities for students to understand the Field, and to appropriate new language forms and features needed for later composing. For examples of this approach see Parkin and Harper (2018).

Alternatively, students may be asked to write a draft of the target genre, which they gradually refine and revise over the course of the unit as they learn more about the genre. Close engagement with the model texts and mini lessons helps students to develop understanding of the text staging, possible phases and register choices they can apply to refine their own writing. See for example Derewianka (2020), *Exploring how texts work*.

A third approach is for the teacher and students to read and discuss a range of model texts within the same or a related field, gradually expanding students' understanding of the target genre through text deconstruction and joint construction before engaging in independent writing of the target genre.

Each of these approaches is underpinned by a scaffolding approach to learning

and reflects a tailored approach to the teaching and learning cycle. How you use the model texts in this book in your own classroom will need to be tailored to the needs, interests and current attainment of the learner group. You may simply use them as a reference and guide for the model texts you write for your class; you may consider how they can complement other existing model texts in the school or how they may be useful to differentiate teaching within the classroom.

Finally, we hope *Investigating model texts for learning* will support teachers to make connections between model texts within and across disciplines, to gradually expand and refine student understandings about the relationship between language and context in order to develop increasingly flexible student writing repertoires.