

A NEW GRAMMAR COMPANION

FOR TEACHERS

BEVERLY DEREWIANKA



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PREFACE

Over the past few years, e:lit has published a number of books dealing directly or indirectly with questions of grammar. In the widely read *Exploring How Texts Work* (1990) by Beverly Derewianka certain grammatical features were highlighted in terms of how they operated within particular genres. This provided insights into how grammar could be treated functionally in context. John Collerson followed this up with a more detailed account of English grammar from a functional perspective in *English Grammar: A Functional Approach* (1994). This work was groundbreaking, introducing teachers to a different way of looking at language based on Halliday's *Functional Grammar*. In 1997, PETA published John Collerson's *Grammar in Teaching* which demonstrated a rich variety of ways in which functional grammar could be drawn upon in classroom activities.

So why do we need another book on grammar? The increasing interest in grammar throughout Australia and its appearance in a number of syllabus and curriculum documents — including the *Australian Curriculum: English* — has stimulated a demand for a handbook which familiarises teachers with the basics of the English grammatical system. While teachers have been excited by the potential of working with a functional approach to grammar, many are still a bit daunted by its newness and the terminology. This book is intended therefore as a bridge for teachers between what they already know about grammar and how they might extend that knowledge to include a more functional perspective.

A New Grammar Companion employs standard grammatical terminology which is familiar to teachers and the community, but it also uses terms which allow for a more functional interpretation.

This book is not intended as a comprehensive grammar of English. It provides an overview of those features of grammar that have been found to be useful in school contexts in terms of supporting and extending students' ability to use English productively for educational purposes. For further detail on any of the aspects, you are encouraged to consult more detailed descriptions of English (as in some of the references in the final chapter).

Unlike the previous edition, which was organised according to grammatical categories, this edition is organised around the main functions that language plays in our lives: expressing and connecting ideas, interacting with others and creating coherent texts. Another major difference is that the content now extends into secondary schooling, dealing with the language challenges faced by older students.

We are sure that *A New Grammar Companion* will become a well-thumbed reference and guide, which will truly keep you company and provide reassurance as you introduce students to the fascinating workings of grammar.

PETAA
Primary English Teaching Association Australia

*This book is dedicated to the
memory of Vladimir Derewianka
who was constantly intrigued by
the possibilities of language.*

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Thanks also need to go to the tireless e:lit staff, to Rema Gnanadickam for her editing and Pamela Horsnell for her clean design and layout.

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What is grammar?

While there are many technical definitions of grammar, for our purposes we could simply say that grammar is a way of describing how a language works to make meaning.

Why learn about grammar?

We learn about grammar to:

- be able to reflect on how the English language works
- be able to use language effectively, appropriately and accurately
- understand how different kinds of meaning are created through the use of different grammatical forms so that we can control and shape those meanings more skilfully and effectively ourselves
- critically analyse texts so we can understand how grammar has been used to achieve certain effects
- examine patterns of language and word choices so that we can appreciate, interpret and create well-constructed texts
- have a shared language for teaching and learning about the main features of the English language.

A multi-purpose grammar

The description of grammar provided here has been designed so that teachers can use it for a number of different purposes: for exploring how language functions to create different types of meaning; for understanding the structure or formation of various language features; and for anticipating where students might need particular assistance with certain features. The book therefore includes sections on looking at meaning, looking at form, and troubleshooting.

If you are primarily interested in **meaning**, you might like to focus on those sections that discuss how our linguistic choices create certain meanings. In this book we are viewing grammar as a resource – an array of possibilities from which we can choose. Learning grammar in this sense is seen as extending a learner's potential to make and interpret meanings.

If you are primarily interested in **form**, you might like to focus on those sections that explain how various grammatical features are structured. A traditional motive for teaching about grammar has been the development of an analytical approach to language – an ability to ‘reason grammatically’ – along with the identification and

naming of different grammatical categories, providing students with a language for talking about language. Knowing how language is structured helps us to deal with questions such as:

- What does a noun group consist of?
- How are different verb tenses formed?
- What does a clause look like?
- How are messages combined to form sentences?

Preferably, however, the focus will be on the relationship between **meaning** and **form**. In this book, we look at how the different grammatical categories are involved in the construction of meaning with questions such as:

- What range of meanings do verbs express?
- How can my choice of nouns affect the meaning of the text?
- How can I use certain types of adjectives to express my opinion about something?
- Which grammatical features are involved in skills such as classifying, defining, describing, generalising, exemplifying?
- Which linguistic features can help me produce a text that is coherent and cohesive?
- How do grammatical patterns change from text to text? Why and with what effect?
- How does the context affect the kinds of grammatical choices made?

If you are concerned about the kinds of problems students might encounter, look for the **Troubleshooting** notes. There are certain linguistic structures that often cause problems, particularly for young students and EAL/ESL¹ learners. In many cases, the problems will sort themselves out over time. Often, however, it is useful for the teacher to be able to identify trouble spots so that the problem can be explained or so that activities can be designed to address the difficulty. ESL learners will need a much greater focus on developing their control over English grammatical structures and meaning.

It is this area that many people associate with the learning of grammar: the correction of 'mistakes'. This is a legitimate area of concern. Students' language is often judged by their control over certain linguistic features, and this can be a significant factor in examinations, job applications, and so on. It is important, however, not to let this get out of perspective. Many 'problems' reflect students' use of social dialects, especially in the spoken mode: *he done it; me and him are going home*. In the written mode, however, there are probably only a dozen or so problem structures that regularly crop up – and most of them are to do with punctuation, not grammar. Typical of these are issues such as the use of 'comma splices' (*It was getting late, we went home.*); 'run on sentences' (*The cows got out of the paddock they ran through the streets the farmer couldn't catch them.*); and 'sentence fragments' (*There were lots of animals. Such as kangaroos, koalas and rabbits.*)

¹ Learners of English as an Additional Language/English as a Second Language

A functional perspective

The approach to grammar adopted in this book draws heavily upon the pioneering work done by Professor Michael Halliday in the area of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Functional Grammar is built upon a series of assumptions about the way language works in context:

- Language is a dynamic, complex system of resources for making meaning.
- Language reflects the culture in which it has evolved. It is not a neutral medium, but expresses certain world views, values, beliefs and attitudes.
- Our language choices change from situation to situation, depending on the social purpose for which language is being used, the subject matter, who is involved, and whether the language is spoken or written.
- The emphasis in language study is on how people use authentic language in various contexts in real life to achieve their purposes. The particular focus of this book will be on the language needed for successful participation in school contexts.
- A knowledge of grammar can help us to critically evaluate our own texts and those of others (eg identifying point of view; examining how language can be manipulated to achieve certain effects and position the reader in different ways; knowing how language can be used to construct various identities or a particular way of viewing the world).

A functional approach looks at how language enables us to do things in our daily lives. To participate successfully in school and the community, for example, students need to know how to use language:

- for achieving different social purposes
- for sharing ideas about their experience of the world
- for making connections between these ideas
- for interacting with others
- and for constructing coherent texts in both spoken and written modes.

Achieving different social purposes

As they progress through school and life, learners need to be able to use language in order to achieve a range of social purposes such as describing, explaining, arguing or recounting. These different social purposes are expressed through different text types (or genres). Young children operate with a moderate range of text types, which generally have a relatively basic, unelaborated structure (eg recounts involving only a couple of events, arguments that are often unsupported by evidence, explanations of only a sentence or two in length). With teacher guidance over the years, students should be able to confidently interpret and employ a wide range of text types for a variety of social purposes, including texts that have a more complex, unpredictable structure. This provides students with a solid preparation for the demands of secondary school and life in the community.

The *Australian Curriculum: English* requires that students develop proficiency in a range of text types for a variety of purposes. While not dealing in detail with different text types, this book will refer to how different grammatical resources are drawn on in achieving different social purposes, such as the use of the past tense to refer to events in a recount or the use of the present tense to refer to 'timeless' actions in an information report.

Expressing ideas

A major function of language is to represent experience, to help us to express and understand what goes on in our lives. This is sometimes called the 'observer' function of language. In the school context, this includes using and understanding the language of the different areas of the curriculum. It is now well known that each disciplinary area has its own way of using language to develop knowledge and understandings relevant to that area. The language of science, for example, is quite different from the language of history. The language used in English literary texts is quite different from that of geography texts. Students need to be able to read and write texts that become increasingly technical, abstract, and subject-specific as they move through the school system from primary to secondary school.

On entering school, students' language will be concerned with more particular, everyday understandings ('my family', 'our neighbourhood'). As they grow older, they need to be able to talk and write in more generalised terms ('families', 'dinosaurs') about less familiar topics which often require research ('the planets', 'volcanic eruptions') and specialist terminology ('solar system', 'lava'). It cannot be taken for granted that this type of language will develop automatically.

Chapter 2 illustrates how grammar functions to represent experience: the kinds of activities taking place; the participants in those activities; and the circumstances surrounding those activities.

Connecting ideas

Not only do students need to know how to express ideas through language, they need to make connections between ideas. Simple connections can be made by using words such as *and*, *but* and *so*. However, if students are to be able to comprehend and produce more complex connections between ideas, they will need to deal with more sophisticated ways of reasoning and creating logical relationships through language. Knowing how to construct and interpret lengthy sentences that contain a number of ideas in complex relationships is a skill that continues to develop throughout secondary school.

Chapter 3 deals with the various ways in which ideas can be connected to make richer sentences.

Interacting with others

Another major function of language is to enable interaction. Through language we construct particular roles and relationships. Students need to be able to use language effectively to interact with a range of people. In the early years, they will use language in more informal, familiar ways with known peers and adults, freely expressing their feelings and attitudes. Gradually they will also need to learn ways of expressing themselves that are a bit more formal and detached, with a more subtle use of evaluative language and modality, particularly in the written mode.

In school, children need the skills of group interaction, the ability to take part in class discussions, the poise to talk with both familiar and unfamiliar adults. They need to know how to cope in situations with different degrees of authority and power. They need to know how to take on an expanding range of roles: group leader; observer; apprentice; mediator; initiator; questioner; co-learner. They need to be able to evaluate their own interaction skills and to reflect critically on the ways in which others use language to interact with them in oral and written language (eg Are they being persuaded to accept a particular point of view? How is language being used to do this? How might they recognise this and resist if necessary?). In many cases, children will need explicit assistance in developing these interpersonal skills.

Chapter 4 looks at how different grammatical categories are involved when making statements, asking questions, giving commands, expressing opinions, making judgements and engaging with others.

Creating coherent and cohesive texts

Finally, language functions to create texts that are cohesive and coherent. One of the major shifts in children's language use over the primary years is from the spoken mode to the written mode. When students enter school, they are accustomed to using language in face-to-face oral interaction. It is spontaneous and immediate. It generally refers to the 'here-and-now' and to the surrounding context. There is a conversation partner who can provide support by asking questions, giving feedback, and requesting clarification. When moving to the written mode, students need to learn how to use language in quite different ways. Texts will involve a degree of planning, revising and reworking and will therefore be more highly structured. Because the writer has more time to construct the text, the sentences are generally more 'crafted', with greater complexity and density. And because a written text needs to be able to stand on its own, the reader cannot get help from an interaction partner or the surrounding setting. The reader must use cues from the text itself to understand how it is developing. The writer needs to know how to guide the reader through the text. This involves quite sophisticated language skills (eg using the beginning of the sentence and paragraphs to indicate how the topic is developing, using text connectives, and compacting information so that it does not sound rambling). Moving successfully from spoken to written modes is one of the major achievements of primary schooling, requiring the development of a number of high-level skills and strategies. Even in secondary school, however, the ability to create and comprehend highly complex texts continues to develop.

Chapter 5 deals with the ways in which texts are shaped in ways that make them more cohesive and coherent.

Texts in context

The language choices we make are influenced by the context: the purpose, field, tenor and mode.

The **social purpose** for which we use language impacts on our choice of **genre**/text type and the way in which the genre unfolds in characteristic stages to achieve its purpose. If the social purpose, for example, is to tell what happened, the

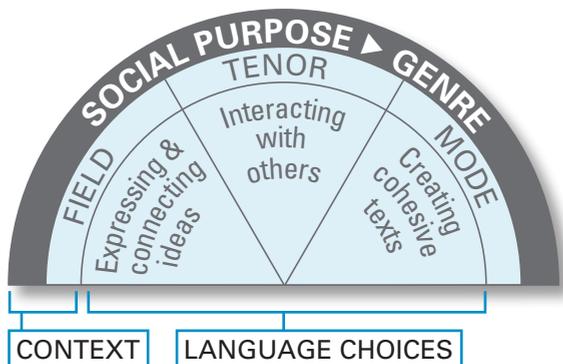
typical choice of genre would be a recount. A recount will generally begin with an 'Orientation' stage in which the various participants are introduced and the time and setting clarified. This is followed by a 'Record of Events', outlining what happened in chronological order. An exposition, on the other hand, will typically begin with a 'Statement of Position', outlining the proposal being argued for. This will be followed by a series of supporting 'Arguments' which are brought together in the 'Conclusion'.²

The **field** being developed – 'What is the subject-matter?' – will influence our language choices for **expressing and connecting ideas** (the 'ideational' function of language). If the field, for example, involves providing information about different types of rocks, then our language choices would probably include technical, generalised, descriptive noun groups (*most igneous rocks are silicate minerals*) and relating verbs in the present tense (*Sedimentary rocks are less abundant.*) Ideas might be connected in a causal relationship: *Sedimentary rocks are formed x by tiny grains of material pressing against each other.*

The **tenor** of the context – 'Who is involved in the interaction?' – will influence our language choices for **interacting with others** (the 'interpersonal' function of language). Here we are concerned with how the roles being taken up (husband/wife; teacher/student; doctor/patient; shopkeeper/customer) and the relationships between people (intimate, familiar, distant or infrequent) affect the ways in which we interact through language. Factors such as age, gender, authority, expertise, and class can also play a part, as can the degree to which the context is 'interpersonally charged'.

The **mode** – 'What is the channel of communication?' – will influence our language choices when we are **creating cohesive and coherent texts** (the 'textual' function of language). The free-flowing, spontaneous language of spoken texts, for example, is quite different from the compact, carefully crafted language of written texts.

Any particular combination of field, tenor and mode in a situation is referred to as the 'register'. By being aware of the genre and register, we are able to predict the language choices that would be typical of that situation. We can represent the relationship between the context and language system in the following diagram:



² The various ways in which text types are structured have been described elsewhere, for example *Exploring How Texts Work* (PETA 1990).

Language and learning

The following table summarises how the different language functions are involved in students' learning through the years of school.

EARLY YEARS



LATER YEARS

LANGUAGE FOR ACHIEVING DIFFERENT PURPOSES

Producing and comprehending a small range of text types with basic structures for specific purposes.

Producing and interpreting a wide range of text types for varied social purposes, with more complex structures (multiple purposes, 'hybrids' (eg *infomercials*), and less predictable stages).

LANGUAGE FOR REPRESENTING EXPERIENCE

Dealing with everyday, familiar, individualised, concrete, non-specialised subject matter, represented by non-elaborated noun groups, simple verb groups using a limited range of tenses, and a basic selection of adverbials (primarily *when*, *where* and *how*).

Dealing with more technical, generalised, abstract, discipline-specific subject matter, represented by richly elaborated noun groups, complex verb groups using a broad range of tenses and aspects, and an extensive variety of adverbials expressing the circumstances surrounding the activity.

LANGUAGE FOR CONNECTING IDEAS

Linking ideas in simple, spoken-like manner, using connectors such as *and*, *but* and *so*.

Creating more complex connections between ideas and managing the development of lengthy, well-structured sentences containing a variety of clause types.

LANGUAGE FOR INTERACTING WITH OTHERS

Operating in contexts that involve more personal interaction with known individuals; a limited range of roles; freely expressed emotions; evaluations grounded in personal opinion not necessarily supported by evidence.

Operating in contexts which include more impersonal, formal, interaction with a wide range of individuals and groups – both familiar and unfamiliar; expanded range of roles; more nuanced expression of emotion; more detached and informed appreciation and judgement, grounded in explicit criteria and supported by evidence; discerning use of intensifiers; careful use of modality and other resources to create spaces for alternative perspectives and possibilities; critical awareness of how language can be used to position self and others.

LANGUAGE FOR CREATING COHERENT AND COHESIVE TEXTS

Participating in face-to-face, spontaneous, context-dependent dialogues; engaging with relatively brief written texts involving minimal use of cohesive resources.

Engaging with texts that are monologic, crafted and planned, and independent of the immediate context; comprehending and producing lengthy, cohesive texts that require careful organisation and guidance of the reader.

Terminology

In all contemporary grammars of English, there are terms that relate to the grammatical class (eg noun) and terms that relate to the functions that such a grammatical category can perform (eg Participant in an activity³). This is important, as each grammatical category can do a variety of jobs. There is no one-to-one correspondence between form and function. An adverb, for example, can tell about the circumstances surrounding an activity (*quickly*), or it can express a particular viewpoint (*unfortunately*), or it can intensify (*very*), or it can indicate the strength of commitment (*probably*), or it can help to make links within a text (*firstly*), and so on.

In this edition, there is greater detail in terms of the two kinds of terminology. Ideally, students should be familiar both with terms that refer to form (eg noun group, verb group) and terms that refer to their functions (eg Participant, Process). Some teachers, particularly when focusing on meaning, might choose to work just with the functional terms – especially when students are first learning about grammar. Others, particularly when focusing on form and structure, might use the formal terms. Ultimately, it is a matter of what students already know about grammar, how that knowledge can be extended in ways that are productive, and how the knowledge about language is built over the years, preferably through whole-school planning for teaching and learning.

Over the centuries, different terminology has developed as our understanding about language has evolved. In many cases, different terms are in circulation, depending on the particular description of English and when it was in use. In this book, footnotes have been used to indicate when a particular language feature might be referred to using different terms.

Links to the *Australian Curriculum: English*

The current edition has been substantially revised in order to provide support to teachers as they implement the national curriculum – and in particular the Knowledge about Language strand. The organisation of the Language strand reflects the three major functions of language: ‘Interacting with others’ (the Interpersonal function); ‘text structure and organisation’ (the Textual function); and ‘expressing and developing ideas’ (the Ideational function). The terminology used here is very similar to that in the national curriculum, though it might vary slightly in certain instances.

Throughout this edition, relevant Content Descriptions and Elaborations from the English curriculum have been included. These are shaded in blue. The Elaborations are distinguished by the use of a dot point.

Considerations for teaching grammar

Most children will learn how to use grammar implicitly by engaging in extensive and purposeful talking, listening, reading, writing and viewing. Children – including those from language backgrounds other than English – come to school with

³ A capital letter is often used for functional terms.

a highly-developed ability to use language in rich and complex ways. Their language will continue to develop as they use it for a variety of purposes in their homes, in the community and school. In addition to learning language through social interaction, this book will assume that the teacher plays a deliberate role in enhancing children's use of language and in developing their knowledge about language.

Learning to ...

In the classroom, students will be learning to use language in particular ways. The teacher's role is to design contexts and plan activities in all curriculum areas that provide opportunities for learners to develop the particular language they need in order to participate effectively in school. The teacher's knowledge about language will assist in selecting resources, choosing texts, focusing on salient points, constructing language-rich activities, responding to questions, assessing students' work, and providing informed feedback. At the end of various sections of this book, you will find a section on how teachers might monitor the development of particular language features at various stages of development. This is not intended as an assessment tool, but rather as an indication of directions in which teachers might actively promote students' language use.

The teacher plays an important role in modelling and promoting the use of Standard Australian English – particularly for students from language backgrounds other than English or students whose home language is not closely aligned with the language of the school. While respecting and appreciating the diverse language backgrounds of all the students in the class, the teacher has a responsibility to explicitly and systematically apprentice learners into the language of the school.

Learning about ...

In addition to fostering children's ability to use language in particular ways, the teacher can tap into the learner's implicit knowledge about language and help make it more explicit. The teacher can provide learners with tools for reflecting on how language works. Together they build up a shared language for talking about language (a 'metalinguage') so that they can refer to the various functions and structures of language. During activities such as shared and guided reading, modelled and collaborative writing, conferencing, and in class discussions, the teacher is able to focus on how language is functioning. By selecting certain texts, focusing on relevant features, highlighting specific points, and asking particular questions, the teacher draws students' attention to ways in which language is being used. In this way the teacher is able to demonstrate how grammar is contributing to the meaning of the text.

Grammar should generally be taught in the context of working with whole texts (eg identifying grammatical patterns that help a particular text type achieve its purpose). The emphasis should not be on the ability simply to label a particular feature, but on its usefulness in creating, appreciating and evaluating texts. Students should be shown how grammar helps to build up the meaning of the text. When dealing with information reports, for example, the teacher might want to demonstrate how the timeless present tense is used for generalising. This can then be contrasted with the specific past tense actions found in recounts. The texts used when teaching grammar should be authentic, not artificial and contrived simply to

teach a grammatical point. They may, however, need to be simplified, when first introducing a certain feature.

There are times, however, when it might be more efficient to look at a particular, relevant aspect of grammar more intensively. For example, if a specific feature is presenting particular challenges, then additional language activities on that feature could be explored, using a number of clear examples taken from texts.

Certain groups of students will need more systematic and focused assistance with particular features of English grammar, eg students from language backgrounds other than English. Emphasis should be placed on the construction of clear, well-formed, and coherent sentences and texts, and not so much on the rules of usage (eg whether to finish a sentence with a preposition, whether to use *will* or *shall*.)

Teachers need to use their own judgement as to how much information or detail the students can usefully and comfortably deal with at any particular time. The grammatical features outlined in this book should serve as a guide as to what might reasonably be learned by most children during the years of schooling.

The study of grammar need not be onerous or dry. There is room for playfulness and creativity, for experimentation and discovery, for enjoyment and wonder. Children have an instinctive fascination with language. It is the teacher's job to nurture this.

Levels of language

When we are teaching about language, we need to be clear about which level we are dealing with.

Text

Modern linguists now recognise that language patterns extend beyond the sentence and can operate at the level of the whole text. At the text level, we find patterns that are related to a particular text type (eg the use of commands in a procedure, action verbs in a recount, abstract nouns in an exposition, dialogue in a narrative). We also find certain features that serve to link parts of a text: cohesive devices such as pronouns; words that create relationships within the text (eg synonyms, repeated words); words that signal how the text is structured (eg *Firstly ...* ; *On the one hand ...*). In achieving its purpose, the language patterns change as the text moves through its various stages. When introducing the characters in a story, for example, we find long descriptive noun groups. When the text moves to an action sequence, the emphasis is on action verbs. And when there is a reflective stage, there will be more thinking and feeling verbs.

Sentence

A text is made up of a number of sentences. Sentences can consist of a single clause or a number of clauses joined together. Students need to know how to combine clauses to make sentences and how to construct different types of relationships between clauses in a sentence (eg relationships of time, place, causality and concession).

Clause

A clause is a unit of meaning that expresses a message. It typically contains a verb/verb group. The clause is often seen as the basic unit for analysing language.

Group/Phrase

A clause consists of smaller ‘chunks’ or groups of words that do certain jobs. In the clause *a group of small children were digging in the sand*, the core of the clause is the verb group (eg **were digging**). Participating in this action might be one or more persons or things, represented by a noun group (eg **A group of small children were digging**). There might also be some extra information in the form of an adverbial (eg *A group of small children were digging **in the sand***).

Word

Groups and phrases can be divided into individual words. In a noun group, for example, we might find an article, an adjective and a noun (eg *the wily fox*). It is important to see how individual words function within a group so that students can see how the words relate to each other.

In the past, grammar was often taught at the level of the individual word, eg ‘noun’, ‘verb’, ‘preposition’. While these categories are important, students often ended up with a fragmented knowledge of the system, with little idea of how these words work together to make meaning or how different shades of meanings could be made through author choices.

TEXT LEVEL
(excerpt)

Alice caught the baby with some difficulty, as it was a queer-shaped little creature, and held out its arms and legs in all directions, ‘just like a star-fish,’ thought Alice. The poor little thing was snorting like a steam-engine when she caught it. It kept doubling itself up and straightening itself out again, so that altogether, for the first minute or two, it was as much as she could do to hold it.

SENTENCE LEVEL

The poor little thing was snorting like a steam-engine | when she caught it.

CLAUSE LEVEL

The poor little thing was snorting like a steam-engine

GROUP/PHRASE LEVEL

The poor little thing | was snorting | like a steam-engine

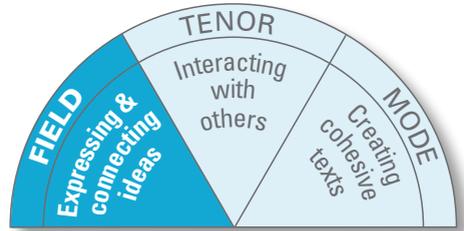
WORD LEVEL

The | poor | little | thing | was | snorting | like | a | steam-engine

2

Language for expressing ideas

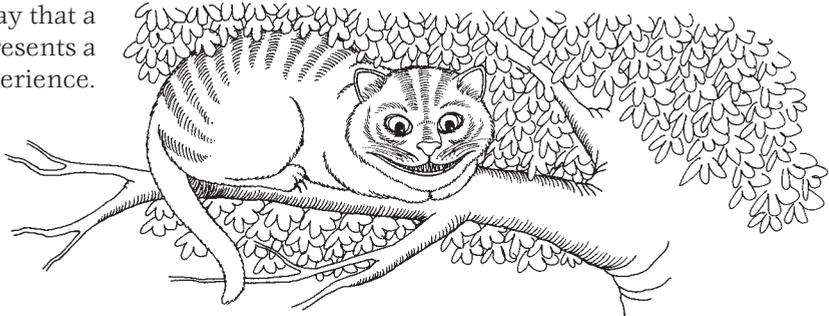
One important function of language is to enable us to represent what is going on in the world: to talk about our experiences, to reflect on our observations, to share knowledge and ideas.¹ Here we are concerned with how we use language to create different 'worlds': literary, imaginative, mathematical, scientific, historical or everyday.



A key resource for observing the world is the clause – the basic unit of meaning. Clauses do many different jobs. In terms of representing the world, a clause provides information about what is going on, who/what is taking part, and any circumstances surrounding the activity (When? Where? How? etc).

Recognise that sentences are key units for expressing ideas [Foundation]

We could say that a clause represents a slice of experience.



<i>Where?</i>	<i>Who/what is taking part?</i>	<i>What's happening?</i>	<i>How?'</i>
<i>In the treetop</i>	<i>the cat</i>	<i>was smiling</i>	<i>mysteriously.</i>
CLAUSE			

In representing experience, each part of the clause has a different function.

One of the best ways of introducing students to a new grammatical feature is to use a 'probe question', which draws their attention to the meaning or function of the feature. When exploring the clause and its parts, for example, it is useful to start by using probe questions such as:

¹ While 'language for expressing ideas' captures the intention of this chapter to a certain extent, it is more broadly concerned with how language functions to represent difference kinds of experience. Halliday refers to this as the 'experiential' or 'ideational' function of language.

What is happening?

Who or what is taking part?

What gives us more information about the activity? When? Where? How? etc

Identify the parts of a simple sentence that represent ‘What’s happening?’, ‘Who or what is doing or receiving the action?’ and circumstances surrounding the action [Year 1]

This will help the students to start thinking in terms of ‘chunks of meaning’ rather than individual words. When students use one of these questions to find a clause part, and to identify its function, they can use functional terms to describe its meaning (eg What kind of Process is taking place?; Who/What is the Participant in this activity?; What kind of Circumstance is this?). When discussing the grammatical forms used to express these functions, students can use formal terms (eg verb group, noun group or adverb).²

	<i>Where?</i>	<i>Who/what is taking part?</i>	<i>What's happening?</i>	<i>How?</i>
	<i>In the treetop</i>	<i>the cat</i>	<i>was smiling</i>	<i>mysteriously.</i>
MEANING	<i>Circumstance</i>	<i>Participant</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Circumstance</i>
FORM	↘ prepositional phrase ³	↘ noun group	↘ verb group	↘ adverb
CLAUSE				

Explore differences in words that represent people, places and things (nouns and pronouns), actions (verbs), qualities (adjectives) and details like when, where and how (adverbs) [Year 1]

- knowing that, in terms of meaning, a basic clause represents: what is happening (verb); who or what is participating (noun group); and the surrounding circumstances (adverbial) [Year 1]

When introducing students to grammar from a functional perspective, it is not always a matter of whether something is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ but whether students find the metalanguage useful for exploring the meaning of the text. Sometimes there are blurred edges when we talk about meaning and students should be encouraged to have lively discussions about the meaning and function of a particular linguistic feature.

Understand that a clause is a unit of meaning [Year 3]

- knowing that a clause is basically a group of words that contains a verb [Year 3]

² It is not a matter of ‘meaning’ or ‘form’ but of how different meanings are expressed by different forms. Grammar always looks two ways – towards form and towards meaning.

³ A sloping arrow is often used to mean ‘is expressed by’. For example, the meaning ‘Participant’ is typically expressed (or ‘realised’) by a noun group.

A common way of identifying a clause is to look for the verb group representing the activity (eg *was smiling*). Each clause will typically have one verb/verb group.

It is possible to have a sentence without a verb, as in the following introduction to the harsh teacher, Mr Gradgrind, in Dickens' *Hard Times*:

THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir.

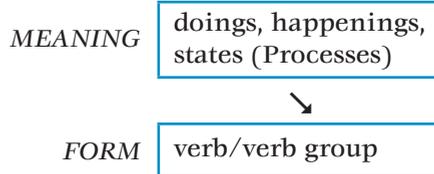
These are called 'minor clauses'. Other types of minor clauses are expressions such as *Wow!*, *Good morning*, *The more the merrier*.

What is happening?

Our experiences are generally made up of different kinds of doings, happenings and states. We could refer to these as Processes⁴ – a term that captures the meaning or function of this aspect of experience.

Understand that verbs represent different processes (doing, thinking, saying, and relating) [Year 3]

Processes typically take the form of verbs (or verb groups⁵).



Through verb groups, we can express different aspects of our experience:

- what we do ('action verbs')
- what we say ('saying verbs')
- what we think, feel and perceive ('sensing verbs')
- how we create links between bits of information ('relating verbs')
- how we refer to things that simply 'exist' ('existing verbs').

■ identifying different types of verbs and the way they add meaning to a sentence [Year 3]

Looking at meaning: Different kinds of Processes

When considering 'what's going on', we could ask such questions as:

- Is the text mostly concerned with actions (as in a recount or procedure)?
- Does the text report what people are saying (as often happens in a newspaper story or narrative)?

⁴ When we are using terms to refer to the functions of grammar, we often use a capital letter.

⁵ 'Verb group' is often the preferred term, even though it might consist of only a single word (eg 'smiles').

- Does the text reveal what people are sensing – their feelings, desires, thoughts, memories, hopes, regrets, opinions or beliefs as in many literary texts such as stories and poems – and in persuasive texts such as expositions?
- Is the text concerned with linking bits of information, using relating verbs to describe, exemplify, classify, or define (as in information reports and many mathematical problems)?

Identify visual representations of characters' actions, reactions, speech and thought processes in narratives [Year 2]

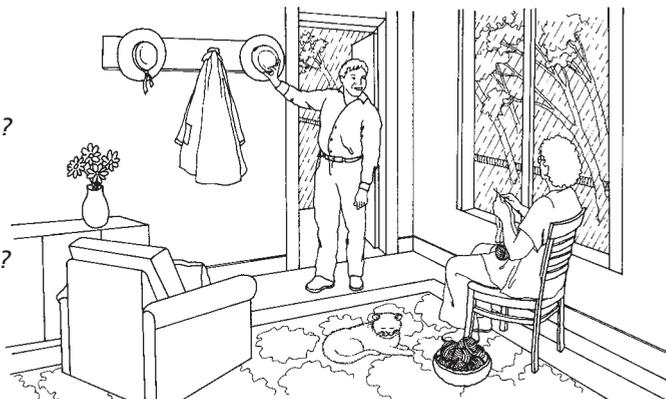
What's he saying?

What is the cat thinking?

Describe the setting.

What's she doing?

What else is happening?



Action verbs

Much of our experience consists of physical activity. With younger children we often refer to 'doing words', but we could also use the term 'action verb'.⁶ The following are some common action verbs:⁷

blow	buy	come	do	drive
eat	fly	get	give	live
limp	make	play	roam	rub
run	shake	slip	take	work

We find examples of action verbs in most texts, but particularly in texts such as procedures, recounts, and narratives.

Procedures, for example, are mainly about actions in the form of commands:

Put the soil into the container. **Add** water to the soil. **Mix** the soil and water together.

In more advanced procedures, the action verbs often need to be quite precise so that the procedure will be successful (eg *dissolve*, *dilute*, *transfer*, *insert* or *filter* instead of simply *add* or *put*).

⁶ It is generally preferable to use one set of terms to refer to meaning (eg Process) and another set to refer to the grammatical form (eg verb) as often there is not a one-to-one relationship between meaning and form. In the case of Processes, however, we often tend to combine meaning and form in a single term (eg 'action verb') as it is more accessible for those familiar with traditional grammar and because, in the case of Processes, there is only one form that expresses the process (ie verbs/verb groups). When it comes to other elements (eg Participants) we need to keep the two levels – meaning and form – as certain meanings can be realised by a number of different forms.

⁷ In Hallidayan grammar, these are referred to as Material Processes that are realised through verb groups.

- moving from general, 'all-purpose' words, for example 'cut' to more specific words, for example 'slice', 'dice', 'fillet', 'segment' [Year 5]

When recounting what happened on an excursion, we might encourage students to make the experience come alive through their choice of action verbs. These could be brainstormed in preparation for writing:

*On Tuesday Kindergarten children and teachers **visited** Blue Gum Farm. We **tried to milk** the cow, but her tail **swished** in our face. We **stroked** a chicken and **patted** the horse. Then we **clambered** onto the bus and **trundled** off home.*

- knowing that verbs often represent actions and that the choice of more expressive verbs makes an action more vivid (for example 'She ate her lunch' compared to 'She gobbled up her lunch') [Year 6]

Older students might use well-selected action verbs to construct a series of events in an historical account:

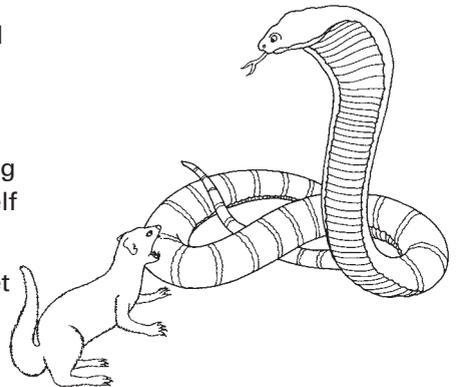
In the nineteenth century, many European countries **established** colonies in South-East Asia. France **expanded** its colonial empire to Indochina. In twenty years France **had a grip** on Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In WWII, however, the French **were defeated** by Germany in France while the French colonies **were invaded** by Germany's ally the Japanese. When the Viet Minh **had beaten** the Japanese, the French **attempted to come back to rule**, but they **were confronted** with the independence movement of the Vietnamese people. The French **tried to fight** the Vietnamese but **failed** miserably and dramatically and **abandoned** their colonial empire.

In narratives we could look for an 'action sequence' in the story to model to students how professional writers create a sense of dynamic action, as in this story where Rikki-tikki, the mongoose, is fighting with Nagaina, the cobra.⁸

Rikki-tikki **was bounding** all round Nagaina, keeping just out of reach of her stroke, his little eyes like hot coals.

Nagaina **gathered** herself together and **flung out** at him. Rikki-tikki **jumped** up and backward. Again and again and again she **struck**, and each time her head came with a whack on the matting of the veranda and she **gathered** herself together like a watch spring.

Then Rikki-tikki **danced** in a circle to get behind her, and Nagaina **spun round** to keep her head to his head, so that the rustle of her tail on the matting sounded like dry leaves blown along by the wind. ... As Nagaina **plunged** into the rat-hole where she and Nag used to live, his



⁸ Not all verbs have been highlighted.

little white teeth **were clenched** on her tail. ... He **held on** savagely, and **stuck out** his feet to act as brakes on the dark slope of the hot, moist earth. ... The grass **quivered** again, and Rikki-tikki, covered with dirt, **dragged** himself out of the hole leg by leg, **licking** his whiskers. Rikki-tikki **shook** some of the dust out of his fur and **sneezed**. "It is all over," he said. "The widow will never come out again."

Rikki-tikki-tavi, Rudyard Kipling

In literary texts we can often find creative examples of action verbs/verb groups:

[The Seven young Parrots] **began to fight**, and they **scuffled**, and **huffed**, and **ruffled**, and **shuffled**, and **puffed**, and **muffled**, and **buffled**, and **duffled**, and **fluffed**, and **guffled**, and **bruffled**, and **screamed**, and **shrieked**, and **squealed**, and **squeaked**, and **clawed**, and **snapped**, and **bit**, and **bumped**, and **thumped**, and **dumped**, and **flumped** each other, till they **were** all **torn** into little bits.

Edward Lear

If we want to build up a character in a particular way, we might use more 'evaluative' action verbs. For example, rather than saying *Sam walked down the street*, we can represent Sam positively (*Sam skipped down the street*) or negatively (*Sam slunk down the street*).

Action verbs are often used in a metaphorical way:

Newtown – a Fantasy

Sunset

slides over

the slow stone

cottages of Newtown.

An aura of light

clings to sloping

chimney tops.

Reluctant footsteps

linger. Traffic

noises **dim**. Open

windows **catch and**

hold the twilight.

The sun **tangles**

in a Port Jackson

fig tree a few

houses down. All

the colours of the rainbow

run berserk over the

slow stone cottages

of Newtown.

Colleen Burke

The Sea

Deep glass-green seas

chew rocks

with their green-glass jaws.

But little waves

creep in

and **nibble** softly at the sand.

Lilith Norman

The poem below provides an opportunity to extend the students' range of action verbs to bring the text to life and to help the reader to visualise what is going on. When working with action verbs, it is fun to get students to act out the verbs, reinforcing the fact that they refer to physical activity.

Skateboard

We **twist**

and we **turn**

and the pavement

we **burn**

as we **rocket**

downhill at a rate.

We **whoop**

and we **swoop**

as we **crouch**

and we **stoop**

on the board

where we **ride**

when we **skate**.

With a shove

and a run

it is furious fun

as we **roll**

with a sweep

and a swerve.

Then we **reel**

and we **rip**

in a breathtaking trip

while keeping

our balance

and nerve.

We **swing**

and we **sway**
 in a dare-devil way
 on a hair-raising,
 zig-zagging track.
 Our father
 once **tried**.
 You'll **find** him
 inside
 with a very
 large bruise
 on his back.⁹

Max Fatchen

Not all action verbs represent physical activities. Sometimes they are relatively abstract.

*'Can you **manage** all right?'*

*She **retained** her sense of humour.*

*He couldn't **provide** a good reason.*

*Outbreaks of violence **occurred** frequently.*

*The inflation rate **has increased** lately.*

There is also a group similar to action verbs that are sometimes referred to as 'behavioural processes'. These tend to represent (typically human) bodily actions usually only with one participant (eg *stare, listen, worry, dream, breathe, sneeze, cough, hiccup, burp, faint, yawn, sleep, cry, laugh, smile, frown, sigh, sob, snarl, chatter, grumble, gossip, argue, and whine*). They often lie between 'doing' and 'sensing' but for our purposes, this finer distinction might not be necessary.

Saying verbs

Sometimes experience is not represented directly, but is reported verbally. The following are some common saying verbs:¹⁰

saying verbs				
ask	deny	plead	respond	stammer
claim	explain	promise	say	suggest
continue	imply	reply	scream	tell
cry	murmur	report	shout	whisper

⁹ Note that there are also parts of this text where action words are used as 'describers': breathtaking trip; hair-raising; zig-zagging track. There are also instances where actions have been represented as 'things': a shove; a run; a sweep; a swerve. These no longer have the form of verbs but retain the meaning of an action.

¹⁰ These are called Verbal Processes in Hallidayan grammar.

- exploring action and saying verbs in narrative texts to show how they give information about what characters do and say [Year 3]

You can generally test whether a verb is potentially a 'saying verb' by asking whether it can be followed by items such as 'that', 'whether' or 'what':¹¹

*She promised **that** she would come back.*

*She claimed **that** it was a plot.*

*She explained **what** had been troubling her.*

*She asked **whether** she could go home.*

Another rule of thumb is whether the verb can take a 'receiver':

*She promised **him** ...;*

*She explained **to her mother** ...;*

*She asked **the teacher** ...*

Saying verbs are found most commonly in stories, where we get to know the characters by the way they speak and interact with others. In the following passage, for example, J.K. Rowling could have simply said that Dudley was a belligerent, spoilt child, but instead she gives an insight into his personality through the choice of saying verbs:

"Make it move," he **whined** at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the glass, but the snake didn't budge.

"Do it again," Dudley **ordered**. Uncle Vernon rapped the glass smartly with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on.

"This is boring," Dudley **moaned**. He shuffled away.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, J.K. Rowling

In shared reading, students could explore the different saying verbs used (eg pleaded, whispered, responded, sighed) and discuss how these can be more effective than *said*. Students could be asked to read the lines aloud in the manner suggested by the saying verb: '*Don't hit me!*'; he *blubbered/stammered/croaked/hissed/whimpered*. They could also look at the manner expressions¹² used with saying verbs that help to build up the character and mood (eg *severely, humbly, angrily, in a languid, sleepy voice, rather eagerly, in a soothing tone*). Students could contribute to wordbanks of saying verbs to refer to later in their own writing.

Saying verbs are also important in newspaper articles, where it is reported what people *said* (*promised, threatened, implied* or *announced*). This could become part of a media study unit (eg involving a critical evaluation of how people's 'sayings' are interpreted, quoted or reported).

When looking at saying verbs, we can also deal with such matters as the difference between direct and indirect speech, and the punctuation of direct speech.¹³

¹¹ Though this will depend on context. Note, for example, the difference between 'He screamed that he was hungry' (saying verb) and 'The baby didn't stop screaming' (action/behavioural verb).

¹² See Circumstances of manner, p. 67

¹³ See section on Quoting and Reporting, page 97.

Sensing verbs

Sensing verbs¹⁴ reflect processes of our ‘internal world’. They are typically used only in relation to humans – or non-humans given human-like qualities – describing what they think, feel, desire and perceive. The following are some examples:

thinking		feeling and wanting	perceiving
know	decide	like	see
reflect	consider	hate	taste
comprehend	recall	dislike	hear
believe	hypothesise	want	smell
imagine	wonder	wish	observe
forget	understand	need	notice
remember	assume	fear	sense
recollect	recognise	enjoy	
realise	infer		

- exploring the use of sensing verbs and how they allow readers to know what characters think and feel [Year 3]

As with saying verbs, the students can test whether a verb is a sensing verb by asking whether it can potentially be followed by ‘that’:

*She understood **that** ...*

*She noticed **that** ...*

*She forgot **that** ...*

As this isn’t always the case (eg *She understood what it meant*; *She understood his concern*.) another test is to ask about the tense. A sensing verb will usually take a simple tense (*She forgot ...*) rather than a progressive (*She was forgetting ...*).

In a story, sensing verbs can give us insight into the characters of a story by describing what is going on in their minds. They are often used when characters reflect on the action or evaluate what is happening in the story.

“But then,” **thought** Alice, “shall I never get any older than I am now? That’ll be a comfort, one way – never to be an old woman – but then – always to have lessons to **learn!** Oh, **I shouldn’t like that!**” ... But a few minutes later she **heard** a voice outside. “Mary Ann! Mary Ann!” said the voice. “Fetch me my gloves this moment!” Then came a little pattering of feet on the stairs. Alice **knew** it was the Rabbit coming to look for her, and she trembled till she shook the house, quite **forgetting** that she was now a thousand times as large as the Rabbit and had no reason to be afraid of it.”

Lewis Carroll

¹⁴ Halliday refers to these as Mental Processes.

Thinking verbs are used to express processes of cognition and can feature in texts such as arguments and discussions (eg *It is thought that ...; I believe that ...; I wonder whether ...*) where we are interested in people's ideas and opinions or in stories where a character is reflecting:

This is a hospital, he **thought**. I am in a hospital. But he **could remember** nothing. He lay back on his pillow, looking at the ceiling and **wondering** what had happened. He was gazing at the smooth greyness of the ceiling which was so clean and grey, and then suddenly he saw a fly walking upon it. The sight of this fly, the suddenness of seeing this small black speck on a sea of grey, brushed the surface of his brain, and quickly, in that second, he **remembered** everything. He **remembered** the Spitfire and he **remembered** the altimeter showing twenty-one thousand feet. He **remembered** the pushing back of the hood with both hands, and he **remembered** the bailing out. He **remembered** his leg.

Beware of the Dog, R. Dahl

Sensing verbs are concerned not only with people's thoughts but with their feelings and desires. We often find people expressing their emotions in texts such as romance novels, poems, songs and blogs:

Why I hate sports

I'm just going to come right out and say it. I **hate** all sports. Even the ones I sometimes **like**. Now this is, of course, downright unAustralian of me so I'm going to try to defend my position. First of all, you **need** to know that I **enjoy** physical activity. But what I **loathe** is the brittle rhetoric that surrounds almost all sporting endeavour. The forum in which I **resent** this rhetoric the most is children's sports. Why do we make children who aren't naturally good at sport race their classmates in front of huge audiences? The kid who comes last doesn't get a trophy but sits in the great silent stillness of the non-winner, feeling like a loser.

Adapted from <http://fantasticthoughts.wordpress.com/2009/10/19/why-i-hate-sports/>

Sensing verbs also encompass actions of perception – those that involve the use of our senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling.

He **heard** the cows mooing loudly
As they invaded the vegie garden.

He **saw** the herd devouring his sage and thyme
As they trampled the artichokes.

He **felt** his chest thumping
as he chased them into the barn.

He **smelled** the beef roasting
As he stoked the sizzling coals.

He **tasted** the flavour of freshly herbed steak
As he savoured the thought of a moo-free morning.

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