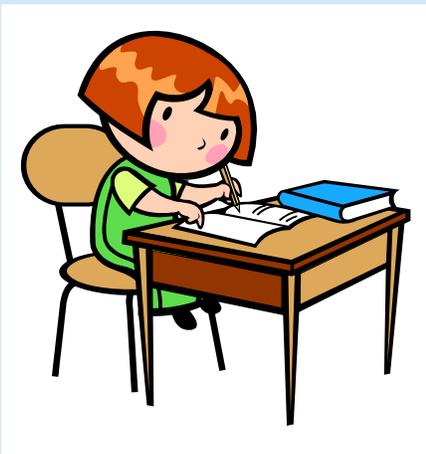


Engaging in and Exploring Report Writing

A practical guide for classroom teachers

This resource paper has been designed to assist classroom teachers to review and refine the teaching of report writing.



Key terms:

Genre refers to any staged, purposeful social activity which is accomplished through language.

Genres may also be referred to as **text types**. Genres are used for specific purposes with each genre having specific language features and schematic structure.

What is report writing?

Report texts are the most common factual genres encountered by students across the curriculum. The purpose of a report is to provide accurate and relevant information.

REPORT WRITING is a genre which intends to classify and describe the natural, cultural and technological phenomena of our world (eg Computers) in contrast to a description which focuses on one specific thing (eg My Computer).

Information Report

THERE ARE A RANGE OF REPORTS, THESE INCLUDE:

- Compositional/descriptive report – describing and giving information about one type of thing eg *human dwellings*
- Classifying Report - describing and giving information about sub groups within a class eg *deciduous and evergreen trees*
- Comparative Report - describing two or more things by comparing and contrasting different aspects eg *2D and 3D shapes; human adaptation to different climates*

Common Reports in upper primary and secondary years involve:

- investigative/research report – eg *drug use in sport*
- practical/experiment report and evaluation– eg A Science report

What do students need to know about report writing?

Students need to know about how language is used to **structure** factual text and the **language features** used in a report to achieve its purpose.

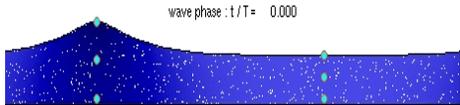
Students also need to develop an understanding of how different audiences and purposes of reports determine the language choices they make.

The language in a report text is influenced by:

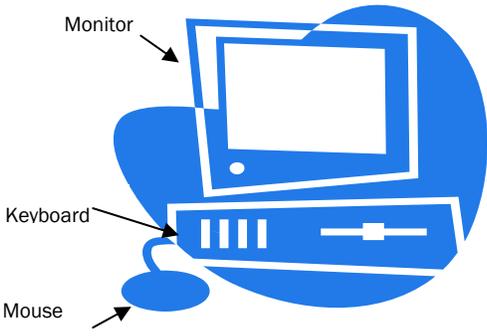
- **Purpose** – What do I want my writing to do/achieve? eg give clear information
- **Audience** – Who am I writing to? eg teacher, other students, the principal
- **Identity/Stance** – Who am I writing as? eg a zoologist, a researcher, a student
- **Attitude** – How do I want/need to make them feel? eg informed and confident in my expertise/knowledge.

What do students need to know about the structure of Report Texts?

INFORMATION REPORT - DESCRIPTIVE

	<i>The language creating the structure of the text is italicized. The language features of report texts are detailed on page 3.</i>
Title	Tsunamis Year 3 – Year 5 text
Introduction - General classification statement – Introduces the topic of the report which may include a definition and indicate a particular aspect of the topic.	Tsunami is a Japanese word which means ‘harbour wave’. These waves come after an earthquake or volcano under the sea. They are a type of natural disaster.
Series of facts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use of sub-headings - use of diagrams, illustrations 	Description The sea floor moves when there is an earthquake and makes the water rise up to the surface. This water travels in big waves to the land. As <i>the water approaches the land</i> , huge waves build up and they smash into the coast. Location Tsunamis happen around the Pacific Ocean and in the Indian Ocean.
Conclusion – reports do not usually have a conclusion although it may be rounded off by some general statement.	Tsunamis can cause the death of many people. They cause destruction of the environment and damage cities and towns.

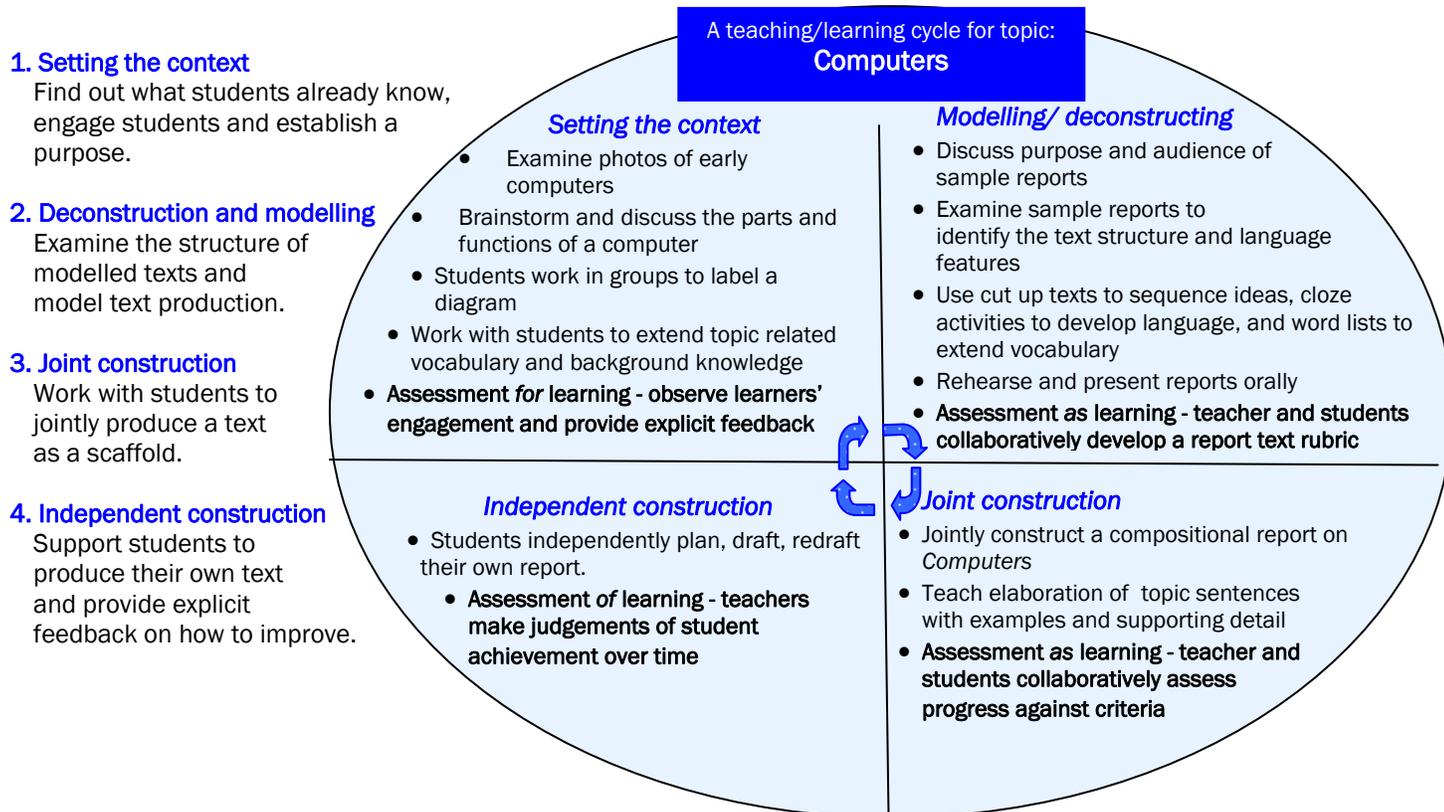
INFORMATION REPORT - COMPOSITIONAL

	<i>The language creating the structure of the text is italicized. The language features of report texts are detailed on page 3.</i>
Title	Computers Year 7 – Year 9 text
Introduction - General classification statement – Introduces the topic of the report which may include a technical definition and indicate a particular aspect of the topic.	Computers are machines which allow people to electronically work with and save complex information very efficiently. They are also becoming part of our social lives.
Series of facts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use of sub-headings - use of diagrams, illustration figures and tables 	The basic computer system has two parts, the hardware including parts such as a monitor, keyboard, printer, scanner and mouse or touch pad, and the software which includes the Operating System (OS). Hardware is the physical part of computers which means it can be seen and touched. It includes the Central Processing Unit (CPU), which does the actual work of computers, the circuit board or motherboard, and built in disk drives. Information is entered into computers from a keyboard or from storage devices like USBs, DVDs or MP3 players. The monitor screen shows the information which has been put into the computer. The mouse or touch pad is used for navigation of the screen. Software is the information that computers use to manage (eg open, run create, save, convert) other information. This information is referred to as a program or application and is stored on a disk which is a Storage device. The Disk drive is the mechanism that runs the disk. The Random Access Memory or RAM is where computers store the information which is currently being used. The operating system most commonly used on personal computers is “Windows” which is produced by Microsoft.
Conclusion – reports do not always have a conclusion but can be rounded off by some general statement about the topic.	Business people regularly use computers to perform their work. Through the use of computers, they create professional looking documents that can be quickly shared with their peers and clients. Students and people in the community use computers to learn and through the internet service providers, programs and platforms they create digital communities for social networking.

What do teachers need to know to support students with report texts?

Report texts have logically sequenced facts and use objective descriptive language. Supporting students to order their thoughts and develop a topic specific vocabulary will assist them to produce reports. Oral language activities that build vocabulary and provide authentic purposes enable students to develop the language skills for reports. Scaffolding students with a planned and logical sequence of activities through a teaching and learning cycle that provides a gradual release of responsibility will support students to confidently construct a report. Assessment processes that provide explicit feedback and use assessment as, for and of learning help students to understand the criteria for a successful report and to reflect on their work and improve their skills.

A Teaching and Learning Cycle: a systematic and explicit approach to teaching report writing



What do students need to know to make appropriate language choices for report texts? The student needs to understand the author is choosing an objective stance

An annotated example of a Report- Topic: Computers Year 7 - 9 text.

Text Structure	TEXT	Language features - examples
INTRODUCTION	Computers are machines which allow people to electronically work with and save complex information very efficiently. They are also becoming part of our social lives.	Formal and impersonal language Topic specific vocabulary: <i>Operating System (OS), Central Processing Unit (CPU)</i>
Series of facts: short paragraphs with topic noun groups foregrounded	The basic computer system has two parts, the hardware including parts such as a monitor, keyboard, printer, scanner and mouse or touch pad, and the software which includes the Operating System (OS) .	Topic noun groups to organise the text: The basic computer system, Hardware, Information, Software, Business People, Students and people in the community
	Hardware is the physical part of computers which means it can be seen and touched. It includes the Central Processing Unit (CPU) , which does the actual work of computers, the circuit board or motherboard , and built in disk drives.	Timeless present tense: <i>Hardware is the physical part of computers.....</i> Reference items: <i>It, they, the, this</i>
	Information is entered into computers from a keyboard or from storage devices like USBs, DVDs or MP3 players . The monitor screen shows the information which has been put into the computer. The mouse or touch pad is used for navigation of the screen.	Passive voice: <i>The mouse or touch pad is used..... The information ...is...being used.</i> Circumstance, why: <i>for navigation of the screen</i>
	Software is the information that computers use to get the job done. This information is referred to as a program or application and is stored on a disk which is a storage device . The disk drive is the mechanism that runs the disk. The Random Access Memory or RAM is where computers store the information which is currently being used. The operating system most commonly used on personal computers is "Windows" which is produced by Microsoft.	Noun group: <i>the information that computers use to get the job done</i> Nominalisations: <i>information, application, storage</i> Verbs, action: <i>runs, creates</i> relational: <i>are</i>
CONCLUSION: which refers back to the Introduction	Business people regularly use computers to perform their work. Through the use of computers, they create professional looking documents that can be quickly shared with their peers and their clients. Students and people in the community use computers to learn and through the internet service providers, programs and platforms they create digital communities for social networking.	Circumstance, with whom: <i>with their peers.....</i> Circumstance, of means: <i>Through the use of computers...</i>

Sequencing report writing with increasing complexity

Engagement with report texts across the year levels should be guided by these continua to make choices about the complexity of the task	Stating facts What is the topic?			
	Everyday, concrete			Technical, abstract
	Relating to others What identity does the author present?			
	Novice			Expert
Creating coherent text How is the message conveyed?				
Basic oral report using visuals			Formal written structure which can include sub-headings	
Examples	Years R-3	Years 4-6	Years 7-9	Years 10-12
Possible learning areas and topics	Simple descriptive information report related to animals or a familiar object	Compositional report related to a community topic/system	Compositional/Comparative report related to a more specialised topic/system	Taxonomic report dealing with national and international topics requiring technical, political, and social science knowledge
Studies of Society and Environment	<i>Australian Animals</i>	<i>Public transport</i>	<i>Ancient civilisations</i>	<i>Systems of Government</i>
Health and PE	<i>Healthy food</i>	<i>Olympic Games</i>	<i>Adolescent Health issues</i>	<i>Illicit substances</i>
Science	<i>Mini-beasts</i>	<i>Energy systems</i>	<i>The solar system</i>	<i>Particle Theory</i>
Mathematics	<i>2D Shapes</i>	<i>Transport graphs</i>	<i>Fibonacci numbers</i>	<i>Pythagorean theorem</i>
Business, Enterprise and Technology	<i>Tools, toys and simple machines</i>	<i>Communication forms and technologies</i>	<i>Robotics</i>	<i>Social Networks</i>
Some examples of language features				
Topic noun groups – to organise text;	<i>some small, fresh water creatures</i>	<i>nuclear powered submarines</i>	<i>complex hormonal changes in the body</i>	<i>the revolutionary twentieth century analysis of quasars</i>
Relational verbs – to show relationship	<i>have, has, is, are,</i>	<i>consist/s of, is made up of, relates to,</i>	<i>creates, indicates, shows</i>	<i>signifies, leads to, results in, demonstrates</i>
Action verbs -	<i>hop, eat, turn, grow</i>	<i>swim, organise, transfer,</i>	<i>build, reduce, formulate, orbit</i>	<i>inject, measure, collide, communicate, delineate</i>
Passive voice -	<i>is eaten, are grown</i>	<i>are transferred</i>	<i>were built, is reduced</i>	<i>are absorbed, is indicated</i>
Nominalisations	<i>growth, movement, hopping</i>	<i>transportation, discovery, competition</i>	<i>development, expansion, evolution</i>	<i>networking, hallucination, frequency, detoxification, dissemination, lobbyist</i>
Modality to express certainty, usuality, frequency, obligation	<i>will</i>	<i>have to, can, might</i>	<i>usually, perhaps, definitely</i>	<i>can be achieved, frequently,</i>
Circumstances	<i>of place and time: in the water, in the rainy season</i>	<i>of manner: strenuously, quickly, with speed, efficiently</i>	<i>of cause: due to age, because of centrifugal force</i>	<i>accompaniment (with what, with whom): with sterile instruments, accompanied by fellow scientists</i>
Foregrounding of non-human or general participants at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs	topic words:	circumstances of place and time:	circumstances of manner and cause: non-finite phrases eg <i>Building complex cities; Eradicating STDs</i>	circumstances of cause and accompaniment.: abstractions eg <i>visualisation, democracy, totalitarianism</i>

Self review – reflecting on your literacy practices

- When, and in what curriculum areas will you explicitly teach report texts this year?
- What teaching and learning cycle and strategies will you provide to:
 - scaffold learners to produce successful report texts
 - explicitly teach the structure and language features for report texts
 - build students' vocabulary specific to report writing language
 - develop students oral language skills relevant to writing specific reports?
- What assessment processes will make expectations clear to students?
- What feedback will best support students refine/develop their report writing skills?

Some useful resources:

More ideas and examples of information reports can be found in *Targeting Text* (series), Blake Education, Glebe NSW.

Anderson, M 1997, *Text types in English*, Macmillan, 1998.

English Elements (series), Jacaranda Wiley, Milton, Qld.

Whitfield, M 2001, *Targeting writing across the curriculum*, Blake Education, Glebe, NSW.