

Teaching Literacy in English

Part B: Teacher notes and additional strategies

Punctuation

Definitions

- Sentence punctuation: capitals at the beginning of sentences, full stops at the end.
- Simple punctuation: apostrophes in common contractions, commas in lists, correct use of capital letters within the body of the text, including capital letters for proper nouns and lower case for common nouns, question marks for questions.
- Complex punctuation: apostrophes to denote possession, parentheses, commas to separate clauses, etc.

Using punctuation to structure sentences

Students experiencing difficulties with punctuation may have a problem with structuring sentences. Students understand the surface features of capital letter and full stop but do not have a sense of sentence. The following strategies have been useful in helping students correctly structure sentences.

Focus on punctuation indicating sentence boundaries (capital letters and full stops).

Display an OHT or enlarged copy of student writing which includes poorly structured sentences such as run-ons. Ask students to read it aloud and indicate the end of the first idea. Use different coloured highlighter pens to indicate the first idea, changing colours for each new idea. Model correct punctuation at the beginning and end of each coloured sentence.

Work together with student(s) on completed work using a different coloured highlighter for each new idea; this strategy can be repeated by pairs of students, or when work is read aloud.

Focus on improved sentence structure:

Guide students by asking them to:
write their **first** idea FULL STOP (said in a loud voice) e.g. Trees provide shade FULL STOP

write their **second** idea FULL STOP e.g. They help protect people from skin cancer FULL STOP

write their **third** idea FULL STOP e.g. They keep cars cool FULL STOP

Encourage students to verbalise as they write to reinforce the end of a sentence.

Introduce **rainbow writing**: students change colour pencil for each new idea; a full stop must be placed before changing colours.

References: *ELLA 2001 Writing Task Marking Procedures, page 20*

Editing

For students experiencing difficulties with editing, try these strategies:

Explain the distinction made between editing and proofreading (see below) in the *State Literacy Strategy* documents:

Editing involves changing the drafts of developing texts in order to improve the text, for example, by improving cohesion, syntax, grammar and vocabulary. Editing leads to changes which will be incorporated into the next draft of the text. (*Focus on literacy: Writing*, NSW DET, 2000, page 23.)

Ensure editing occurs at a different time to drafting, as editing and drafting are different phases.

Copy the process used by authors. Real authors send their writing to others for editing; they don't edit their own work. Have students edit the writing of their peers.

Provide students with an editing checklist for reference when checking the writing of others, e.g. *Choosing Literacy Strategies that Work*, Stage 2, page 231.

Spelling

For students experiencing difficulties with spelling, try these strategies:

Focus on self-correction of errors

Walk around the room observing and supporting students with their writing.

Indicate a student's need to self-correct by using the same type of writing implement as the student. The teacher indicates the student's need to self-correct by touching the word on the student's page with the writing implement. The student then has the opportunity to self-correct, which is a very powerful form of learning. When teachers collect work to take away and mark, the student is less responsible for their own learning.

Focus on learning correct spellings

Students use pencil for draft writing, so they can erase spelling errors so these are not imprinted.

Remind students that some written tasks are for practice only; the text does not have an audience wider than the writer.

Other written pieces which will be published will require editing. Suggest the analogy of practising piano scales purely for skill development, compared to preparing a piece for performance.

Focus on supporting students to move on from the known

Walk around the room observing and supporting students with their writing.

If a student supplies another incorrect spelling for an identified spelling error, supply the correct spelling immediately rather than leaving students struggling to get correct spelling.

Focus on parts which the student has correct, e.g. tick all correct letters; identify section(s) where letters are missing, in the wrong order, or where a double letter is required.

Focus on developing morphemic knowledge (knowledge of word meaning and how words change when they take on different grammatical forms). Consider a base word, e.g. beauty, sincere: students brainstorm and use dictionaries to locate other words related to the base word, and record their findings on a word web.

Provide a table with headings describing different word functions, e.g. noun (to name), adjective (to describe). Students sort the word family into the table, noting any similarities and changes to the spelling of each word.

List words with a common ending, e.g. -ly. Record each adjective with its base word; create groups of words showing a change to the base word when -ly is added, and groups showing no change to the base word when -ly is added.

Handwriting

For students experiencing difficulties with handwriting, try these strategies:

Focus on joined handwriting

Explain the purpose of joined handwriting (to increase fluency and speed). When students are proficient in joined handwriting, it is easier to write for extended periods of time to draft texts.

Insist all students use joined handwriting.

Focus on increasing use of joined writing

Support students to practise joined writing by beginning with small tasks, for example use joined writing for the first part of each sentence or paragraph or have students copy or trace a model of the introductory sentence provided by teacher.

Focus on fluency

Begin each lesson with a quick pattern practice to develop familiarity with basic foundation style movements and shapes. See pages 188–190, *Writing K–12*, NSW Department of Education, Sydney, 1987. (Note. Remove all sections except VI. Handwriting: teaching the foundation approach, pages 147–200)

Resources:

Focus on literacy: Writing (2000), NSW Department of Education and Training, pages 22–3

Using technology

This activity can be used for editing texts in a collaborative situation. It can also be useful for tracking changes in a student's work.

1. As an aspect of peer editing, students can refine each other's compositions and make any amendments to forms, features and structures of texts that they believe improve the effect of the communication. The writer can then decide whether to accept or reject the suggested changes.

2. Teachers can make changes to a text and ask students which should be accepted and which rejected and why. These changes can be general or focus on a particular aspect of language.

To turn on the Track Changes function, go to the **Tools** menu and click on **Track Changes** and then click on **Highlight Changes**.

Click on track changes while editing. Wherever you make alterations to the text, they will appear different from the rest of the text. The default is for inserted text to be underlined and red and deleted text to be red with a strike through. If you would like to alter this, then click on **Options...** This will give you a window where you can customise your *track changes*. (You can access this same window through the Preferences command in the Tools menu.)

If you receive a document that contains editing using the track changes feature you can accept or reject these changes. Go to the **Tools** menu and click on **Track Changes** and then select **Accept or Reject Changes...**

You can work through the document change by change and either accept or reject each of the changes. You can reject all of the changes or accept all of the changes. If you are finding the document confusing, you can click on *Changes without highlighting* which will preview the document without the strike through and coloured text. If you wish to view the original text, click on *Original*.

If you click either **Accept All** or **Reject All**, the Office Assistant will ask you if you are sure. Click **Yes**.

Resources:

Focus on literacy: Writing (2000), NSW Department of Education and Training, pages 22–3
Microsoft Word

Proof reading

For students experiencing difficulties with proofreading, try these strategies:

Explain the distinction made between proofreading and editing (see above) in the *State Literacy Strategy*:

Proofreading involves preparing the final text for presentation, including reading the text to locate and fix any inaccuracies in grammar, spelling, punctuation or layout.

Select a piece of student writing from another class or year and enlarge it for the whole class to read. Read through the text for meaning then re-read the text slowly, checking the text for structure and cohesion.

Choose a proofreading focus, e.g. spelling, and read the text again, using a ruler to uncover one line at a time. This allows readers to focus on details such as punctuation and spelling. Ask students to identify any spelling errors as the text is read.

Model correction of errors by spell check and use of dictionary.

Resources:

Focus on literacy: Writing (2000), NSW Department of Education and Training, pages 22–3

Publishing

Consider publishing only selected student texts.

The purpose of some writing tasks is practise only.

The purpose of others includes performance or publication.

The audience is wider for published writing than for practice writing.

All writing does not need to be published.

Thin Pair Share

Purpose

- To activate learners' background knowledge by creating a large and diverse collection of words and information.
- To allow others to hear new knowledge.
- To encourage creativity.

Description

Individual students record their thoughts on a given topic in a time limit. Individuals then form pairs to share ideas, and pairs then join up for further sharing.

The sharing of new ideas stimulates students to make links with what they already know.

Implementation

Ask individuals to list as many things as they can think of which they already know about the topic, within a one-minute time limit.

Encourage all students to participate by observing the resources provided and list what they can see if they are unable to recall other details about the topic.

After one minute, ask individuals to form a pair to combine and consolidate their lists.

After another minute, ask pairs to form a group of four to combine and consolidate their lists again.

Ask groups to nominate a reporter to share the group's information with the class

Mode Continuum

Purpose

To demonstrate the vast range of degrees of formality in different uses of language, from the immediacy of informal conversation at one end to very formal written language at the other end.

Description

In the classroom a line is marked out with tape along a wall or on the floor, or drawn along the chalkboard.

At one end the line is labelled **informal spoken**, at the other end the line is labelled **formal written**. This represents a mode continuum.

Students place different situations along the mode continuum to reflect the degree of language formality appropriate to the situation.

Implementation

Create a large mode continuum in the classroom.

Explain the mode continuum by telling students it represents the range of formality of language use.

Give examples of language use at each end of the continuum and also a midpoint, e.g. informal spoken (asking a friend to borrow a pen), midpoint (telling, or writing a note to, a senior work colleague about tasks completed during your shift), formal written (School Certificate English essay).

Provide situation cards for students to place along the mode continuum according to the degree of formality of the language used.

References:

Collerson, J (1997) *Grammar in Teaching*, page 4–5, 130 PETA, Sydney.

Derewianka, BA (1997) *Grammar Companion for Primary Teachers*, page 6–7, PETA, Sydney.

Focus on literacy: Talking and Listening, Department of Education and Training policy document 2003, page 21.

Modality

Modality is a term used to describe a range of grammatical resources used to express probability or obligation. In general terms, obligation is more usually used in speech, especially when wanting to get things done such as, "You **should** eat more healthy food". In writing, modality indicates degree or qualification of a writer's position in relation to truth or fact, in order to manipulate a reader's perspective such as, "It **may be better** to eat more healthy food". Modality can be expressed through various grammatical devices:

modal verbs: can, should, will, might

modal adverbs: (indicating probability, usuality, presumption, inclination, degree, intensity) possibly

modal nouns: possibility

modal adjectives: Possible

References:

ELLA Writing Task Marking Procedures 2001 Book, page 76

Further references:

English 7–10 Syllabus, page 69

English K–6 Syllabus, page 96

Nominalisation

Nominalisation is the process of forming a noun from a verb or clause.

Nominalisation of a clause:

Because students like junk food they spend too much money.
The popularity of junk food causes unnecessary expense.

Nominalisation of a verb:

People **argue** about junk food...

The junk food **argument**...

Nominalisations are a feature of particular types of writing such as essays and technical writing that use abstract ideas and concepts. Arguments often use nominalisations as they can effectively remove agency and time from statements and therefore render the propositions more difficult to refute. Writing such as narratives, on the other hand, employ abstract language through the use of imagery and generally avoid nominalisations.

References:

ELLA Writing Task Marking Procedures 2001 Book, pages 76–7

English 7–10 Syllabus, page 69

Focus on literacy: Writing, NSW Department of Education and Training, 2000.

Collerson, J (1997), *Grammar in Teaching*, pages 92–93, 130 PETA.