OXFORD

ENGLISH
for Queensland

UNITS 1 & 2

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Perspectives, text and culture

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HOW TO THINK ABOUT TEXTS IN ENGLISH

DRAFT

Chapter 1
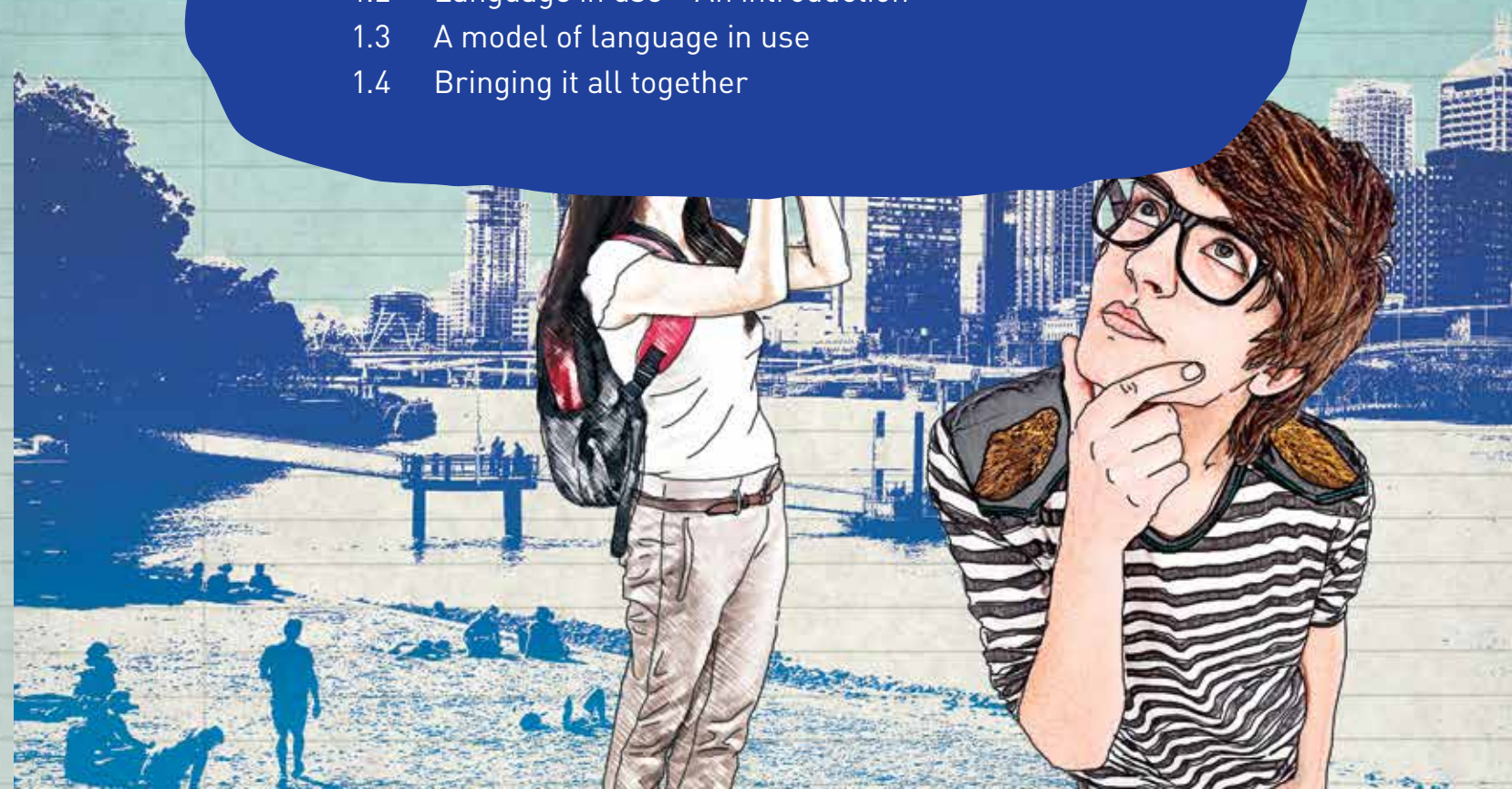
WAYS INTO INTERPRETING AND CREATING

All texts are representations. They are representations of things that happened, things that someone thought up, and things that people feel. Sometimes they seek to represent the truth. Sometimes they represent opinions, or imaginary worlds. Sometimes the perspective being represented is reliable and sometimes it is not. All texts can be understood as representing concepts, issues and identities that reflect the context of a specific time in history and place in the world.

Whether a text involves storytelling, persuasion, or some kind of everyday transaction, they will all use language in some way to make meaning for an audience. That might be an audience of one, if we're talking about your daily to-do list, or an audience of millions if we're talking about a popular television show.

These two propositions – that all texts are representations of something, and that texts use language to make meaning – are your touchstones for this chapter.

Whether you are reading, viewing or listening to a text, if you start by always asking:

\# What and who is being represented (and why)?

\# How is language being used to create meaning?

...then you will be off to a good start in Senior English!

SYLLABUS ALIGNMENTS

This chapter prepares students to engage with **Unit 1 and Unit 2** of the *General English Syllabus*, **and key concepts that will be useful throughout senior English.**

This chapter features:

\# A model for using a sequence of 'frames' to personally interpret and relate to texts.

\# Guidance on how to approach the analysis on 'Language-in-use' by analysing texts within the context of social situation and culture.

\# A variety of short texts, situations, and exercises for students to use in applying their knowledge of Language-in-use, to prepare for more substantial text analysis and creation in subsequent chapters.

The syllabus subject matter is approached in the following ways:

IDEAS/ INFORMATION	RESPONDING	CREATING
- Texts in contexts	- Cultural and critical frames offered as metaphors for thinking about the contexts in which texts were created. - Language-in-use explained as a model for situating texts within both social and cultural contexts.	- Personal frame offered as way of connecting to texts and supporting personal responses to texts. - Critical frame offered as a precursor and catalyst for the creation of new texts.
- Language and textual analysis	- Structural frame offered as a means of focusing discretely on significant language choices and textual features. - Analysis of Language-in-use at the structural level is related to other ways of thinking that occur when holding up the personal and cultural frames. - In focus: language, text, register, genre, audience, interpretation.	

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1.1   READING TEXTS – THE 'BIG PICTURE'

language
literally, a set of words and the system for using them that is common to a community of people. More recently, the term has also come to be applied metaphorically to the systematic and meaningful uses of image, sound, body language, typography, and so forth

text
any stretch of language that makes meaning. Texts can come in a huge variety of forms, for example a shopping list, a novel, an email, a conversation, a movie, an artwork, a maths equation, a school uniform or a cereal packet

create
to use language, sound and images to produce a text, to bring it into existence

interpret
to work out what a text (written, spoken, visual) means. This involves reading the text closely and drawing on your own knowledge, values and beliefs

Human beings use a variety of meaning-making systems to represent their thoughts. **Language** is one of the most powerful systems of human communication. In the study of English, we deal very closely with the interpretation of language to consider how it is used to represent thoughts, maintain relationships and organise **texts**. Like other cultural artefacts, written and spoken texts can be recorded and revisited over time and you will have more interest in some than others.

In Senior English, you will be asked to interpret and evaluate a range of texts, and to **create** texts of your own in response. Ideally, by the time you finish high school you should be immersed in the cycle of interpreting texts, then creating new ones, then following your interests to decide what to interpret next. Studying English should not just be about spotting language features and practising essays. We want you to finish school with a sense of how to relate to the texts you encounter through life, and with a set of tools for tinkering with your own texts.

Interpreting, analysing and responding to texts

When we *read* texts, we do more than just decode words on a page. To begin with, not all texts are purely written ones, so we sometimes use the word 'read' as a metaphor for decoding sounds and pictures as well. However, as well as thinking about this, we have to consider all the other things we do when we try to understand what we have read:

- responding: working out our personal views about a text
- analysing: breaking down and closely examining the mechanics of a text to explain it and find meaning
- evaluating: making a judgment.

It might seem pointless sometimes, trying to separate these processes. I mean, how does a reader come up with their response to a text without making judgments to evaluate it? How does a reader evaluate a text without conducting some analysis to look at the text closely? Also, can we ever really analyse a text without bringing our own personal response into the mix? Ultimately, these processes do overlap.

In your assessment tasks for English, when you are asked to write or speak about a text you have studied, verbs like 'respond', 'analyse' and 'evaluate' signal what your teacher is looking for you to foreground (or focus on). They could be looking for you to showcase the links you have found between the text and your own values and experience, your work on closely deconstructing texts, or your ability to argue a point of view using evidence. We can also look at the genre we are asked to produce for clues about how we are expected to show our understanding of a text – this will be explored further in Section 1.3.

In this book, we will use the umbrella term **interpret** to refer to all of the different processes involved in reading and understanding meaning.

Framing your interpretation

Interpreting texts involves using our subjective standpoint in the world to make sense of how someone else has used language to create meaning. Even when we agree with our peers about the meaning of a text, in our minds we are linking that text to a different set of memories, past experiences, and related texts. Sometimes this means we interpret a text slightly (or dramatically!) differently from others. To ensure that our interpretations are based on personal responses that have been rigorously considered, it's important that we keep the big picture in mind and always push ourselves to look at the text from different angles.

One metaphor that we suggest for ensuring your personal response contains multiple elements of interpretation is that of framing. By ensuring we look at a text through multiple frames, we give ourselves a system for seeing different things and creating rich responses to the work of others.

To really get a 'big picture' understanding of a new text, you should figuratively place each of the following frames over the text to generate ideas about possible personal, structural, cultural and critical meanings.

Personal frame

When we hold up the personal frame to a text, we are taking time to observe what stands out to us personally; to perceive the way a text makes us feel; and to consider the connections between the text, our past experiences and our aspirations. This is the frame where we are encouraged to think subjectively. When we look through the personal frame to understand a text, we allow ourselves to consider our own understandings, rather than try to anticipate someone else's.

Tip: Have you ever been really bored while analysing a text? It's possible that you needed to spend more time looking through the personal frame, before moving on to look at how a text is structured. The personal frame can actually be used, at any time, to re-engage with a text you have lost interest in. Ask yourself again: What does this text mean to me? What else does it remind me of? How does it make me feel?

Structural frame

Looking through the structural frame, we try to notice significant language choices and textual features, and to consider how they work to give a text meaning. We engage in some closer reading of a text, perhaps to inspect some of the elements that stood out to us in the personal frame. A benefit of the structural frame, is that it helps us to move beyond our subjective, personally framed response, by inviting us to notice other features, symbols and patterns in the text.

This frame lets us look in a kind of detached way at the mechanics of the language in use. We look at how the text has been organised and at the way written, spoken and visual codes have been used. Noticing the structure and textual features can help us understand how an author has provoked a particular response.

Tip: In situations where close analysis is required, the process of interpreting a text will require you to revisit the structural frame multiple times.

Cultural frame

When we look through the cultural frame, we imagine the text is a museum piece and we treat it as a cultural artefact. We ask: how does this text represent the society and culture of a particular time and place?

It's important in this frame to remember that texts can both reflect culture and act on it. Some texts, in reaction to limitations in the existing cultural repertoire, end up creating new genres. Some texts cover subject matter that would have been seen as controversial for their times, and this has impacted society. Consider texts such as novels, songs and music videos that get banned for their content, and what insight this can give us into the values, attitudes and beliefs of people in different cultural and historical contexts.

Some texts take up avant-garde mediums, experimenting with new communication technologies before they are considered to be 'literary' – for example, film was once a new medium of text production, and it took some time before feature films were considered to have literary integrity. These days, an internet bot can be coded to generate original poems … how might robot poems be valued in our culture in 20 to 30 years from now?

Sometimes, knowing the cultural context is vital for us to make much sense of the text at all. Using the cultural frame, we can consider the ways that a text might have been received in its original context.

Tip: The cultural frame helps to provide context for the text and language choices you observe in the structural frame. It also helps with understanding the perspectives and representations that you examine in the critical frame.

Critical frame

The critical frame is typically the final one to be used, to give us a chance to push our interpretations beyond the reading that the author invites us to make. Using a critical frame does not require you to 'criticise' a text in an unfair way. Seeing a work critically does not have to diminish our appreciation of it or cause us to develop a negative attitude towards it. The reason negative attitudes come to mind when we think of the word 'critical' is that it is linked back to Greek and Latin words that link judgement to being a judge, and therefore to crimes. Instead, the critical reading used in this frame refers to the process indicated by the Proto-Indo-European word krei, meaning to sieve, discriminate and distinguish. The process of sieving through a text to see whose perspective is being shown helps us see perspectives that have been omitted, marginalised or disregarded, and question the values represented.

All texts invite us to believe and do things, whether those things relate to everyday life, for example a train ticket inviting you to travel, or a fantasy novel inviting you to believe what makes a hero. The critical frame makes us look for the obvious and subtle ways that language and text structures work to position us. We use this frame to see who has power in the text, what they are suggesting people believe and do, and to consider the social impact of this.

The thinking that happens in the critical frame provides excellent material to inspire your next creative work. When you start thinking about alternative perspectives it can lead you to focus on a perspective of your own you wish to share. When you think about how a text producer could have done something differently to create an alternative meaning, it invites experimentation and transformation of texts.

Tip: Ideally, you will revisit the personal frame after you have noticed things through the critical frame and see whether any of your feelings or reactions to the text have changed.

Personal frame

- How did this text make you feel?
- What were the first things you noticed about this text?
- Can you see your own story or perspective in this text?
- Does it remind you of any other texts?

Cultural frame

- When and where was this text produced?
- What social and cultural norms are represented (e.g. in terms of gender, class, race)?
- What values are promoted?
- Was this text controversial or conservative for its time?
- Does this text belong to a movement or style?

Structural frame

- How has the text been organised?
- What genre is being used?
- How have written, spoken, visual or other features been used?
- Do any patterns stand out (e.g. metaphors, motifs/themes and symbols)?
- How are the textual features working to give the text meaning?

Critical frame

- What does this text invite us to believe and do?
- Whose perspectives have been omitted, disregarded or marginalised?
- Whose perspectives have been included, emphasised or privileged?
- What linguistic, textual or cultural conventions are challenged by this work?
- How has the text been accepted by others?

1.1 Your turn

Using frames to analyse a poem

Popular English writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907, Rudyard Kipling, published a poem called 'If –' in 1910, between the Boer War (1899–1902) and the First World War (1914–1918). The poem (see Source 2) was written as advice to his son about how to be a man.

1 Use the frames on pages xx to think through your response to this poem and complete the table below. If you have a little trouble coming up with ideas for the structural and cultural frames, don't panic. There is more information in this chapter about how language works in use, so you can think about the role of textual features and cultural influences in more depth as you go. You can also use the next activity to look more closely at some different levels of meaning in the poem.

personal

FRAME	RESPONSES YOU HAVE CONSIDERED
personal	Sample response: The poem makes me feel inspired by some of the lines, but not by others. I can see my own perspective in this poem when it talks about hearing the truth you've spoken 'twisted by knaves'. Sometimes people do twist your words to make you look bad and it's hard to rise above that.
structural	
cultural	
critical	

'IF –', RUDYARD KIPLING

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

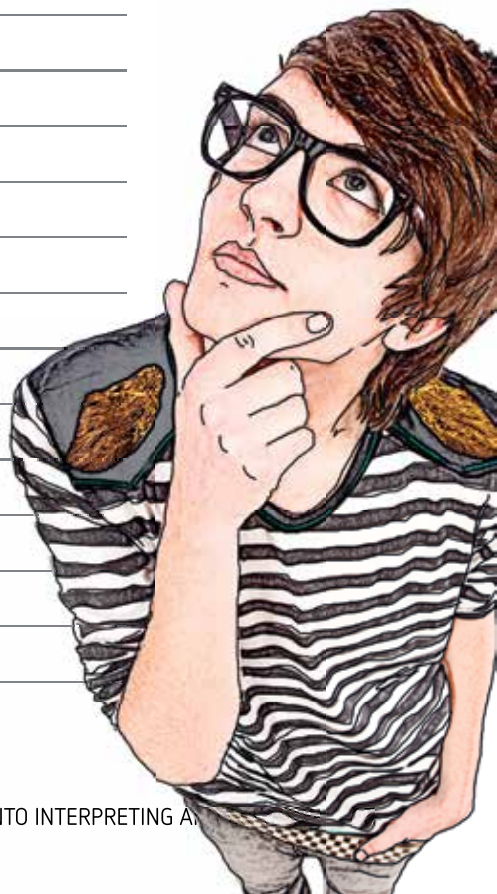Rudyard Kipling, *Rewards and Fairies*, Macmillan and Co., London, 1910

2 Exploring levels of meaning – Sometimes when we're noticing things about a text, we only look at the meanings that are most obvious to us. Use this next activity to consider the poem 'If –' in more depth. Look at the meanings you can find on the lines (literal), between the lines (interpretive), and beyond the lines (inferential). Answer 'true' or 'false' for the following statements, based on your understanding of the poem.

Literal

a _____ The poem was first published in 1910.

b _____ The poem uses an A-B-A-B rhyme scheme (in each stanza the 1st/3rd, and the 2nd/4th lines rhyme).

c _____ There is no reference to gender until the final line of the poem.

d _____ The speaker in the poem starts addressing the audience directly as 'you' right from the first line of the poem.

Interpretive

a _____ The speaker in this poem believes that being a man requires a calm and patient attitude.

b _____ This poem also contains advice for being a woman.

c _____ Maturity, in this poem, is something you automatically have more of as you get older.

d _____ Every stanza contains at least three recommendations for how to behave/act.

Inferential

a _____ I believe this poem contains good advice about how to act maturely.

b _____ This style of poetry suits a contemporary Australian audience.

c _____ The advice in this poem would be different if it were from a mother to her daughter.

d _____ The expectations set up by the speaker in this poem are too high.

3 When you finish exploring these levels of meaning in the poem, return to the framing exercise on page xx to see what notes you can add to the table. Ask yourself whether your response for the personal frame has expanded to contain more reactions.

4 **Reflect and create –** The poem 'If –' is written as advice to the poet's son. Who else might want to pass down or receive advice? The poem gives advice about how to 'be a man', though this could be understood more broadly as advice about how to be more stoic and, therefore, act maturely. What else might someone want advice about?

Write at least one stanza (8 lines) of a new poem that mirrors the textual features of the poem 'If –', but that draws from a different context. You might change the roles from father and son to something else. You might write advice for a very different kind of situation. Consider:

- adopting the A-B-A-B rhyme scheme
- starting the first of every four lines with 'If you can ...'

Use the final line 'And – which is more – you'll be ...' to suggest the goal of the advice, and who it's intended for (e.g. Kipling wrote 'you'll be a Man' as the goal, and added 'my son', telling us the advice was for his son).

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1.2 LANGUAGE IN USE – AN INTRODUCTION

Language is big! We have a huge number of language resources that we can draw on from second to second, minute to minute, as we chat to friends, negotiate with shop assistants, send emails, produce video blogs, and write formal school assignments. For example:

- There are 26 letters and about 44 sounds in English. These letters and sounds combine into **morphemes**, which in turn combine into words.
- The second edition of the twenty-volume *Oxford Dictionary* contains entries for 171,476 words in current use in the English language.

Words can be used in almost infinite combinations to form word groups, sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. In addition, humans convey meanings through body language, images, sounds and … well, you get the idea. Language is big!

Using language is complex. The language chosen must suit the context in which it is being used. Also, throughout any single day, you are constantly changing contexts. These different contexts often require you to adopt different roles and types of language.

Let us see how this works in action.

morphemes
the smallest unit of meaning that makes up a word, e.g.: 'tele' (far) + 'skopos' (to observe) = 'telescope'; 'morph' (form, structure) + 'eme' (noun-forming suffix) + s (plural) = 'morpheme'
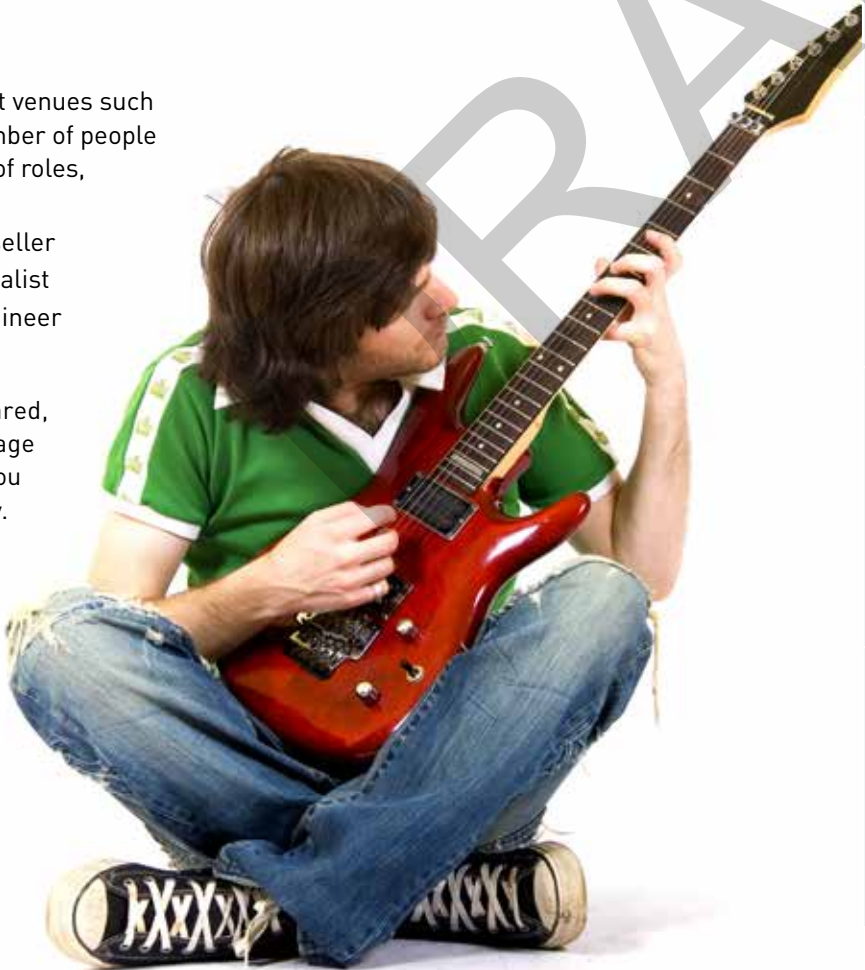
1.2 Your turn

Language in use at a music gig

Big name bands usually perform in large concert venues such as stadiums. Gigs of this sort involve a large number of people working at or attending the stadium in a variety of roles, including:

- fan
- lead singer
- band manager
- parking attendant
- program seller
- rock journalist
- sound engineer
- usher.

While the overall context of the concert is shared, each of these roles places different language demands on the people in them. In this activity, you will explore how this language varies and why. The activity will work best if you complete it by taking on a few different roles, or if groups in the class adopt a different role each and share the results.

1 Adopting the chosen role, answer the following questions. If necessary, conduct some brief research about your role online. Refer to the model answer in the middle column.

QUESTION	SAMPLE RESPONSE (AS POLICE OFFICER)	POSSIBLE ANSWER
What is one major type of writing or speaking that they do at the gig?	making a legal request	telling a story, explaining a process, giving an instruction, engaging in an argument/discussion, writing a review …
What do they write or speak about?	law enforcement and music concerts; submitting to breath testing or a bag search	
To whom do they speak or write at (or after) the gig, that is who is their audience?	a concert-goer who is creating a nuisance outside the venue	
Are they and their audience close or distant (physically and emotionally)?	they are distant as they are strangers	
Do they or the audience have the most power – or are they equals?	the police officer has the power legally but treats suspects politely where possible. The concert-goer can choose (however unwisely) to resist	
Are their values aligned or unaligned with those of the audience?	their values are not always aligned: the police officer values law and order; assumes some concert-goers will be intoxicated or using drugs; believes in bringing criminals to justice. On the other hand, the concert-goer may want to have a good time and enjoy the concert, assuming it is okay to do anything that achieves this goal	
Is the language mainly written or spoken? Do they use visuals (images, diagrams, graphs), gestures and body language, space? Do they use any of these in combination?	the language is mainly spoken, but this would be combined with the use of gesture, body language, vocal intonation, and space (e.g. coming close and placing hand on concert-goer's shoulder)	

2 Now, using your answers to guide you, write or perform a short argument text. Suggestions for each role are provided below and a sample dialogue is also given:

Suggestions for roles at concert

- fan of the band arguing with another fan that the band is not up to their usual standards, or they are trying to persuade security to let them backstage
- lead singer of the band arguing with the backstage manager about the quality of food and drink provided, or they are arguing with other band members about the playlist
- band manager arguing with the venue manager about safety concerns, or they are trying to convince the event organiser to employ the band again
- parking attendant trying to persuade a concert-goer that the carpark really is full, or trying to persuade their boss to give them a pay rise
- program seller arguing with a colleague about the best place to position themselves in the foyer, or persuading a concert-goer that paying $50 for a program is good value
- rock journalist trying to persuade an usher to let them into the press area even though they left their accreditation badge at home, or making the argument in a newspaper article that the band is in decline
- sound engineer trying to persuade the event organiser that the sound tent is not waterproof and therefore dangerous, or arguing with their assistant about the sound levels
- usher arguing with a concert-goer about the validity of their ticket, or persuading another usher that they need to take a break

Police officer: (approaches concert-goer, serious face, speaking in a polite but assertive manner) Sir, you are starting to become a public menace and I have reason to believe that you are intoxicated. Under the provisions of the Drugs Act, you are required to accompany me to the RBT van for testing.

Concert-goer: (backing away, holding up hands, swaying unsteadily) Whoah man, chill. I'm just here to see the band.

Police officer: (placing one hand on shoulder of concert-goer and another on his handcuffs) Sir, I don't want to arrest you but, if you refuse to come, I will have no choice.

Concert-goer: (allowing himself to be led off peacefully) Never liked that freakin' band anyway.

Police officer: (leads concert-goer away, holding elbow gently) Good choice, Sir.

Sample script: Police officer and concert-goer

3 Finally, share your responses with other groups. Start by summarising key details about your role and the context for your text. Then, read your argument aloud, or perform it. After each group has shared their responses, discuss the following:

- For the purposes of this activity, the general context of the concert and the social purpose (to argue a point of view) were kept the same. Despite this, in what ways are the responses different? Was anything about them similar?
- How can the differences be explained?
- List all the roles that you play during a typical school week, for example son/daughter, student, musician, artist, fiction writer, football player, friend. How do these affect your choices of language?
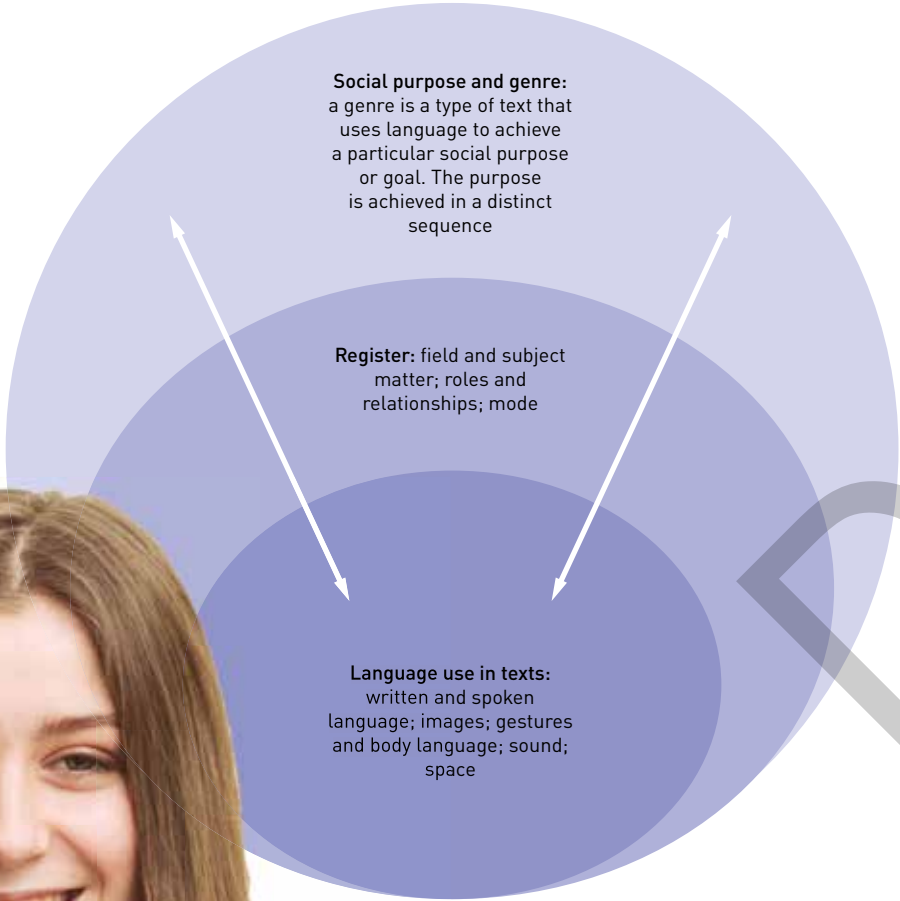
Write your notes here

A MODEL OF LANGUAGE IN USE

In order to make sense of some of the 'bigness' and complexity of language, we are going to use the language-in-use model. A model is a way of representing aspects of the world and can be a useful thinking tool. In this case, it will allow us to think about the way language is used in different contexts relevant to Senior English: everyday, civic, literary and academic.

One version of the model is presented in Source 3 below. The double-headed arrow indicates a two-way influence, that is:

- The purpose, genre and register influence the selection of language for a text.
- Choices in language can affect, challenge or subvert the register and genre.

For example a student is expected to be polite and deferential when speaking to the principal, but could challenge the relationship by sitting in her chair, calling her 'mate' and being the one asking the questions.

Social purpose and genre:
a genre is a type of text that uses language to achieve a particular social purpose or goal. The purpose is achieved in a distinct sequence

Register: field and subject matter; roles and relationships; mode

Language use in texts:
written and spoken language; images; gestures and body language; sound; space

Source 3 Language-in-use model

Without being aware of it, you used this model earlier as you completed the music gig activity. Source 4 below shows the model answers for the police officer, with an added column to match the questions to the different parts of the language-in-use model.

Source 4 Language-in-use model applied to interactions at a gig

RELATIONSHIP TO LANGUAGE-IN-USE MODEL	QUESTION	POSSIBLE ANSWER
social purpose and genre	What is one major type of writing or speaking that they do at the gig?	making a legal request
field and subject matter	What area of human knowledge/activity is the person involved in? Within this field, what do they write or speak about?	law enforcement and music concerts; submitting to breath testing or a bag search
roles and relationships	To whom do they speak or write at (or after) the gig, that is who is their audience?	a concert-goer who is creating a nuisance outside the venue
	Are they and their audience close or distant (physically and emotionally)?	they are distant as they are strangers
	Who has the most power – or are they equals?	the police officer has the power legally but treats suspects politely where possible. The concert-goer can choose (however unwisely) to resist
	Are their values aligned or unaligned? What is important to them in this world of the gig? What do they value, believe in and assume?	their values are not always aligned: the police officer values law and order; assumes some concert-goers will be intoxicated or using drugs; believes in bringing criminals to justice. On the other hand, the concert-goer may want to have a good time and enjoy the concert, assuming it is okay to do anything that achieves this goal
mode	Is the language mainly written or spoken? Do they use visuals (images, diagrams, graphs), gesture and body language, space? Do they use any of these in combination?	the language is mainly spoken, but this would be combined with the use of gesture, body language, vocal intonation, and space (e.g. coming close and placing hand on concert-goer's shoulder)

In fact, the language-in-use model represents the sort of thinking we do all day every day as we use language, often without even realising it.

What are the implications of this activity for your own writing and speaking as you progress through Senior English?

values
the things that are highly esteemed by people in particular communities. The term also includes the assumptions people make, and their attitudes towards various topics

Social purpose and genre

This section asks the questions: What are we trying to achieve? What types of text are we using to do so? People living in any community need to perform a variety of activities, some basic (such as cooking, washing clothes, fixing a leaking roof) and some with more complex social goals (such as negotiating goods and services, telling stories, explaining phenomena, arguing points of view, interpreting texts). Over time, these activities tend to become more standardised and sometimes even formulaic. The social goal (e.g. telling stories) is achieved through a series of typical steps or stages (e.g. orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, coda). When this happens, we call the activity a **genre** (e.g. narrative).

Think about the word 'genre' and other words it relates to, like 'general' and 'generic'. They link back to the Latin word *genus*, which means 'kind'. So, users of a language will recognise that some texts can be grouped together: they belong to a similar category or genre. However, genres are much more than just useful categories. Genres provide a way to productively 'contain' what you want to say and write. They allow you to shape your thoughts in ways that suit your purpose (and **audience**, but more on that shortly). In this way, you use the genre or genres that will best allow you to get a particular job done.

In Senior English, you will be required to interpret and create written, spoken and multimodal texts in a range of genres and contexts. However, of the many types of genres available for use in our society, subject English deals primarily with three families, as outlined in Source 5. Stages in parentheses are optional.

During the next two years, you need to consolidate your understanding of a range of these genres, some of which will be developed in detail later in this book. Although many of these will be familiar from Years 7 to 10, during senior school you will develop your ability to produce **sophisticated** versions of these texts. Importantly, you need to move away from an idea that genres are recipes to follow. Instead, you need to think about genres as a **culturalrepertoire** that allows you to achieve your social purposes. They provide a way to productively 'contain' what you want to say and write. They allow you to shape your thoughts in ways that suit your purpose (and audience, more on page XX). In this way, you use the genre or genres that will be best to allow you to get a job done.

genre
a type of text that uses language to achieve a particular social purpose or goal in a distinct sequence of steps or stages. Another name you might have heard for genre is 'text type'

audience
the people a writer/speaker has in mind when producing a text. This might be a real audience or one that can be inferred from evidence in the text

sophisticated
a use of language that is flexible and accurate in order to create a complex text that responds skilfully to the social purpose and register

cultural repertoire
the 'toolbox' of meaning-making resources (e.g. language, images, sound patterns and gestures) shared by people in a community

Source 5 Key genres for Senior English

GENRE FAMILY	GENRE	SOCIAL PURPOSE	TYPICAL STAGES (LISTED IN ORDER)
story	recount	to relate a series of events	- orientation - events
	narrative	to resolve a complication in a story	- orientation - complication - (evaluation) - resolution - (coda)
	anecdote	to share an emotional reaction to a remarkable event	- orientation - complication - (evaluation)
	exemplum	to judge characters/people or behaviour in a story	- orientation - complication - (evaluation)
	news story	to report a significant event	- lead - angles
argument	exposition	to argue a point of view	- (background) - thesis - supporting arguments - reinforcement of thesis
	discussion	to discuss two or more points of view	- (background) - issue - sides - resolution
	challenge	to rebut a position on an issue	- position - rebuttal
response to texts	personal response	to respond to a work in a personal way	- title - events - opinion
	review	to assess the value of a literary, visual or musical text	- context - interpretation of elements of text - judgment
	character analysis	to evaluate character(s) in a text	- character presentation - character description - character judgment
	analytical essay (interpretation)	to interpret themes/ messages or aesthetics of a text	- thesis: theme identification and preview of elements - element evaluation - theme reiteration
	critical evaluation	to analyse and evaluate the themes, ideas, or messages in a work	- text evaluation - deconstruction of text - challenge to message

If you were asked to produce a feature article, you know that it would appear in the feature articles section of a newspaper or magazine (online or print), and it would need to be suitable for a general audience. However, consider your purpose.

Source 6 Questions to consider when writing a feature article

Your answers to the sorts of questions that are being posed in Source 5 will help you determine which genre is best to use: narrative, exposition or cause–effect explanation respectively (although the final genre is not one you would typically write in subject English). However, you can also combine genres in order to achieve multiple goals in the same text and to make it more interesting.

In other words, you need to become increasing attuned to the ways that genres can be used flexibly to achieve your purpose in sophisticated ways. We will explore this idea further throughout this book.

1.3a Your turn

Identifying genres

Find out how well you know the basic genres. Each of the extracts below is the first stage of a different genre with which you should be familiar from your studies in Years 7–10. Read the four extracts carefully and use the table on page xx (later chapter) to identify the genre of each. Ensure that you justify your answers.

TEXT ONE: HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS

'Top Destinations: Lamington National Park'

Australia has an abundance of impressive, natural attractions. There are the sparkling blue waters of Sydney Harbour, the mystical red monolith of Uluru, the snow-blanketed peaks of Cradle Mountain and the colourful palette of the Great Barrier Reef. However, in the last of our series, another remarkable wilderness experience tops our list of great holiday destinations. Conveniently situated in the mountains behind the Gold Coast, Lamington National Park is a long way from the glitz and glamour of the tourist strip. A World Heritage listed area of astonishing natural beauty, Lamington is a place that will suit just about anyone. It has a range of accommodation options and opportunities for total relaxation or adrenaline-pumping adventure.

Genre:

TEXT THREE: *SARAH AND BOB*

Day one

Sarah stood with her King Charles spaniel, Bob, on the windswept cliff top, staring out at the sea stretched before her like a blue velvet cloth scattered with glinting diamonds. After removing her backpack, she reached inside and pulled out the cork-sealed bottle. Inside was a single, dried red flower with a long stem. She didn't know the exact sort of flower; she just knew it was brightly coloured and slipped into the narrow neck of the bottle without sustaining too much damage. Raising her arm, she tossed it as straight and far as she could. She held her breath as she watched it fall in a graceful arc towards the sea. 'I just hope it doesn't smash when it hits the water,' she said to herself. Sarah saw a tiny splash as it landed, but from that height could not see the condition of the bottle. 'Well, Bob, that's it. That bottle's on its own now.' Turning her back on the ocean, she said, 'Time to get home, boy'.

Genre:

TEXT TWO: COMPARISON

As this comparison of *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron and *The World According to Garp* by John Irving begins, imagine Stingo and Garp – strangers – meeting in a park one morning 'excellent and fair' (Styron 1980: 51). They are sitting in the bright sunlight, throwing scraps of bread to the ducks. They talk and, by a chance remark, each discovers … 'You're a writer?' Their ensuing, hesitant discussion on the art of fiction and problems faced by modern writers is by turns convivial and comforting as each shares common concerns and experiences, and heated conversation ensues. Ultimately, their ideological differences are too strong. For everything that joins them, there are corresponding deep, black chasms between them. They could never be friends or colleagues.

Genre:

TEXT FOUR: ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

Fellow survivors

The zombies have won. [pause] These horrible but cunning creatures, the children of a sinister retrovirus, have defeated us [sweep out right arm to full extension], sweeping over our nation like a tsunami. They were once our friends and family, but no more. Now they are our enemy. This is a bitter pill to swallow, I know. However, we must accept this reality. We must give up hope of returning to our former lives. We must leave this land, because it is our home no longer. [pause] Instead, in a place far from here [gradually rising volume], we will build a new civilisation, construct new homes, and establish a new society.

Genre:

Register and social context

While genre helps give shape to a text, specific organisational and language choices are influenced by the register. Register is a collective term encompassing the field and subject matter, roles and relationships, and mode of the context in which the text is produced. Let us take these elements one at a time.

Field and subject matter

In looking at field and subject matter, we consider the questions: In what field am I involved? What am I producing a text about? The field is the general area of activity and knowledge in which the **text producer** is engaged, for example biology, fairytale, gardening or cooking. Within any of those fields your subject matter (or topic) might be frogs.

In English, subject matter is often used to define story genres more precisely. So, for example, rather than just saying you are going to read a story, you might say you are going to read a romance, comedy, science fiction or horror. Or, more broadly, we might say we are going to read a fiction or non-fiction book, in other words a largely invented story versus a largely true story. Over time, readers might develop certain expectations about how stories on different topics (i.e. sub-genres of narrative) will unfold and the way language is used. For example, a reader of romance stories (typically) has different expectations from those of a science fiction reader. However, writers can unleash their creativity and challenge readers' expectations by fusing different sub-genres – a romantic, zombie comedy anyone? This is one of the ways that genre innovation occurs.

Let us have a closer look at how subject matter affects how a text is written. For this example, we will read a text about frogs within the field of fairytale production. Read this extract from the beginning of 'The Frog Prince', first published in 1874.

text producer
the writer, speaker or person who creates a multimodal text

Source 7

'THE FROG PRINCE'

In the olden time, when wishing was having, there lived a King, whose daughters were all beautiful; but the youngest was so exceedingly beautiful that the Sun himself, although he saw her very often, was enchanted every time she came out into the sunshine.

Near the castle of this King was a large and gloomy forest, and in the midst stood an old lime-tree, beneath whose branches splashed a little fountain; so, whenever it was very hot, the King's youngest daughter ran off into this wood, and sat down by the side of this fountain; and, when she felt dull, would often divert herself by throwing a golden ball up in the air and catching it. And this was her favourite amusement.

Now, one day it happened, that this golden ball, when the King's daughter threw it into the air, did not fall down into her hand, but on the grass; and then it rolled past her into the fountain. The King's daughter followed the ball with her eyes, but it disappeared beneath the water, which was so deep that no one could see to the bottom. Then she began to lament, and to cry louder and louder; and, as she cried, a voice called out, 'Why weepest thou, O King's daughter? thy tears would melt even a stone to pity.' And she looked around to the spot whence the voice came, and saw a Frog stretching his thick ugly head out of the water. 'Ah! you old water-paddler,' said she, 'was it you that spoke? I am weeping for my golden ball, which has slipped away from me into the water.'

'Be quiet, and do not cry,' answered the Frog; 'I can give thee good advice. But what wilt thou give me if I fetch thy plaything up again?'

'What will you have, dear Frog?' said she. 'My dresses, my pearls and jewels, or the golden crown which I wear?'

The Frog answered, 'Dresses, or jewels, or golden crowns, are not for me; but if thou wilt love me, and let me be thy companion and playfellow, and sit at thy table, and eat from thy little golden plate, and drink out of thy cup, and sleep in thy little bed, – if thou wilt promise me all these, then will I dive down and fetch up thy golden ball.'

'Oh, I will promise you all,' said she, 'if you will only get me my ball.' But she thought to herself, 'What is the silly Frog chattering about? Let him remain in the water with his equals; he cannot mix in society.' But the Frog, as soon as he had received her promise, drew his head under the water and dived down. Presently he swam up again with the ball in his mouth, and threw it on the grass. The King's daughter was full of joy when she again saw her beautiful plaything; and, taking it up, she ran off immediately. 'Stop! stop!' cried the Frog; 'take me with thee. I cannot run as thou canst.' But all his croaking was useless; although it was loud enough, the King's daughter did not hear it, but, hastening home, soon forgot the poor Frog, who was obliged to leap back into the fountain.

Brothers Grimm, George Routledge, 1874

1.3b Your turn

Effects of field on language use

In small groups, discuss what makes 'The Frog Prince' a fairytale. Now, see what happens when you change the field. Each group should write about frogs within a different field, using the suggestions below. After you are finished, share your texts and discuss how the changing fields have influenced the way that you wrote about the topic of frogs.

FIELD	GENRE	SUGGESTED SUBJECT MATTER
biology	sequential explanation	the life cycle of frogs
gardening	fact sheet	how to attract frogs to your garden
cooking	recipe	how to cook frogs' legs

Roles and relationships

Within this element of register, we ask: Who is the writer/speaker/creator? Who is the reader/listener/viewer? What is their relationship? Roles and relationships are often glossed over as 'audience'. However, that term needs some elaboration to be useful in Senior English. Firstly, any interaction almost always involves at least two people: the text producer (i.e. writer, speaker, creator of multimodal text) and the audience (i.e. reader, listener, viewer). Moreover, as we saw in the music gig activity, **interactants** take on special roles in any communication context. For example, at home you might take on the role of son or daughter negotiating with your parents/caregivers to go to a party. Then at school, you might become a student being taught by your Art teacher. At lunch time, you become a friend recounting to your best friends the concert you went to on the weekend. After school, you might become a supervisor at a supermarket having to provide help to a colleague. It is very likely that in each of these different roles, you will use slightly different language. For example, there is a social expectation that you would speak differently to your friends and your teacher.

However, writers and speakers also have the freedom to ignore, challenge or even reshape previously established social **conventions**. For example when text messages became a common genre for communication, users began to drop conventional punctuation, use abbreviations and invent emojis. Despite some resistance to this, these changes suited the more spoken-like nature of texting and through repeated use have become a new set of conventions. Interestingly, research in the United States revealed that the majority of people considered the use of correct punctuation in texts to be aggressive! Of course, ignoring social conventions can have negative, short-term consequences: calling your principal by his or her first name will get you into trouble in most schools.

We can be more precise, however, there are three factors that influence relationships (see Source 8). These factors can be crucial for ensuring that you connect in an appropriate and effective way with your audience. Throughout this book, we will explore these factors and their significance for texts in much more detail. For the moment, though, experiment with the difference that roles and relationships make through the following activity.

interactants
the people involved in any communication event

conventions
the typical way things get done in a community

alignment
amount of agreement among a group of people

Source 8 Factors that influence relationships

RELATIONSHIP FACTOR	QUESTION	SCALE
distance	Are you and your audience close?	close ← → distant
power	Are you and your audience equal?(This can relate to comparative status, prominence, authority/expertise, control of language, and access to power.)	equal ← → unequal
alignment of values	Are the values of you and your audience aligned? (These include values related to generation, gender, ethnicity, capacity and class.)	aligned ← → not aligned

1.3c Your turn

Effects of roles and relationships on language use

In pairs, select one set of roles (described below) and produce a two- to three-minute interaction between them. You might like to script this first and then either video it or perform it live to the class. When you share your roleplays, see if other students can identify the roles and relationships accurately. Discuss the success (or otherwise) of the various interactions and make recommendations for how the various characters could have improved the situation in which they found themselves. Focus particularly on the relationships they establish and how they maintain these.

SET 1 – AWARD PRESENTATION	
Genre	
award presentation	acceptance speech
Field and subject matter	
film industry (AACTA Awards); presentation of Best Actress Award	film industry (AACTA Awards); winning Best Actress Award
Speaker's role	
Clarissa Bombe, presenter at a gala motion picture awards ceremony. She was last year's winner of the Best Actress Award.	Sally Starre, fabulous and self-centred actor and tabloid celebrity
Relationship	
distance: Wants to come across as just an ordinary person, so tries to establish a sense of closeness with the audience. power: Considers herself infinitely better than Sally Starre, even though Clarissa was not nominated this year. alignment of values: Like the audience, she values the Australian motion picture industry, but her hatred for Starre borders on the psychopathic.	distance: pretends to be close to Clarissa power: considers herself a superstar alignment of values: positive to the world around her as long as the world recognises her greatness
Some suggested language features	
Try to use unexpected forms of language for an awards presenter, for example: - frequent use of questions - use of first and third person - use of general noun groups when referring to Starre (e.g. her, that woman) - use of negative word choices associated with Starre.	- use statements - frequent use of first person - frequent use of very positive words about herself

SET 2 – PURCHASE OF GOODS

Genre	
transactional (purchase of goods)	
Field and subject matter	
commerce and shopping; purchase of items of clothing	commerce and shopping; purchase of items of clothing
Speaker's role	
you are a customer in a quality department store	you are a shop assistant in a quality department store
Relationship	
– distance: You try to be very familiar, treating them like your best friend. – power: you try to establish a close relationship with the shop assistant, ignoring even physical barriers such as counters. – alignment of values: You consider yourself the equal of most people and behave in a manner that reflects this.	– distance: You remain behind your counter to maintain a physical barrier between yourself and your customers. You project aloofness and distance – power: You consider yourself to be superior in every way to your customers – alignment of values: You have disdain for your customers and believe the 'riff raff' should be kept out of the store
Some suggested language features	
– use of politeness markers, e.g. please, thank you – colloquial language – familiar forms of address, e.g. mate, girlfriend – use of statements and questions	– third person, e.g. 'What would the customer like?' – commands (rather than statements and questions) – formal vocabulary – words that evaluate the customer negatively

SET 3 – JOB INTERVIEW

Genre	
job interview	job interview
Field and subject matter	
human resources; selling himself for a job	human resources; finding the best candidate for a job
Speaker's role	
Gecko (a nickname), a surfer dude who is applying for a job	interviewer for a prestigious company
Relationship	
– distance: You like to get close to people, to the point where you invade their personal space. – power: You consider yourself everyone's equal. – alignment of values: You consider yourself a great candidate but work for you is just a necessity to keep you in surfboards.	– distance: You sit behind a large desk to keep a barrier between you and the interviewee. – power: You are the boss. – alignment of values: You value the reputation of the company and expect employees to be hard-working and devoted to the company.
Some suggested language features	
– use of familiar modes of address, e.g. mate, 'Shazza' (for Sharon) – frequent use of surfer slang – use of statements and lots of questions – lack of subject–verb agreement at times	– use of formal modes of address, e.g. Ms Smith – use of politeness markers, e.g. please, thank you – use of fairly formal vocabulary – use of questions and some statements

Mode

English speakers recognise written language as the set of resources (sounds, letters, morphemes, words, groups of words, etc) that we can draw on to create meaning and communicate ideas. When we are speaking, we have access to additional resources such as intonation, pitch, volume, pace, pause and vocal quality. These sets of meaning-making resources, which are recognised by cultural groups, are called modes.

In addition to written language and spoken resources, there are a number of other modes that we typically draw on in Senior English, provided below with some examples:

- visual: shot types, framing, colour and composition
- typography: weight, slope, expansion, curvature and connectivity
- body language: facial expression, body orientation and gesture
- spatial: bonding icons, binding and social distance
- sound: sound effects, silence, soundtracks and soundscape.

A more comprehensive summary of key resources for each of these modes can be found in Chapter 8. The important point to remember is that modes facilitate the communication of meaning in different ways and, frequently, meaning in a text can be distributed across a number of them. For example in a commercial on YouTube, the written language might tell you the name of a product and where to buy it; the sound (e.g. soft piano and the sounds of a breeze blowing through leaves) might suggest that the product creates peace and calm in your life, and this might be reinforced by images of green forests in a long shot. You will be expected to both interpret these sorts of texts and create your own.

1.3d Your turn

Experimenting with mode

Working in pairs or small groups, try communicating the following ideas through different modes, using, for example:

- words
- images without words
- gesture, facial expression and posture only.

Ideas to communicate

1 'Turn on the air-conditioner, please. It's hot.'
2 excitement
3 anger
4 'I really like you.'
5 hope

Moving towards highly valued academic language

There is one other implication of mode that you need to consider. As you move through primary and secondary school, it is expected that your language becomes less like oral (spoken) language and more like formal, written language. Let us return to the opening line of the Holiday destinations text on for a moment:

> Australia has an abundance of impressive, natural attractions: the sparkling blue waters of Sydney Harbour, the mystical red monolith of Uluru, the snow-blanketed peaks of Cradle Mountain, or the colourful palette of the Great Barrier Reef. (36 words)

This contains a number of language features that make it an effective 'written' text, including:

- use of noun-forming suffixes, e.g. –ance (abundant   abundance) and –ion (attract   attraction)
- nominalisation, especially an abundance of impressive, natural attractions
- noun groups packed with lots of information, including the sparkling blue waters of Sydney Harbour; the mystical red monolith of Uluru; the snow-blanketed peaks of Cradle Mountain; the colourful palette of the Great Barrier Reef.

Alternatively, this is how the same sentence might have been spoken:

> Impressive natural places that attract people are abundant in Australia. The blue waters of Sydney Harbour sparkle. Uluru is a red monolith and it creates mystery. Cradle Mountain has peaks that snow is blanketing. Also, the Great Barrier Reef has a colourful palette. (43 words)
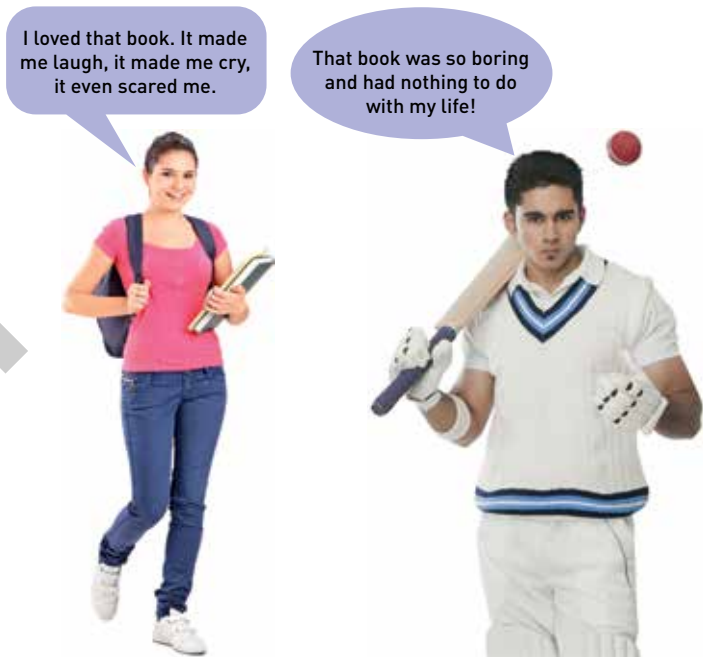
This type of language is less dense (note the second version has more words) and much looser and is likely to attract a lower grade than the first version.

The ability to move from more 'spoken' to more 'written' language will be one of the focuses of this book.

1.3e Your turn

Shifting mode

Imagine it is lunch time and you and your friends are talking about a book you just read for English.

> I loved that book. It made me laugh, it made me cry, it even scared me.

> That book was so boring and had nothing to do with my life!

Source 9

Now imagine you have to write about your response in an English lesson. Rewrite the response for either Student 1 or Student 2, making it a more sophisticated. Share your responses and discuss why the new version would be more appropriate for an English assignment.

Possible answer

Student 1: This is an incredibly moving novel that is highly recommended for the discerning reader.

Student 2: The plodding, interminable plot reveals nothing of relevance to a modern reader.

Discussion

In both cases, the emotion words have been changed into appreciation words, for example:

- The adjective 'boring' becomes 'plodding' and 'interminable'.
- The verbs 'laugh', 'cry', 'scared' become the words 'incredibly moving'.

In addition, while first person is used in the original, spoken responses, both of the written responses change to third person. Also, for Student 2, the clause 'had nothing to do with my life' becomes the noun group 'nothing of relevance to a modern reader'.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

In this chapter you have learnt that language is 'big' and, therefore, provides us with a huge toolbox of resources at our disposal to communicate meaning. The tools we use at any one time depend on the context in which we are communicating. This idea is represented by the language-in-use model that shows the relationship between genre and social purpose, register and language used in texts. Now it is time to consolidate your understanding of the model.

1.4 Your turn

Reviewing the language-in-use model

Return to the texts on pages XX. Complete the table below for all aspects of the model. You may have to infer some of the information from the relevant text and your general knowledge and understanding. Text one has been done for you. Although we have touched on only some aspects of language so far, see how you go completing the final row based on your knowledge about grammar for Years 7–10.

ASPECT OF LANGUAGE-IN-USE MODEL	TEXT ONE: HOLIDAY DESTINATIONS	TEXT TWO: COMPARISON	TEXT THREE: SARAH AND BOB	TEXT FOUR: ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE
Social purpose and genre	exposition to argue a point of view			
Field of activity and subject matter	travel; top holiday destinations in Australia			
Roles role of writer/speaker	travel writer			
assumed audience (listeners, readers, viewers)	reader of a travel blog or travel section of a weekend paper			
Relationship distance	fairly distant: the writer and readers do not know each other personally			
power	fairly unequal: the travel writer is the expert but the readers can stop reading			
alignment of values	not necessarily aligned: travel writer must assume that not all readers will agree with their opinions			
Mode/s (written, spoken, visual, or multimodal)	written (probably accompanied by a photo)			
Key features (language and other multimodal resources)	present tense; some use of inclusive third person; long noun groups (e.g. the sparkling blue waters of Sydney Harbour); frequent use of positive evaluative language appreciating places			

FOR THE TEACHER

Check your obook assess for the following additional resources for this chapter:

Answers
Answers to each *Your Turn task bank* in this chapter

Teacher notes
Useful notes and advice for teaching this chapter, including syllabus connections and relevant weblinks

Class test
Comprehensive test to review students' skills and knowledge

assess quiz
Interactive auto-correcting multiple-choice quiz to test student comprehension