



Transactional Writing: Explanation

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 4 5

The Tape Dispenser

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

Prior to writing, the class spent a number of sessions discussing a variety of written explanations, focusing on the “how” and the “why”. They were asked to identify different language features and distinct qualities of the organisation of the texts.

Laura drafted this explanation over four days. It was then revised and edited after group and individual conferencing. In total, this covered two weeks.

To introduce explanation writing, the teacher placed the students into cooperative groups and asked them to explain everyday household chores. This was followed by a group discussion and whole-class feedback on the effectiveness of the process.

The class then identified the two frequently written types of explanation, “How?” and “Why?” The groups were asked to read two *School Journal* stories, “Le Polo Pulu” (2.2.99) and “Freaky” (2.3.99). Their task was to determine whether the explanations were in the “how” or “why” category, and identify the features of each text. Following this, they studied the language, specifically time-order and cause-and-effect words.

They then had to put together an explanation framework. Each group was given the text “How a Kite Works” (First Steps). The group task was to draft a framework of headings and understandings of the content. They were asked to think about what each paragraph was telling them.

The class then devised a framework for explanation writing:

- title
- definition
- components or parts
- operations
- application
- interesting comment.

The next session focused on sequencing and cause and effect. In pairs, the students constructed a flow diagram of how they would organise “The Best Party Ever”. The emphasis was on using cause-and-effect and time-order words such as “if”, “so”, “then”, “as a consequence” and “first”, “then”, “after”, “next”.

They were now confident to begin writing. Each group was given a tape dispenser to pull apart and explore. They were challenged to find the most parts, and the most interesting parts. They explained to each other what each part was used for.

The class then revisited the framework. Before writing, they discussed their intended audience. What language would entice them to continue? It was decided that they would emphasise precise and varied verbs.

The students talked about what information would be needed in the first paragraph. Together, they and the teacher wrote

a definition example on the board. After discussion, individual definitions were written and shared. Modelling and feedback continued during the draft.

In the operation section, emphasis was placed on cause-and-effect and time-order language. The students were encouraged to share their writing at selected intervals, to offer feedback.

Once they had completed their initial drafts, they referred to a writer’s checklist:

- precise and varied verbs
- cause-and-effect language
- reasonably formal language
- engaging the audience.

Teacher-student conversations

During the first draft:

Teacher: In our first paragraph we need to keep in mind that we are wanting to inform the reader that this explanation is going to tell them how to use a tape dispenser.

Laura: Do I need to give them a bit more detail about what they will expect to read? I can do that.

Teacher: I’m just looking at your sentence lengths. What do you notice about them?

Laura: I’ve gone in-depth so they are quite long.

Teacher: Yes, we need to remember that we are writing for an audience. A piece with varied sentence lengths may hold their interest more.

Laura: When I’m reading it out loud I can see a couple of places where I could change them.

Teacher: Looking at your sentence beginnings, I just wonder whether we can add a bit more variety here too?

Laura: I can see the ones you mean. There are lots of “The tape dispenser” and “Some tape dispensers”.

Teacher: Could you have a go at reworking these also?

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Opportunities should be provided in classroom reading programmes for students to respond to written and visual texts, identifying how processes, occurrences and phenomena can be explained. Shared reading and guided reading programmes will provide opportunities for discussing topic-related vocabulary, specific language features, precise criteria and diagrams, which may be transferred to student writing and drawing.



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WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Laura toward the next learning step, the teacher might help her to focus on:

Ideas

- supporting explanations with a range of pertinent but detailed ideas that are precisely linked.

Vocabulary

- encouraging her to become more discerning in her choices.

Sentences

- using a variety of structures and lengths for effect.

This could be done by:

- exploring models of writing which exemplify the strategies
- working with Laura to develop further criteria to help achieve the purpose of the writing
- choosing more complex phenomena, occurrences or processes to explain.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 5: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write coherent, logical instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express and argue a point of view, linking main and supporting ideas, and structuring material in appropriate styles in a range of authentic contexts.

Levels 5 and 6: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should: using appropriate terminology, describe, discuss, analyse, and apply the distinctive conventions, structures, and language features of a range of texts and explain how they suit the topic and purpose.

Thinking Critically: Students should: interpret, analyse, and produce written texts, identifying and discussing their literary qualities, and explore and identify attitudes and beliefs in terms of personal experience and knowledge of other texts.

Processing Information: Students should: using appropriate technologies, retrieve, select, and interpret information from a variety of sources, and present accurate and coherent information for a range of purposes, analysing the processes used.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35-36

NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement)

Transactional Writing: Explanation
Achievement Standard AS90053: English 1.2 Produce Formal Writing.

www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/ach/English/AS90053.doc
New Zealand Qualifications Authority (2001).

Unit Standard 8813: Produce Transactional Written Text in Simple Forms.

New Zealand Qualifications Authority (2002).

REFERENCES

Education Department of Western Australia (1977). *First Steps: Writing Developmental Continuum*. Melbourne: Rigby Heinemann.

Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Laura speaks directly to her audience with an objective, comprehensive and detailed explanation that includes elements of instructional and procedural text.

Deeper features

Impact

Explains a selected phenomenon, occurrence or process comprehensively, clearly and logically.

Targets audience.

Speaks directly to the audience.

Ideas

Includes a range of ideas, which are logically linked.

Structure

Uses a range of time-order and cause-and-effect words and phrases.

Organises ideas into paragraphs.

Provides a summary statement.

Sentences

Uses a variety of structures with some impact.

Vocabulary

Selects interesting, topic-related vocabulary

Language features

Uses a range of explanation features with control and intent, e.g., adverbs and adjectives as qualifiers, action verbs, present tense.

Student's first draft

To use a tape dispenser is unbelievably easy. It is a wonderful and simple mechanism that holds a roll of tape and dispenses it in quantities of your liking

The contraption is built up of various parts that make it serviceable. Some of the main parts are the jagged metal razor, the plastic body of the dispenser, and the plastic axle in the middle of the body. There is also the foamy grip pad underneath the tape dispenser, which prevents it from sliding and scratching the surface it has been placed on. Some tape dispensers also have sand in the plastic body at the bottom to help weigh it down so it will not slide.

The dispenser is a simple gadget to use. Firstly, the end of the tape should already be stretched onto the razor teeth, so take hold of the tape and tug it gently towards you until it is the length that you require. Be careful not to pull it too hard so you end up with too much tape, and try to avoid cutting your fingers on the metal teeth. Next, pull the tape against the razor in a swift, downwards motion, hence cutting the measure of tape in a straight line. As a result, you can now cut approximate lengths of tape for your work.

As you may or may not already know, a tape dispenser isn't dependent on electricity or batteries, so it can work anytime, day or night. They are used worldwide in offices, shops, schools, homes, and companies and serve themselves as reliable working equipment. They're cheap and can be used to stick objects together, wrap a present, hold a piece of paper or an item to a surface, or even hold items down.

As the world leaps farther into the technology and science of the future, clever effective equipment such as a tape dispenser will surely stay the simple ingenious tool it has been for many more generations.

Surface features

Uses the writing conventions of grammar, spelling and punctuation with few intrusive errors.



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Student's first draft

How to use a sellotape dispenser is unbelievably easy. It is a wonderful and simple mechanism that holds a roll of sellotape and dispenses it in quantities of your liking.

The contraption is built up of various parts that make it serviceable. Some of the main parts are the jagged metal razor, the plastic body of the dispenser, and the plastic axle in the middle of the body. There is also the foamy grip pad underneath the tape dispenser, which prevents it from sliding and scratching the surface it has been placed on. Some sellotape dispensers also have sand in the plastic body at the bottom to help weigh it down so it will not slide.

The dispenser is a simple gadget to use. Firstly, the end of the sellotape should already be stretched onto the razor teeth, so take hold of the sticky sellotape and tug it gently towards you until it is the length that you require. Be careful not to pull it too hard so you end up with too much sellotape, and try to avoid cutting your fingers on the metal teeth. Next, pull the tape against the razor in a swift, downwards motion, hence cutting the measure of sellotape in a straight line. As a result, you can now cut approximate lengths of sellotape for your work.

As you may or may not already know, a sellotape dispenser isn't dependent on electricity or batteries, so it can work anytime, day or night. They are used worldwide in offices, shops, schools, homes, and companies and serve themselves as reliable working equipment. They're cheap and can be bought from stationary equipment stores and warehouses for their ideal uses. The extracted sellotape from the sellotape roll can be used to stick objects together, wrap a present, hold a piece of paper or an item to a surface, or to even hold items down.

As the world leaps farther into the technology and science of the future, clever effective equipment such as a sellotape dispenser will surely stay the simple ingenious tool it has been for many more generations.