

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Recount	15
Narrative	27
Procedure	37
Explanation	49
Persuasive Text	61
Report	73
Bonus Genre Studies	87
• Article	88
• Essay	90
• Biography/Autobiography	92
Acknowledgments	95
Bibliography	96

INTRODUCTION

Writing as a function

Genre studies are an important tool for teachers to help students understand that writing is more than a process. It is a function for living.

When students know how a text works and can determine the purpose of the text, their understanding of the text is improved. The more students know about how a genre works, the better they can read and write.

Changes in the ways we teach writing equals changes in teaching practices

Jan Turbill (2007), an Australian educator, has explained that the way in which student writing has been viewed has changed from the 1960s to the present. As conceptions of writing have changed, so have their teaching practices. Turbill describes it as the four ages of writing:

1. 1960s – the age of writing as production or encoding
2. 1970s – the age of writing as creativity (creative writing)
3. 1980s – the age of writing as a process
4. 1990s to the present – the age of writing as social purpose

This book focuses on the current age of “writing as social purpose.” The discussion and demonstration of the teaching practices necessary to enable children to read and write well for social purposes are presented in a way that enables teachers to plan effectively for successful reading and writing workshops.

Focusing on the way that genre and texts work

A number of important written genres, with their forms, features, and structure are presented in this book. By focusing on this sampling of genre, which closely parallels the English Language Arts Standards written for U.S. state education systems, teachers and students will

- learn how several important text types are structured;
- learn about the features of each of these texts;
- use templates of the text types to help understand how the text works by deconstructing the text during Read Aloud and Shared Reading, and by reconstructing the text during Modeled Writing and Shared Writing;
- be involved in genre specific mini-lessons for both reading and writing workshops;
- draw on a number of model texts for that genre from the classroom materials of well-known publishers listed in this book.

Teaching emphasis

When a teacher purposefully chooses a number of texts of the same genre and reads to her/his students during Read Aloud, and along with them in Shared Reading, then students will better develop an understanding of the following:

- Purpose and audience determine the genre and form (text type)
- Successful writing is writing that achieves its purpose
- Texts have different structures and different language features
- There are certain reader expectations of a text, for example,
 - a story (narrative text) is expected to entertain;
 - a report is expected to inform;
 - a procedure is expected to provide instructions.

When a reader knows why and how a text was written, their understanding is increased, as is their ability to write in that genre and comprehend what they read.

What is a genre?

The term *genre* in this book is used to refer to particular text types, not traditional varieties of literature. The genre of a text is partly determined by the culture in which the text is used, since different cultures achieve their purposes through language in different ways.

Language, text, language transaction, and genre

British and Australian researchers have worked since the early 1980s to bring into classrooms ways of instructing about texts that enable teachers and students to successfully understand the function of a number of different genres.

These understandings have been shown to greatly improve student reading and writing.

The research shows that clear definitions of language, text, and purpose, or language transaction, aid successful comprehension.

In a nutshell:

- Language is
 - functional – it has a clear use or purpose;
 - social – the language is appropriate for the setting in which it is used;
 - contextual – the language is used in context rather than in isolation;
 - structured by the user to make meaning.
- Text is
 - language that is functional and doing some job in context: text can be oral, written, or graphic such as a photo, an illustration, a graph;
 - made of meanings;
 - expressed in words and language structures – phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters;
 - seen as a product;
 - dynamic and changing.
- Language transaction is
 - making meaning by interacting with the text and with other people;

- a speaker having a listener, and a writer having a reader;
 - language users giving and receiving knowledge;
 - individuals building on what he/she brings to a situation;
 - a social exchange of meanings;
 - meanings being exchanged and refined and becoming something new;
 - the social purpose of writing.
- Genre is the way that an oral or written text is shaped, or structured, so that it can fulfill its purpose, or function.

Genres are goal oriented, enabling people to achieve a specific purpose through the use of the most appropriate language. The goal of a Recount, for example, is to “give a sequential account of an incident, a series of incidents, or a conversation.” (Mooney p. 84)

The demands of different contexts determine how spoken or written language is used and for what purpose. The speaker or writer selects the particular items required for the specific purpose, and the genre or text type is created.

Written texts

The purpose of a written text could be to

- persuade the reader to do or buy something;
- inform the reader about something;
- instruct the reader how to make or do something;
- explain why something takes place;
- entertain.

Oral texts

Oral genres are created incidentally through a range of social contexts, which are made explicit. A good example is the oral interaction between an infant and an adult when the adult is shaping or helping the infant to use language appropriately (Cambourne’s Conditions for Learning). This shaping of oral language extends to written genres and is well illustrated by the Recount genre, two examples of which appear below.

1. Young child recounting (the approximate spelling of the writing has been corrected):

At the Beach

I went with our teacher to the beach.

I played in the water.

I made sand castles.

Then I went home.

I had a good day.

2. Kindergarten interactive writing (jointly written by the teacher and a class of kindergarten students)

Our Trip to the Beach

Yesterday our teacher took us to the beach.

We got on the bus and drove a long way.

We made sand castles, and played in the water.

After lunch we got on the bus and went back to school.

We had a great time at the beach.

A teaching challenge

One of the challenges facing teachers is to know a range of genres, their various forms or text types, and how each of these text types is structured. In addition, the different text types have their own text features, which the writer has chosen to use. Understanding how these texts are structured and the various features of each, enables teachers and students to explore genre in a way that will improve both reading and writing.

Text structure

The writer of a recipe structures the text to make it logical for a reader to follow. First, the text tells you the materials and equipment you need to complete the recipe. Next, it takes you through the steps in easy-to-follow chronological order. Finally, there is a comment about how to serve whatever you have been making. This skeleton or framework is the structure of the text.

Text features

Margaret Mooney (2001), internationally renowned writer and educator, says that “knowing the features or characteristics which distinguish one text from another need to be understood from a reader and a writer’s perspective.”

Knowing some of the features likely to be encountered enables the reader to anticipate the use of the most appropriate reading strategies, as well as make accurate predictions about the content and the way it will most likely be presented.

In the same way, knowing how the text works, and using the appropriate features helps a writer to compose and revise a piece of writing according to the purpose for which she/he intends it. Features, depending on the type of text, could include:

- The tense of the writing – past, present, future
- The participants – specific (as in a story) or generalized (as in a fable)
- Use of action verbs
- Use of linking words such as *first*, *and then*, *later*, and *finally* to show the passing of time
- Use of headings and subheadings
- Precise information or generalized information
- Use of graphs, photos, and illustrations to add or clarify information

Unlocking a genre

This book enables teachers and students to examine and understand

- the structure and features that make each genre unique;
- some of the forms of each genre.

Understanding the genre or purpose of a text, its structure, and features has been shown to improve a reader’s comprehension. When teachers and students focus on the social purpose of writing they can “unlock” or understand a genre by using a checklist.

CHECKLIST

What is an explanation?

- Purpose** of the writing:
- To give an account of how something works
 - To give an account of the reasons for a phenomenon
- Genre** the writer chooses:
- Explanation
- Text structure** of this genre:
- A statement about the subject matter
 - Several explanations of how or why the subject matter works
 - An optional restatement to conclude the writing
- Text features** of this genre:
- Usually factual
 - Tells how, when, where, or why things happen or have happened
 - Describes what things are like – size, color, shape, texture
 - Explains what things can do
 - Usually detailed and descriptive
 - Has logically organized information
 - Often includes diagrams and tables
 - Has a table of contents and index for longer explanations
- The **forms** of this genre:
- Texts explaining how, for example:
 - Mechanical explanation
 - Technological explanation
 - System explanation
 - Natural explanation
 - Texts explaining why, for example:
 - Why some objects float and others sink
 - Why we have four seasons

Of the many genres known and used, this book will look closely at:

- Recount
- Narrative
- Procedure
- Explanation
- Persuasive Text
- Report
- Article
- Essay
- Biography/Autobiography

Planning a genre study

Teachers can use the resources in this book to plan a three–five week genre study that involves the following:

- Interactive Read Aloud
- Shared Reading
- Independent Reading and Investigation
- Modeled, Shared, and Interactive Writing
- Independent Writing

The resources also enable teachers to:

- Plan mini-lessons
- Use rubrics to guide and assess the quality of student writing

A schoolwide plan for text types – grades 3–8

What kind of knowledge of written genres do we want students to have as they move through school? There are essential understandings of how texts work, which students need to enable them to

- effectively comprehend written texts;
- write effective texts.

To enable students to meet the various state English Language Arts Standards, and to perform well on the standardized tests, understanding how written texts work is critical. The following chart is an example of a school curriculum map for grades 3–8. If students are unable to understand and use knowledge of these key genres at their grade level, then a detailed study of that genre needs to be undertaken as a whole class, a small group, or as an individual focus.

Example of school curriculum map for grades 3–8

Grade	Known and used	Deliberate immersion and study at this grade level	Benchmark for this grade level
3	Factual Recount Narrative Argument Instructions Explanation Report Poetry Persuasive Essay	Article Diary Journal Book Report Laboratory Report Poetry	Report Biography Instruction (directions) Explanation Essay
4	Factual Recount Narrative Argument Instructions Explanation Report Biography Essay Poetry	Feature Article Narrative (film or TV script) Scientific Recount Persuasive Essay Science Report	Historical Narrative Persuasive Essay Poetry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliterative • Onomatopoeia • Repetitive Article
5	Factual Recount Narrative Argument Persuasive Essay Instructions Explanation Report Biography Essay Poetry	Historical Fiction Explanation (of phenomenon) Autobiography or Memoir	Narrative (personal, story) Explanation (math, science) Instruction Argument/Essay Book Report Biography Poetry Feature Article Narrative (film or TV script) Scientific Recount Persuasive Essay Science Report
6	Factual Recount Narrative Argument Persuasive Essay Instructions Explanation (how and why) Report Biography Essay Poetry Historical Fiction	All the texts to the left, used across the curriculum. The following texts may be added: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Reports • Critiques 	The ability to write and read some forms of the following genres at a sixth grade level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recount • Narrative • Procedure • Report • Explanation • Argument

Grade	Known and used	Deliberate immersion and study at this grade level	Benchmark for this grade level
7	<p>Recount</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science • Social Studies • Diaries <p>Narrative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystery • Historical Fiction • Myths • Legends <p>Argument (at least two and possibly more points of view)</p> <p>Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science • Health • Social Studies <p>Explanation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mathematics • Science • Social Studies <p>Procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction Manual (written in narrative form) • Science Experiment 	<p>All the texts to the left, used across the curriculum. The following texts may be added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed Scientific Research Reports • Detailed Critiques • Detailed Biographies and Autobiographies • Memoirs 	<p>The ability to write and read several forms of the following genres at a seventh grade level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recount • Narrative • Procedure • Report • Explanation • Argument
8	<p>Eighth grade students are expected to be able to understand and use the entire range of genres above, including several forms of each to enable them to read and write well enough to meet state standards.</p>	<p>To decide the focus of immersion and study, teachers should look closely at students' abilities to write and read many forms of the following genres at an eighth grade level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recount • Narrative • Procedure • Report • Explanation • Argument 	<p>The ability to write and read many forms of the following genres at an eighth grade level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recount • Narrative • Procedure • Report • Explanation • Argument

Which genres need to be understood and used?

The following table lists the genres that comprise most state standards. Schools and teachers can use this table to map their reading and writing curriculum.

Genre	Form
Recount	Personal Retelling
Narrative	Personal Fairy tales Folktales, myths, legends, ballads, epics, tall tales, fables Historical fiction Science fiction Movie scripts, plays
Report	Research papers, lab reports, technical reports Magazine articles Book reports and reviews Minutes of meetings Biographies and autobiographies Diaries, journals, memoirs Articles
Procedure (Instruction)	Directions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to build • How to make • How to solve • How to do • How to use • Game rules
Persuasive Text	Argument Editorial (newspaper, magazine) Advertisement Book report/review Résumé Business letter (complaint or opinion) Travel brochure Debate, sermon, speech Political cartoon Student government (sales, student involvement) Essay
Explanation	How things work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural • Technical • Mechanical (computer, pump, motor, battery, electric circuitry) • Organizational Why things are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why phenomena happen • Why events occur
Article	Scientific Historical News (newspaper, magazine, newsletter, class paper) Human interest (feature articles) Professional Compare/contrast

Reproducible sheets

At the end of each genre study there are reproducible sheets for class use.

Writing templates

The writing templates can be used in a variety of ways. They can be

- made into an overhead for the overhead projector;
- enlarged with a chart maker and laminated;
- photocopied for class use.

Teachers can use the templates for Shared Writing or Modeled Writing to show their students how to

- take apart or deconstruct existing pieces of genre writing so the structure and features can be clearly seen;
- see how genre writing is constructed during Modeled and Shared Writing;
- plan a piece of genre writing.

Assessment rubrics

It is common practice in schools for teachers and students to use writing rubrics or profiles to look closely at student writing.

By developing genre specific rubrics, teachers can better describe writing achievement and note progress. The assessment rubric assists teachers and students to rate their genre writing, and look for areas in which it can be improved.

How is my writing going?

Children write best when they have a clear idea of how the writing works.

This *student-created rubric* was first made by a group of fourth graders in Jersey City School. They and their teachers decided that the state writing rubrics were not easy to understand or follow.

After a few trials, and working on one section of their writing, the students found that their writing improved. It was the clear pathway to improvement that the students found most useful. The *student-created rubric* helps students while they write for each genre.