2 The key genres of English: a context for exploring grammar

Having briefly situated a contemporary functional view of grammar within a historical context, we will now illustrate how this model of grammar does its own work in three of the text types commonly used in secondary English. In doing so, we hope to model how English teachers can make grammar 'work' to develop their students' literacy (in terms of comprehending, evaluating and creating written and multimodal texts) and to engage them in a more informed appreciation of literature. We introduce three key genres of English—**narrative**, **text response** and **exposition**—as important contexts for further exploring grammar.

For a number of years now, the concept of genre has been an important one for English teachers as they help their students to structure well-formed narratives, text responses and expositions. The word 'genre' conjures up slightly different things for different people, ranging from a description of the mode in which a text is designed (e.g. an email, a speech, a newspaper report) to a classification of a particular type of text (e.g. film noir, detective fiction). In this book, the word 'genre' is used synonymously with 'text type'; that is, as a relatively predictable form of spoken, written or multimodal text that has evolved in a particular way to do particular jobs. By the time they reach high school, students are required to identify the features and purposes of a range of different text types and be familiar with the typical stages and language features of text types, such as narrative, expositions, debates and reviews of literary works.

Our view of genre then is as a particular organisational and grammatical structure that achieves distinctive social purposes in various forms of spoken, written and multimodal texts. Genres are shaped by the specific contextual factors of field, tenor and mode, as discussed in chapter 1. The genres that students are required to interpret and produce in subject English provide a useful starting point for looking at patterns of grammar and meaning.

Genres and stages: a focus on narrative

Narratives, one of the story genres, explore human experience in order to entertain, move and instruct their readers, listeners or viewers. They create a possible world in which unexpected things happen to individuals and where readers become involved in the conflicts or problems these characters confront and resolve. Narratives can teach through vicarious participation in the experiences of these possible worlds as characters attempt to resolve problems and reach a desired state, whether that be peace, triumph, wisdom or happiness. In order to achieve these purposes, narratives in western English-speaking cultures tend to have three essential stages:

- **orientation**, where some background to the characters and setting is provided
- **complication**, where some problem is identified
- **resolution**, where the problem is resolved.

Text 2.1 is a short narrative, written by Jack, a Year 8 student, with these three stages labelled.

Text 2.1: Jack's narrative, 'Never again'

Orientation	Dad, Grandad, my friend Sam and I had planned the trip up North for months and now it was a reality. We'd packed the combivan with everything we were likely to need—surfboards, fishing and camping gear, loads of goodies to eat and, to Mum's amazement, even sunscreen!
Complication	The trip was uneventful till we hit the border. Sure, the screeching of the fanbelt outperformed Grandpa's snoring, but that was just background noise to a kid like me who grew up in a household with seven others. After only five hours on the road, Sam, who was an only child, went bright red in the face and started shaking violently. I thought he was pulling my leg until he let out an almighty scream. 'Mr Kirk, stop, right here!' That's when we realised that Sam was a chronic claustrophobic and couldn't bear high-pitched sounds. His mum hadn't warned us that travelling in a noisy, cramped, overcrowded and badly tuned Volkswagen was likely to bring on an episode!
Resolution	We arranged for Sam to take the train home—he said he'd prefer that to travelling one more metre in the confined space of the noisy Volksie. As I helped him with his backpack, he whimpered, 'Sorry I didn't tell you. I thought I had this licked.' He ran towards the station in a cloud of red dust, at a speed I didn't think him capable of. We're still friends, but we stick to quiet outdoor walks these days!

The components of well-formed narratives do not always occur in the order above, and innovative storytellers often play with the staging of the story and with reader expectations in creative ways. Narratives do not need to start with an orientation, for example. We often read stories which open with the complication in order to engage the reader immediately in the action, as indicated in figure 2.1 on the next page.

Figure 2.1

Longer or more complex narratives will also have these stages repeating, so that we have a series of mini-complications and resolutions which accumulate progressively as shown in figure 2.2.

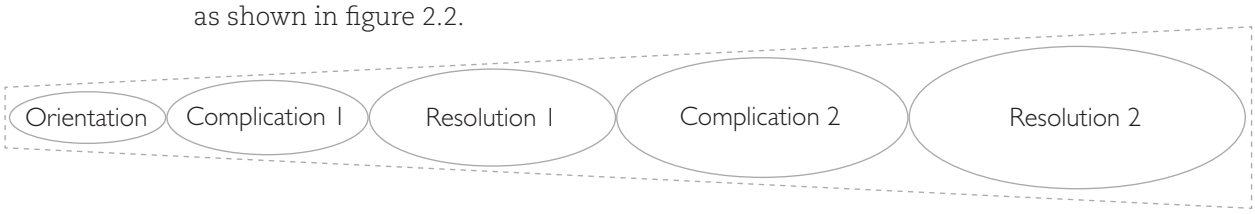

Figure 2.2

Some narratives, such as fairy stories, are more fixed and predictable in structure than others because of the relative lack of change in their purposes. Most genres, however, are dynamic and change over time as the purposes they were established to achieve change. They also vary in structure depending on the cultures in which they variously function. Teachers can make explicit the stable and variable structures of a range of narratives across different times and cultures, thus offering valuable scaffolding for students struggling with creating or identifying a range of narrative structures. By modelling the ways that other writers have modified or played with such structures, we can also open up further creative possibilities for our students.

In appendix 1, we have provided a model of a more intricate narrative than text 2.1: 'The Tres Malum', written by Saro, a Year 7 student (page 185). We use extracts from Saro's text (as well as from published narratives) throughout this book to make explicit the key structural and grammatical resources which are typical of this genre.

Genres and stages: a focus on text response

Another genre often required in secondary English is **text response**, where students discuss the aesthetic, moral and social value of a range of texts. In responding to literary texts, students identify what defines an author's individual literary style, or compare texts in terms of aspects such as their subject or theme, characterisation, text structure, plot development, tone, vocabulary, sense of voice or narrative point of view. In this section we examine one type of text response, a **review**, where a single text is interpreted and analysed as a literary artefact. Here, students are required to select examples, quotations and textual references that support their interpretation of the text. To do this effectively, they need to be supported in the structure of the valued forms of such responses and their key language features.

Reviews are staged in ways that allow their purposes of describing and evaluating to be achieved, with the following three stages being common:

- **context**, which provides background information such as author, illustrator, artist, type of work and a brief synopsis
- **text interpretation**, which analyses elements of the text, such as the main characters and key incidents, stylistic features and staging
- **judgement**, which provides an evaluation of the text by expressing an opinion.

These stages are illustrated in text 2.2, a review written by Christopher, a Year 8 student. The text has been divided according to its structure, and the stages named according to how they function to achieve the text's purpose of reviewing.

Text 2.2: Christopher's review of Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*

Context	The book *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor is set in the Caribbean, during World War II. It is a story about survival and friendship with a powerful message about racial prejudice. Phillip, an 11-year-old boy, and Timothy, a wise old negro sailor, find themselves stranded on a sandy coral cay after their freighter was hit by a German torpedo. Phillip has been left blind after he suffered a serious blow to the head. He must learn to put aside his prejudices and trust Timothy. Timothy becomes Phillip's eyes and teaches him vital survival skills.
Text interpretation: themes	One of the themes that stands out in this story is survival. When faced with a life-or-death situation, survival soon becomes their only concern. After a serious dose of malaria Timothy realises that he has to train Phillip to survive on his own. He knows that their chances of rescue are slim and that he will not always be there for Phillip. Two other themes are fear and courage. These go together because being courageous means overcoming your fear. An example of this is when Phillip climbs the palm tree for the first time or when he first explored the island with his cane. After Timothy dies, Phillip again shows tremendous courage when he begins to put his life back in order and when he goes looking for lobsters in the waterhole.
Text interpretation: stylistic features	The story is written in a narrative style, with Phillip as the narrator. There is a mixture of Phillip retelling the events and direct speech between Timothy and Phillip. For example, 'I frowned at him. "I don't think I can help you, Timothy, I can't see any rocks."' The way the writer spells Timothy's speaking gives you an idea of his accent and how he pronounces words. For example, 'young bahss', 'we ready Phill-eep', 'dis be a western starm'. The writer uses detailed descriptions to create a vivid picture in the reader's mind of the scenes as well as the action. For example, 'There was nothing but blue sea with occasional patches of orange seaweed' and 'The rain sounded like bullets hitting on the dried palm frond roof.' Some of the descriptions are also when Timothy is 'painting' pictures for Phillip. 'Describe the sky to me. He said it was flaming red and that there were thin veils of high clouds.'
Judgement	I found this book an exciting and thrilling novel. The writer made me want to keep reading and reading until I was finished. Many of the scenes kept me in suspense. I could feel the characters' emotions and as I was reading could clearly see the main themes beginning to emerge.

As English teachers, we can support our students by providing them with a metalanguage to investigate distinctive aspects of the text they are responding to, whether this be its theme, its style or its use of language. The nature and structure of text responses become more complex in the senior years of English, where students are required to establish a stance on a question or opinion on aspects such as themes, ideas, issues, effectiveness, entertainment value, intellectual value and literary merit. We explore this structural complexity, and the associated increase in grammatical complexity, in chapter 10. Appendix 1 contains further models of text responses written by students across the years of secondary English and we use extracts from these as well as from published text responses throughout this book to illustrate how grammar works.

Genres and stages: a focus on exposition

Expositions are one type of persuasive text, where arguments are provided in support of a single position. The distinctive functional staging of expositions in Anglo-Western culture is more or less a linear arrangement of **thesis**, **supporting arguments** and **reinforcement of thesis**. This staging serves the key purpose of expositions as persuasive texts, some of which persuade the reader/listener to *think* in a certain way by accepting a theory or position (e.g. that needle injection facilities improve the rehabilitation of drug addicts), or to persuade the reader/listener to *act* in a certain way (e.g. to petition local government to establish an injection facility for drug addicts).

Text 2.3 is an exposition on graffiti, written by a Year 9 student, Kim. It has been divided into its different stages, which are named according to how they function to achieve the text's purpose of persuading people to think in a certain way.

Text 2.3: Kim's exposition, 'Some graffiti should be seen as a form of art'

Thesis	Almost every week there is an article or letter in the newspaper on the subject of graffiti. Usually, the writers are complaining about quick and careless scrawls done on public or private property. This form of graffiti should not be considered art, but other more complex and skilful forms should be. More advanced forms of graffiti brighten up our suburbs. These forms take great artistic skill to design and carry out. If they were recognised as art, young artists would have better opportunities to develop their skills and this would benefit the community.
Supporting arguments	It is important, first of all, to distinguish between the different types of graffiti. First, there is the 'tag', which is the stylised writing of the graffiti artist's name. Then, there is the 'throw-up', which is bigger and more time-consuming than the tag, but generally just big bubble letters in two colours. Lastly, there is the 'piece' (short for masterpiece), which takes considerable time and effort to execute. Unfortunately, most of what we see on our streets is tags and throw-ups and really just vandalism. Pieces, on the other hand, are usually done by people who see their work as art and themselves as artists. If good graffiti is seen as art and then encouraged, it has the potential to improve the look of our streets. Good graffiti pieces are colourful, vibrant and attractive. In most cases, they are far more attractive than the walls they are painted on, which in the old parts of cities are often ugly, dull and uncared for. There are many examples of spectacular murals in the inner city. In fact, some have even become tourist attractions. Recognising talented graffitists as artists would give them the opportunity to further develop their skills. Since they cover very large areas, real graffiti pieces require high-level artistic skill to design and carry out, and most are planned in detail on paper first. Most of the best examples of graffiti art can be found on walls where the artists have been given permission to do their work by councils or other organisations. This means they have the time to polish their work to a high, artistic standard. If this happened more, the whole community would benefit.
Reinforcement of thesis	To sum up, there is more than one kind of graffiti. The more basic forms are generally not art. However, the more complex examples of graffiti are a form of art requiring considerable artistic skill. If these forms of graffiti were recognised as art, they could make our streets more attractive and, at the same time, give talented young artists an opportunity to develop their skills further and contribute their skills to the community.

Writers and speakers often further structure their expositions within each stage in order to make their argumentative logic even clearer. English teachers can explicitly support their students in structuring not just the whole text, but the individual paragraphs of an argument. For example, teachers might advise students to structure their thesis stage in two phases, using a **position** statement followed by a phase in which they **preview** the arguments to come. They might likewise advise their students to structure each of their supporting argument paragraphs into two clear phases, one containing a **point**, identified in a topic sentence, followed by an **elaboration** through example or illustration. In offering such explicit advice, teachers are providing valuable support for students as they struggle to shape their structure within, as well as between, paragraphs.

Kim's exposition on graffiti is presented again below with the phases within each of the stages labelled. (Note: the table below continues on the next page.)

'Some graffiti should be seen as a form of art'	Text structure	
Almost every week there is an article or letter in the newspaper on the subject of graffiti. Usually, the writers are complaining about quick and careless scrawls done on public or private property. This form of graffiti should not be considered art, but other more complex and skilful forms should be.	Position	THESIS
More advanced forms of graffiti brighten up our suburbs. These forms take great artistic skill to design and carry out. If they were recognised as art, young artists would have better opportunities to develop their skills and this would benefit the community.	Preview	
It is important, first of all, to distinguish between the different types of graffiti.	Point	SUPPORTING ARGUMENT 1
First, there is the 'tag', which is the stylised writing of the graffiti artist's name. Then, there is the 'throw-up', which is bigger and more time-consuming than the tag, but generally just big bubble letters in two colours. Lastly, there is the 'piece' (short for masterpiece), which takes considerable time and effort to execute. Unfortunately, most of what we see on our streets is tags and throw-ups and really just vandalism. Pieces, on the other hand, are usually done by people who see their work as art and themselves as artists.	Elaboration	
If good graffiti is seen as art and then encouraged, it has the potential to improve the look of our streets.	Point	SUPPORTING ARGUMENT 2
Good graffiti pieces are colourful, vibrant and attractive. In most cases, they are far more attractive than the walls they are painted on, which in the old parts of cities are often ugly, dull and uncared for. There are many examples of spectacular murals in the inner city. In fact, some have even become tourist attractions.	Elaboration	

'Some graffiti should be seen as a form of art' (cont.)	Text structure	
Recognising talented graffitists as artists would give them the opportunity to further develop their skills.	Point	SUPPORTING ARGUMENT 3
Since they cover very large areas, real graffiti pieces require high-level artistic skill to design and carry out, and most are planned in detail on paper first. Most of the best examples of graffiti art can be found on walls where the artists have been given permission to do their work by councils or other organisations. This means they have the time to polish their work to a high, artistic standard. If this happened more, the whole community would benefit.	Elaboration	
To sum up, there is more than one kind of graffiti. The more basic forms are generally not art. However, the more complex examples of graffiti are a form of art requiring considerable artistic skill. If these forms of graffiti were recognised as art, they could make our streets more attractive and, at the same time, give talented young artists an opportunity to develop their skills further and contribute their skills to the community.		REINFORCEMENT OF THESIS

Knowing what a typical exposition looks like allows teachers and their students to make comparisons with rhetorically powerful variations as they construct their own and evaluate other expositions. Like most other genres, expositions can be organised in more fluid and less stable structures, according to their purposes. As English teachers, we may have observed the development of hybrid text types (e.g. infomercials, documentaries). The better our tool kit for examining the structures of these emerging genres, the more we are able to help our students identify how these text types achieve their persuasive power.

The kinds of expositions required also vary as students progress through the years of secondary English. Sometimes they may be required to construct expositions that use strong appeals to the emotions in order to persuade. At other times they may be required to construct more analytical forms of exposition, drawing more on the processes of 'logos' or logic, rather than 'pathos' or emotion. Teachers can make explicit the varying structures and language choices of these two forms of persuasion, thus reducing the amount of guesswork students might undertake to identify what's required of them.

Throughout this book, we draw on a range of expositions written by secondary English students and by published adult writers, as these embody a range of structures and language features. We also use extracts from powerful speeches by contemporary politicians, including Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations, delivered in the Australian Parliament in 2008, and Barack Obama's victory and inauguration speeches to the American people upon his election as President of the United States. These speeches represent landmark moments in each nation's development, and provide excellent sites for analysis of the power of language to unify sharply divided social groups through a reasoned and empathic rhetoric. As masterful orators, both speakers drew on rhetorical strategies that reconnected with Roman and Greek traditions of politics as oratory. See Love and Macken-Horarik (2009) for an elaboration of this discussion.

These speeches, along with many others, are part of an evolving tradition of political rhetoric and are dynamic in the ways they galvanise 'people power' behind an ethic of social inclusion, political justice and participatory democracy. The kind of grammatical analysis we offer in this book captures the complex achievement of texts such as these, while allowing teachers and students to appreciate how their speakers' language choices combine in ways that move listeners so deeply. We invite you as teachers to use these texts and the examples of student and published expositions presented or referred to in appendix 1 for your own purposes.

The genres of English: a framework

We have now explored the structures of three of the key genres that students both interpret and produce in secondary English—narratives, reviews and expositions. Note, however, that these three genres also belong to larger 'families' of genres:

- Narratives are part of the **story family**, which includes recounts, biographies and autobiographies. Narratives come in various forms, including novels, short stories, poetry, plays and film.
- Expositions are part of the **argument family**, concerned with persuasion in its various forms. In exposition, writers and speakers persuade by putting an argument for or against an issue, appealing variously to emotion or to reason. Other argument genres include debates, which present two sides of an issue, and discussions, which consider a proposition from a number of different perspectives before arriving at a recommendation.
- Review is part of the **text response family**, where writers and speakers describe and evaluate various aspects of a literary, media, performance or artistic text. Other text response genres include interpretations, which provide personal opinions and reactions to a text, and expository responses, typically in the form of an essay arguing for or against a thematic issue.

The three genre families of subject English, with their various more specialised genres are represented in figure 2.3.

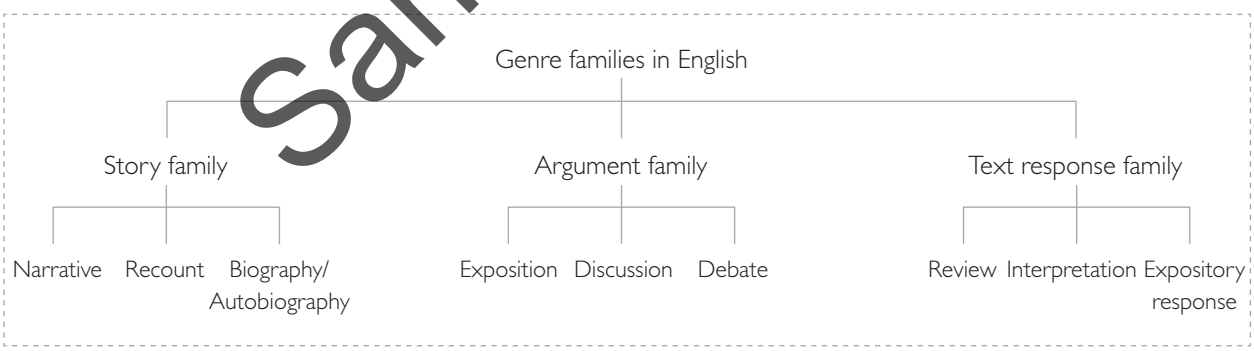

Figure 2.3

Teachers and students will draw on various genres from the story, argument and text response families at different year levels and in different contexts of subject English. These genres are thus important sites for exploring grammar, and we use examples from each of these families in subsequent chapters. In the next section, we briefly illustrate how grammar 'works' in an extract from a narrative written by a Year 7 student.

Genres and grammatical features

The Australian Curriculum for English not only encourages teachers to use structural guidelines to support students in interpreting and creating texts for imaginative, informative, evaluative and persuasive purposes, it also outlines how these text types draw on distinctive patterns of grammatical features.

Throughout the following chapters, we look closely at a wide range of these grammatical features and examine the way in which they function to make meaning in narratives, text responses and expositions. A snapshot of this kind of linguistic exploration is given in table 2.1, where we briefly illustrate some of the grammatical features of an extract from a narrative, 'The Tres Malum', written by Saro, a Year 7 student. The extract (text 2.4) is one of the complication stages of Saro's narrative.

We will use three different 'lenses' to systematically explore how a range of grammatical resources build important experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings in text 2.4. An *experiential* lens allows us to focus on the grammatical resources which help build the **field** of the text; an *interpersonal* lens allows us to focus on the grammatical resources which help build the **tenor** of the text; and a *textual* lens allows us to focus on grammatical resources which help build the **mode** of the text.

Text 2.4: Extract from Saro's narrative, 'The Tres Malum'

> Nirvin was on his way to the school that he worked at and was beginning to crave coffee so he went to the local café. When he got there he was turned off by the very weird combined smell of coffee beans and cheap deodorant. Today was particularly unwelcoming as every person in the café was huddled together watching a news report on the old television in the corner. Soon Nirvin too found himself drawn to the television set. '… although the bodies had no fingerprints on them, a small carved marking was found,' said the reporter, as Nirvin started to become more interested in the story.
>
> Now Nirvin was sweating as he had seen the symbol and the letter and he knew that this was not the doing of a mad mortal but symbolised something much grander and dangerous. It was the return of the Tres Malum.

Viewing this short text using the three lenses (the experiential, the interpersonal and the textual) at the same time, we can see how Saro has made language choices from three grammatical systems that together help him to construct this complication stage in his narrative. Not only do Saro's language choices work together, as we illustrate in table 2.1, but they also accumulate (gather force) across his various orientation, complication and resolution stages, building dramatic tension as his narrative achieves its distinctive purpose of entertaining. He may not have made these choices consciously, but his and his teacher's knowledge about the potential of these grammatical systems to build particular kinds of meanings will help him considerably in his future writing.

In chapters 3–10, we explore each of these grammatical systems in more depth, using texts such as Saro's alongside other texts.

Experiential lens: focuses on grammatical resources which build the field of the text	
Nirvin, the school, coffee, café, Tres Malum	proper and common nouns name people and things
the very weird combined smell of coffee beans and cheap deodorant, the old television in the corner, a small carved marking	long noun groups provide atmospheric detail
went, got, was huddled, worked, was sweating	action verbs in the past tense represent 'happenings'
said	saying verb reports speech
to the local café	adverbial phrase describes setting
Interpersonal lens: focuses on grammatical resources which build the tenor of the text	
'… *although the bodies had no fingerprints on them, a small carved marking was found,' said the reporter*	dialogue introduces characters' voices
crave, turned off, knew	sensing verbs represent 'inner worlds'
weird, cheap, particularly unwelcoming	words that show attitudes
Textual lens: focuses on grammatical resources which build the mode of the text	
Nirvin was on his way to the school that he worked at and was beginning to crave coffee so he went to the local café.	compound sentence connects multiple ideas
It was the return of the Tres Malum.	simple sentence gives dramatic effect
Today, Soon, Now	sentence openers signal time

Table 2.1