Pioneer State High School

Literacy Booklet
Our focus

To improve students’ vocabulary and comprehension of texts.

Overriding Principles

That teachers are:

- aware of the strategies
- trial the strategies in class
- use the strategies consistently
- know their texts thoroughly
- following the Teaching Learning Cycle

Teaching Learning Cycle
Strategy 1-3 – The Words

The most basic part of literacy that we, as high school teachers, need to focus on is the words we use (and before you comment it is ‘is’ not are!). This is not just a spelling or vocabulary list (but that is a great place to start!) but the comprehension of the words, how the jargon can have different meanings in different contexts and the etymology of the word (where it has come from and how it used to be used and how it is used now). We need to build on student’s prior knowledge and increase their knowledge about words.

Suggested strategies: spelling lists, word wall, vocabulary drills and glossaries.

A better way of using a word wall is to use synonyms of your main words. Using the field continuum of the Literacy training, the bottom of the space are the ‘every day’ words, the top of the wall are the ‘technical’ words and the middle show the specialised words. This can be used in every subject we teach.

**EG.**

- **Maxilla (highly technical)**
- **Mandible (specialised)**
- **Jaw bone (everyday)**

Once students know the words and can spell them, it is time to work on their understanding and application. Look at the etymology of the word; is it a Greek or Latin root? How is the prefix or suffix important to the word? Antonyms? Synonyms? Make sure you use the words in the correct contexts and explain if there are different contexts for the same word. Ensure students are using the words correctly.
Strategy 4 – The Sentence

Students struggle to write in a formal method. Again, using a strategy from the Literacy PD (originally from the Functional Grammar PD) we use a continuum to improve their writing from every day to formalised writing.

An abbreviated formula to write sentences, either in reports or paragraphs is below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pointer</th>
<th>Thing</th>
<th>Verbal phrase</th>
<th>Qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The</td>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>(past tense)</td>
<td>(what was done to the thing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Eg beaker</td>
<td>Was filled</td>
<td>with luke warm water.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The beaker was filled with luke warm water.

This ensures that the student is using third person and past tense which automatically formalised their writing. Many genres that require this level of formality also require it to be in a chronological order or step by step. This formula makes the students write in an orderly fashion.

The entire formula is below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-numerator</th>
<th>Pointer</th>
<th>Numerative</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Classifier</th>
<th>Thing</th>
<th>Qualifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of</td>
<td>the</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>young</td>
<td>pre-school</td>
<td>children</td>
<td>picked their nose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There can be many describers and classifiers and qualifiers. There are commas between each describer but none before the Thing. Not all columns need to be used.

It should be noted that some subjects will need to reorder the formula. Home Ec will often start with a verb eg Fill the beaker with luke warm water.
Dart is a useful tool to use for spelling and sentence construction. What can we delete from the sentence? What should we add? Could we rearrange it to make it sound better? What words can I trade to improve the sentence?

Eg - The fat frog sat on the log.

**Delete** (reduce to the absolute basic facts – good for summarizing) – The frog sat on the log.

**Add** (be ridiculous and add as much as you can!) – The green-spotted, purple-skinned, cigar-smoking, fat frog sat on the lumpy, bumpy, moss-covered log.

**Rearrange** (Does swapping the theme and rheme change the meaning of the sentence; remembering that the most important part of the sentence should come first - theme) – The log which was felled last summer had a fat frog sitting on it.

**Trade** (swap words for more specialised or technical ones) – The obese amphibian was seated on the dead trunk of a tree.
Strategy 6 – Paragraph writing

Many staff members have their own way of writing paragraphs but they all follow the same basic outline. The SSS (triple S system, commonly known as Mrs Oldie’s brain child) uses three parts that make up a paragraph.

S tatement – one sentence that describes/states what the entire paragraph is going to be about. (Higher level students sometimes use two sentences here as the second one outlines the arguments/discussion points that will follow.)

S upporting evidence – three to four sentences with all of the facts, opinions, arguments about the statement.

S ock it to ‘em – the final sentence that summarises the topic or leaves the reader thinking about the topic.

The final sentence is the hardest to write for students. A strategy that is highly successful is to have the student think, “I have written all of this wonderful information for you, but you are too stupid to understand. What I’m really trying to say is …” and then they write the rest of that sentence. This is usually a great sock it to ‘em sentence.
Strategy 7 – Genre

Many departments have their own appropriate genres. It is important to model these to the students explicitly. The next step is to work with the students writing a guided piece and finally, to have the students practice independently.

There are a number of genre books in the library and in the English department.

Field, tenor and mode need to be taught within the context of each genre as well. Is it formal? Informal or somewhere in between? High specialised words or everyday?

Including a table similar to the one below on assessment tasks or genre tasks indicates clearly the expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
<th>Specialised</th>
<th>Highly technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used in a speech to peers of a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used in everyday Conversation</td>
<td>Used by playwrights (or some other suitable audience/Presenter)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenor</th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Written as an expert on the physiology of the skeletal structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used in everyday Conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
<th>Specialised</th>
<th>Highly technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face to face, Spontaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Precise, planned, edited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nominalisation is used to make writing more formal. It used a verb (usually an action verb or thinking/feeling verb rather than a relational verb ie were, was) and turns it into a noun. It not only formalises the writing into third person but by nominalising the sentence the writer often has to add more information as well.

EG

Students may write “The council demolished the building.”

Turn the verb into a noun (easiest way to do this is to put the word ‘the’ in front of the verb).

Students then write ‘The demolition of the building …’ and then the students have to add more information

OR

‘Demolition of the building …’

(NB Senior English students have been doing this for almost two years and use it in other classes. Without them actually changing the content of their work their results have improved!)
Strategy 9 – Improving Understanding

Blooms Taxonomy can be used by teachers to structure questions and help develop comprehension and understanding in students. Students can use it when learning new information and problem solving.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>Can the student create new product or point of view?</td>
<td>assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>Can the student justify a stand, point of view or decision?</td>
<td>appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing</td>
<td>Can the student distinguish between the different parts?</td>
<td>appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>Can the student use the information in a new way?</td>
<td>choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Can the student explain ideas or concepts?</td>
<td>classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering</td>
<td>Can the student recall or remember the information?</td>
<td>define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce, state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example over the page shows how Bloom’s was used in the English QCAT’s 2011 to improve student understanding.
| **Remembering** | What are the names of the two central characters?  
Who is the older of the two characters?  
Which one is an artist?  
How did the artist feel about doing the drawing of his subject? (find the quote between lines 12 and 18 – use the appropriate punctuation for the quote) |
| --- | --- |
| **Understanding** | Joseph, the young artist, is nervous about drawing Tom. Why is he surprised by what he sees in Tom? How does this contradict what he expected to find in Tom?  
Identify a line or two from the passage which creates a very accurate impression of how Tom is feeling during this initial meeting. (quote the lines)  
The author, ? Bauer, uses a metaphor in the last paragraph of the passage...“As he peered into the dark caves of Tom Leyton’s eyes, a flash of emotion had blazed...”. Can you explain what that emotion is and who is feeling it?  
Can you identify what it is that has made Tom feel the way he does? |
| **Applying** | In this passage, there are only two characters. Demonstrate whether their emotions are similar or different during their meeting by providing evidence from the text. |
| **Analysing** | Compare and contrast the two characters by writing what they have in common and how they are different. Find five examples of each of their similarities and differences. You may consider the use of a Venn diagram to assist you with this process. |
| **Evaluating** | Which of these two characters is the most realistic for you? Provide at least three reasons why. Provide critical (positive and negative) reasons for your decision.  
From another novel you have read recently, find a major interaction between two characters that reveals something of their personalities and reveals themes from the novel. Argue which piece of writing, this or the one you have selected, is the better of the two. Your ability to provide justification for your choice will be the focus of teacher marking. |
| **Creating** | The original stimulus piece was written in the first person from the perspective of Joseph. Write 100 – 150 words on the same event, the meeting of artists and subject, from the point of view of Tom.  
At line __________ we learn from Joseph that tom has been “hurt too much in the past”. Write a short narrative that describes what may have happened to Tom, to make him seem this way to the rest of the world. You will have to create the scenario and other narrative elements. Plausibility is important |
Strategy 10 – Inferential Understanding

This graphic organizer has been used in SOSE for two years. Students understanding of ‘Reading between the lines’ has improved. The students will get to the point where they don’t have to fill in the shapes and instead think the answers through first.

Using a piece of text start with either the triangle or circle first. What is the evidence from the text? What is my prior knowledge about the topic? Then move onto the rectangle. What could it be saying? It is important that students write more than one possible answer – they need to have a variety of solutions and then they choose the most likely.

EG. Mia frowned at the broccoli on her fork.

What is it really saying?

- Bug on it
- over/under cooked
- she hates broccoli
- thinking about something completely different etc

Students can then make their choice as to the most likely answer or the more appropriate answer to the task.