EXPLORING PROCEDURAL TEXTS—A SAMPLE UNIT

SEQUENCE 1: IMAGINATIVE PROCEDURE


» Without mentioning the focus of the session (procedural texts), or showing or mentioning the book or clip to be read and viewed, ask the students to imagine and draw a monster. They can share these with a partner.

» Prior to viewing the video or reading the book, conduct a Knee to Knee, Eye to Eye activity in which students sit in pairs facing each other and imagine how they might sneak into school a full size (but no larger than a huge adult) ‘real monster’ created from their drawing. Then tell them that they are going to hear/read instructions about how it can be done.

» After the video/book seek and build on the students’ responses to the content—how they felt, what they liked, disliked or noticed and so on. Draw their attention to the writer’s purpose, intended audience and the choice of text type. Discuss and record what the students learnt about procedural writing. Also list other information students know about procedural writing.

» Ensure students can see written and visual text (PDF or book). Revisit some of the pages and talk about how and why the writer added extra information to each instruction. Draw attention to the use of brackets and discuss the purpose and effect of these. They can check what happens if they omit the information in the brackets when they read the text and discuss why the author used brackets (to add further information, warnings, advice and to create a specific effect such as humour).

» Focus on the language used in the text; for example, that it is used to sound like spoken language through:
  – the use of first person pronouns in the introduction, which assumes a familiar relationship with the reader
  – the use of slang, colloquial and non-standard English
  – the unconventional way of signalling instructions
  – the choice of action verbs that are not usually associated with the specific subject matter
  – the way punctuation is used or not used.

» At the end of the book the narrator wishes the reader good luck with sneaking the monster home. The students think about how they could sneak a monster into their home without their parents noticing. They must then imagine that they have to tell someone how to do this, so they need to write the set of instructions. Depending on the students’ needs, the teacher and students can jointly construct a text or students can write independently. This could be continued to publishing if required.

ICT: If using a PDF, use the highlight-text editing tool to draw attention to specific text features.
SEQUENCE 2: COMPARING TEXTS

» Distribute paper copies of recipes, games instructions, operation instructions, first aid instructions, scientific procedures, assembly instructions and so on to small groups of students and ask them to identify the purpose, form, text organisers and written and visual features of each. Record their information on a class data chart.

» Alternatively or additionally students search the classroom, school environment, home or community for: short texts that command or instruct (e.g. signs); longer texts (e.g. class instructions, codes of behaviour, equipment use etc.).

» Discuss the similarities and differences between the types of text. Seek and build on students’ knowledge of procedural texts (purpose, structure, organisation, language use, visual texts etc.).

» Select a short video of a simple procedure (e.g. making a tin can telephone) and written instructions to make the same thing. After reading and viewing, students compare and contrast them. These findings can also be entered on a data chart.

SEQUENCE 3: DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

Website: Kidsgardening.org. 2015, Building a Terrarium «www.kidsgardening.org/node/12931». This is an extract of a book written for children and provides an excellent model of instructions that are presented differently from many others. This text provides opportunities for rich inquiry and discussion as the students use it to build a terrarium.

» Show only the image on the website and ask students to identify what it is (a terrarium) and its use. Ask them how it might have been constructed. They can jot down what they think would be the steps in making a terrarium. When they share their steps, they note any similarities in the process and the language used.

» Seek and record on a class chart their prior knowledge of the purpose, structure and language features of procedural texts.

» Unmask the first paragraph and the introduction and ask the students to consider the following while they read this section: intended audience and how they know this, the function of the introduction and use of language (technical terms). Discuss what they noticed about the introduction (e.g. first sentence defines, second sentence suggests or recommends, last two sentences explain).

» Unmask the remaining text. Depending on the students’ needs it can be read as a shared text or independently. As it is being read, stop at points to check their understanding, to help them retell in their own words, to identify subject-specific terms, to note imperial measurement, to observe the writing style and so on.

» After the reading, seek and build on what the students noticed about the layout, headings, sequence indicators, content and language used. Note that the students’ understanding of the structure and features of procedural text might be challenged and extended. Talk about why the authors chose to write this way and what they did to help a person who has never made a terrarium before.

» Revisit the prior learning chart and add what the students have now learnt about procedural texts.
Students revisit their earlier jottings about the process and mark the sections where they could have made the information clearer for the reader; for example, warnings, further advice, precise measurements and so on.

Now that the students have read the procedure, the subsequent session needs to be allocated to following the instructions and building a terrarium. Each student can bring along the materials required to make one of their own or the teacher and students might make one together.

Depending on the teaching purposes and the students’ interests and needs, they might select something that they know how to do well and write this as a procedure. Encourage them to think about adding extra information to the steps to warn, inform, explain or make them clearer for the reader.

SEQUENCE 4: WRITING PROCESS

Model a text that provides instructions for a classroom procedure. For example, how to prepare for a writing conference; lead the book discussion group or tidy up before leaving the room. Make explicit the decisions you make as you write. Show how to plan in a linear sequence/order and draft.

Use the draft text to draw the students’ attention to the intended audience (the students) and sentence structure, using terms such as commands, imperatives and statements. Focus on verb tense and types.

Depending on the teaching purposes and students’ needs, revisit the text and ask the students to suggest adverbs or adverbials that will add extra information about the verbs, and add precise adjectives or adjectivals to some of the key nouns. Modality—modal verbs, adverbs and adjectives—may also arise.

Select another classroom routine and jointly construct a procedure for this, ensuring the students draw on and use what they learnt previously. With the students, revise, edit and publish this text (paper-based, digital or multimodal) for inclusion in a class protocol manual.

SEQUENCE 5: WRITING PROCESS CONTINUED

Ask the students to identify further situations within the school or classroom that require specific steps for the task to be completed properly (e.g. how to order a lunch at the canteen, how to tidy a locker, how to proofread their work, how to borrow a library book, how to prepare for the day’s work etc.).

Individual students select a topic, think about it and orally rehearse the instructions with a partner to gain feedback before writing. If required they can select an appropriate graphic organiser for planning. They draft, review, edit and publish their writing in the class agreed format so that it becomes part of a class protocol manual.

They reflect on what they have learnt about procedures and the writing process.

ICT: Consider having students take photos to record the stages of the process and then later adding an audio to these as they reflect on the process and their learning.