CHAPTER 8

Teaching vocabulary

Vocabulary plays a crucial role in writing. Being able to select the 'right words' when producing written text is an important part of the writing process. Selecting vocabulary is one of the components of Hayes and Flowers' (1980) process model of writing. During each part of the writing process the writer selects vocabulary in order to convey meaning. Good writers continually review text to ensure the vocabulary used conveys the intended meaning: "The development of a rich and varied vocabulary is considered an essential step in becoming an effective writer" (Olinghouse & Leaird, 2009, p. 546). In addition, Fletcher (1993) stresses the importance of selecting the *right* word. Fletcher (1993, p. 32) states, "words remain the most important tool the writer has to work with … A rich vocabulary allows a writer to get a richness of thought onto paper. However, the writer's real pleasure comes not from using an exotic word but from using the right word."

Quality vocabulary in writing, however, is much more than using interesting adjectives. Different types of writing require different categories or types of vocabulary. For example, in nonfiction writing, the use of content-specific vocabulary is important. That is, if writing about the characteristics of the monarch butterfly it would be expected that the writer would include content words such as metamorphosis, eggs, caterpillar, chrysalis, milkweed plant, wings, insect, and migration. Or when writing an article about volcanoes, content vocabulary such as rupture, eruption, lava, volcanic ash, magma, gases, tectonic plates, crater, and Pacific Ring of Fire would likely be used.

Olinghouse and Wilson (2013) investigated the writing vocabulary of Grade 5 (11-year-old) students in three different types of writing: narrative, persuasive, and informative (or article) writing. The subject for each type of writing was the same (i.e. outer space). Students were asked to write a story that stemmed from a picture of outer space; a persuasive piece of writing convincing the President to build in outer space; and an article/informative piece that taught someone about outer space. Olinghouse and Wilson (2013) categorised the vocabulary into six categories. The six categories were:

Diversity—where lexical (word) diversity is calculated "for the number of unique words to total words" (p. 53).

Maturity—where students' written vocabulary is compared to the General Service List (GSL) of 2,000 most frequently used words. Words not on the GSL list are considered mature.

Content vocabulary—where the researchers develop a list of vocabulary words associated with outer space.

Elaboration—where the number of modifiers per noun phrase is calculated. The researchers identify the noun then identify modifiers. A high average of modifiers indicates a higher level of elaboration. Adjectives (e.g. a *flowering* plant—flowering is a modifier that comes before the noun *plant*; *majestic* mountain—*majestic* is a modifier before the noun *mountain*). Articles (e.g. a, the), possessive nouns (e.g. Jack's) and possessive pronouns (e.g. our, his) are also modifiers that come before a noun to make a noun phrase. There are also modifiers that come after a noun such as prepositional phrases (e.g. the ball is *behind the wall;* the horse is *over the hedge;* the toy is *under the chair*).

Register—where the number of Latin-based words are used.

Academic words—where the number of words from the Academic Word List are calculated and an average number of academic words per text is identified. Academic words are not on the GSL list.

Olinghouse and Wilson (2013) found that there was a difference between the three types of writing and vocabulary use. Vocabulary use, in terms of patterns, differed between students' writing of narrative and information/nonfiction as well as between persuasive and informative texts. The students' narratives contained greater vocabulary diversity than informative text and more maturity than persuasive text. However, the narratives had less elaboration than informative text. Participants' persuasive texts had more vocabulary diversity than informative/nonfiction text. The informative writing included more content words and more elaboration than narrative and persuasive writing. Finally, Olinghouse and Wilson (2013) found that the Grade 5 informative writing had nearly three times as many content words as narrative and persuasive text. What their study suggests is that Grade 5 writers consider both the topic and the text structure when selecting vocabulary.

What are the implications of the research on vocabulary and writing for teachers? The primary implication is to increase the general vocabulary of the writer by providing a rich vocabulary instructional programme.

- Begin introducing words on the Academic Word List (www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist). The Academic Word List is a set of words developed by Coxhead (2000) that consists of words that are found across many different academic contexts and genres. Words such as *generate, relevant, exclude, conclusion, achieve, restricted,* and *distribute* are on the list.
- Teach about the structural analysis of words. In particular, teach the meaning of prefixes (e.g. that *re-* means again or back; *tri-* means three; *sub-* means under, beneath, or below); Latin roots (e.g. *port* means to carry; *rupt* means to break or burst); and Greek combining forms (e.g. *mon* or *mono* means one; *hydro* means water). Knowing the meaning of prefixes, Latin roots, and Greek combining forms can unlock the meaning of countless words and these words can be used when composing text. For example, knowing the meaning of the Latin root

struct (struct means *to build*) unlocks the meaning of more than 50 words (instruct, instruction, restructure, destruction, construction, constructed, restructuring) (see Henry, 2010).

- Teach content-specific vocabulary associated with the writing topic.
- Select published writing samples from a variety of genre and highlight and discuss the vocabulary and how the writers use the words to enhance their writing.
- Reinforce the teaching of vocabulary through repeated exposure to particular vocabulary that is useful to learn (e.g. academic vocabulary).

Consider the content-related vocabulary in the following extract on the weta. Reflect on how content words enhance this piece of nonfiction writing (e.g. 'insect rodent', endangered, habitat, species, weta). The audience for this piece of writing is primary-age students, approximately 8–11 years of age (Bryant, 1990, p. 40):

> At night, this large flightless insect feeds on vegetation and debris from the forest floor. During the day it hides in holes and crevices. The giant weta is sometimes called an 'insect rodent' because its habits are similar to those of a mouse. It even produces rodent-like droppings. The giant weta is endangered. Once fairly common, it has suffered greatly from the loss of its habitat and attacks by rats. The larger species of giant weta survive only on offshore islands, while two slightly smaller species exist on the mainland.

Consider the following extract from Roald Dahl's (2008) short story, *The Great Mouse Plot*. Reflect on how Dahl's use of descriptive vocabulary/word choice has enhanced this piece of narrative writing (e.g. loathsome, filth, clung, grey, greasy, disturbed, and disgusting):

> But by far the most loathsome thing about Mrs Pratchett was the filth that clung around her. Her apron was grey and greasy. Her blouse had bits of breakfast all over it, toast-crumbs and tea stains and splotches of dried egg-yolk. It was her hands, however, that disturbed us most. They were disgusting. They were black with dirt and grime.

In *Teaching Reading Vocabulary* (Nicholson & Dymock, 2010) we outline teaching strategies to enhance the vocabulary of readers (and writers) in order to improve reading comprehension which in turn impacts on writing composition. In this chapter we provide a brief overview of some of the strategies discussed in Nicholson and Dymock (2010).

Teaching strategies for building vocabulary

Reading

Research suggests that exposure to print (either being read to or reading independently) is the most effective way to increase vocabulary from the age of about 10 (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Hayes & Ahrens, 1988; Stanovich, 1993). One reason is that our everyday talk, including university graduates talking to friends, has fewer rare words than books written for children and adults. Rare words are words ranked lower than 10,000 of a list of over 70,000 words. Hayes and Ahrens (1988) found that

children's books alone have 50% more rare words than adults use in their daily conversations. It is through exposure to words that our vocabulary increases. If we never hear or read words outside our vocabulary then our vocabulary will not increase. As Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) put it:

> All of our studies have demonstrated that reading yields significant dividends for everyone—not just the 'smart kids' or the more able readers. Even the child with limited reading and comprehension skills will build vocabulary and cognitive structures through reading. (p. 14)

There is overwhelming evidence that reading impacts positively on vocabulary. The implications are that teachers should provide a print-rich environment for their students including a well-stocked classroom library with a wide variety of books in order to cater for the interest of all readers. This includes reading to and talking with students; having an understanding of how to motivate students to read; being a good model of reading (i.e. children see—children do); providing time for students to read in class; and encouraging/marketing/promoting out-of-school reading.

Structural analysis

Structural analysis is where longer words are constructed and deconstructed into their meaningful parts. It is where words are broken into their morphemes (a morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a word). For example, the word *unhappy* has two morphemes (i.e. prefix *un-* meaning not; and *happy*). The word *running* also has two morphemes (i.e. *run* and *–ing*). The compound word *bedroom* has two morphemes (i.e. *bed* + *room*). *Unhappy, running,* and *bedroom* are from the Anglo-Saxon layer of English.

Rosenthal and Ehri (2008) report that the spelling of words (or orthography) is important for the learning of vocabulary and vice versa. Knowing about how words are constructed *and* their meaning will help not only in spelling but also as a tool for increasing vocabulary which in turn will have an impact on writing. Ehri and Rosenthal (2009) found that vocabulary learning, as compared with just talking about the word and showing a picture, was greater if teachers did the following:

1. explained the meaning of the word
2. showed students how to spell the word
3. told students how to pronounce the word
4. helped students sound out the word
5. showed students a picture of the word.

Anglo-Saxon words

We explain in Chapter 11 that Anglo-Saxon words are primarily one- and two-syllable everyday words (e.g. *dog*, *cat*, and *rabbit*). The Anglo-Saxon layer also has many compound words, two base words that have been joined together to make one word (e.g. *bedroom, moonlight,* and *notebook*). Compound words are common in *Ready to Read* and *Junior Journal* stories and articles so teaching about compound words and their meanings should start early. For example, the *Junior Journal* story, "The Snowman" (Bagnall, 2005) has the following compound words: *snowman, outside, headlights, policeman, notebook,* and *something*.

Some compound words describe the meaning of the word. For example, *snowman* means a man made from snow, *notebook* means a book that is used for writing notes. For some compound words only one morpheme is relevant, such as *berry* in *strawberry*. Finally, some compound words indicate only part of the meaning of the two combined words—such as the word *firefly*. While a firefly is a type of insect it is not a fly rather it is a beetle that produces light to attract food or mates. It is also important to point out to students that some words may appear to consist of two separate words but they do not (e.g. the word *father* is not a combination of *fat* + *her*).

It is suggested that when teaching about compound words it is best to begin with words where the relationship between the two combined words is clear (rather than beginning with the compound words such as *strawberry, carpool,* or *buttercup* where the relationship is unclear). For example, it is relatively easy to see the relationship between the two words in the following compound words.

basketball: in the game of basketball the ball that is thrown through a basket/hoop to score points

dishwasher: machine for washing dishes

airplane: machine (plane) that flies through the air

bedroom: room with a bed

weekday: day during the week

candlelight: lit by candle

bathroom: room for bathing (and/or toilet)

blueberry: berry that is blue

shoemaker: maker of shoes

steamboat: boat that is powered by steam

sailboat: boat that is powered by sails

While Anglo-Saxon words are able to stand alone (that is, Anglo-Saxon are free morphemes) many *can* be affixed. This is when a prefix or suffix is added. Prefixes such as *un-* (meaning not or opposite as in *unhappy*, *undone*, *undo*); *over-* (meaning too much or above as in *overdone*, *overweight*, *overheard*); *under-* (meaning too little or below as in *underdone*, *underweight*, and *underfed*). Many Anglo-Saxon prefixes are prepositions as in *over-*, *under-,* and *in-.*

There are many everyday Anglo-Saxon suffixes. They include *-ed* (meaning past tense as in *jumped*, *liked*, *pressed*, *hoped*, *hopped*); *-s/-es* (meaning plural or more than one as in *books, chairs, cats, schools, talks, robs, plans*); *-ing* (meaning action or process such as *helping, talking, robbing, planning, thinking*); *-ly* (meaning characteristic of such as *sadly, badly, quickly*); and *-ness* (meaning condition, state of, as in *darkness, happiness, fairness*). Students who are taught about the structural analysis of Anglo-Saxon words, particularly compound words, prefixes, and suffixes can add many words to their vocabulary.

Latin- and Greek-based words

In Chapter 12 we discuss the structure of Latin- and Greek-based words. By using structural analysis, students can build their vocabulary which in turn will enhance their written composition. In the article "New Zealand Sea Lions" (Sorrell, 2009) there are a number of Latin-based words that students could be encouraged to use in their writing. Latin-based words in the sea lion article include *habitat, peninsula, distances, female, species, produce, protected, scientist, allowed, protect,* and *curious.* Encouraging students to include Latin-based words in their writing adds interest for the reader.

Greek-based words are less common in text written at the primary level. The *Junior Journal* article on the New Zealand sea lion article (see Sorrell, 2009) has the word *energy* which is a Greek-based word—a word that dates back to the time of Aristotle.

Building vocabulary using concept maps

We suggest discussing words from the stories and articles the teacher is using to motivate children to write as well as a model for their writing. Research suggests that if you discuss vocabulary from published material students are better able to learn the words. Concept maps provide an excellent tool for building vocabulary from published stories and articles. Using concept maps to build vocabulary helps to take students from what they know to the unknown. Concept maps are diagrams that show the relationship between words and concepts—providing a visual representation for the student. There are a number of different types of concept maps that teachers can use to build on what the student knows. We recommend using the web, weave, Venn diagram, and thermometer concept maps.

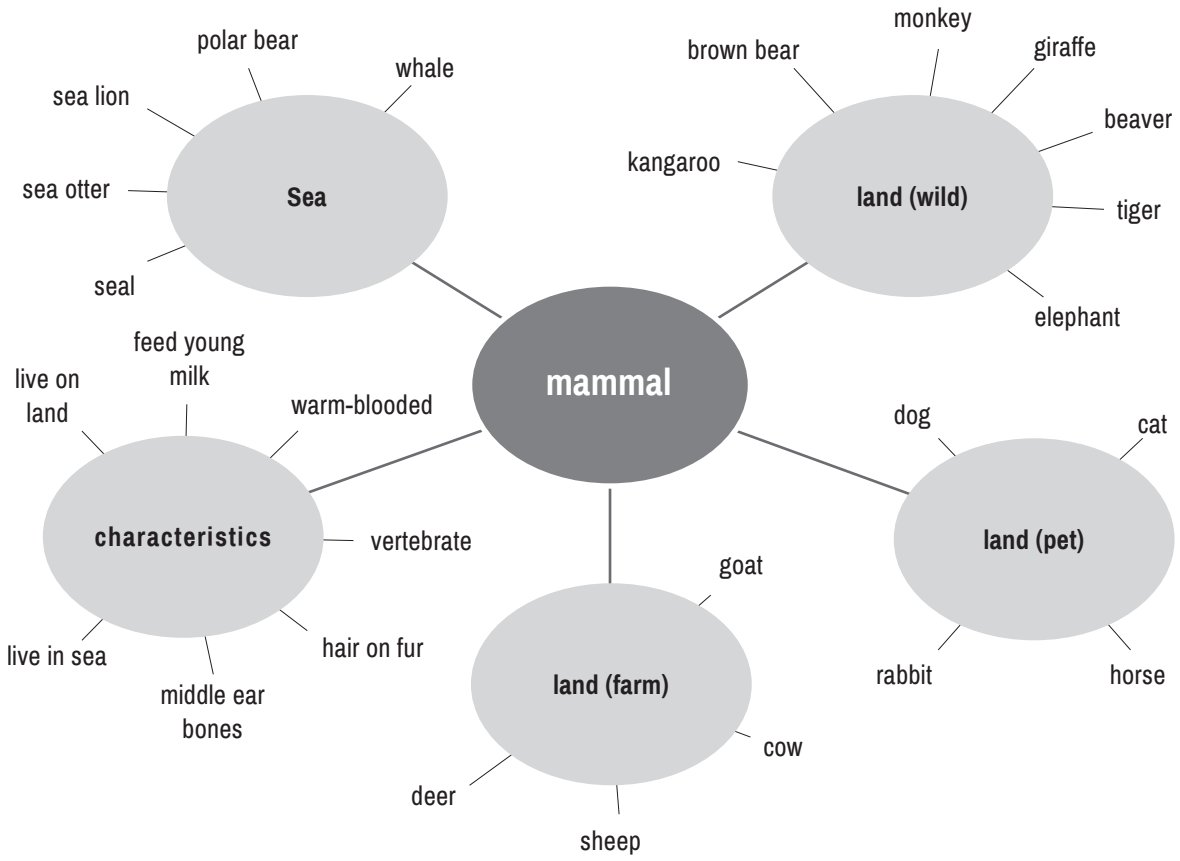
Web concept map

A web concept map resembles a spider's web (Calfee & Patrick, 1995). A spider's web has a centre and a number of lines that stem from the centre (see Figure 8.1). A web concept map is about one thing. The centre of the web identifies the one topic and the subtopics stem from the centre.

Figure 8.1 A spider web that illustrates the conceptual basis for the web concept map

Figure 8.2 shows a web concept map for the word *mammal*—a content word in the *Junior Journa*l article, "New Zealand Sea Lions" (Sorrell, 2009). There are a number of content words in the article. Teachers can build a concept map with students (e.g. types of mammals, habitat (sea, land), unique characteristics (e.g. give birth to young), NOT mammals (e.g. birds, insects, some animals, e.g. some fish).

Figure 8.2 Web concept map for the word *mammal*



Weave concept map

The weave, matrix or compare–contrast concept map is an extension of the web concept map. The weave enables students to compare and contrast concepts. The weave can be used to compare and contrast two or more concepts such as winter sports (e.g. rugby, soccer, and hockey; Australia and New Zealand; or butterflies and moths).

Figure 8.3 shows how the North Island and South Island can be compared and contrasted (the two islands are shown on page 8 of the article "New Zealand Sea Lions" (Sorrell, 2009)).

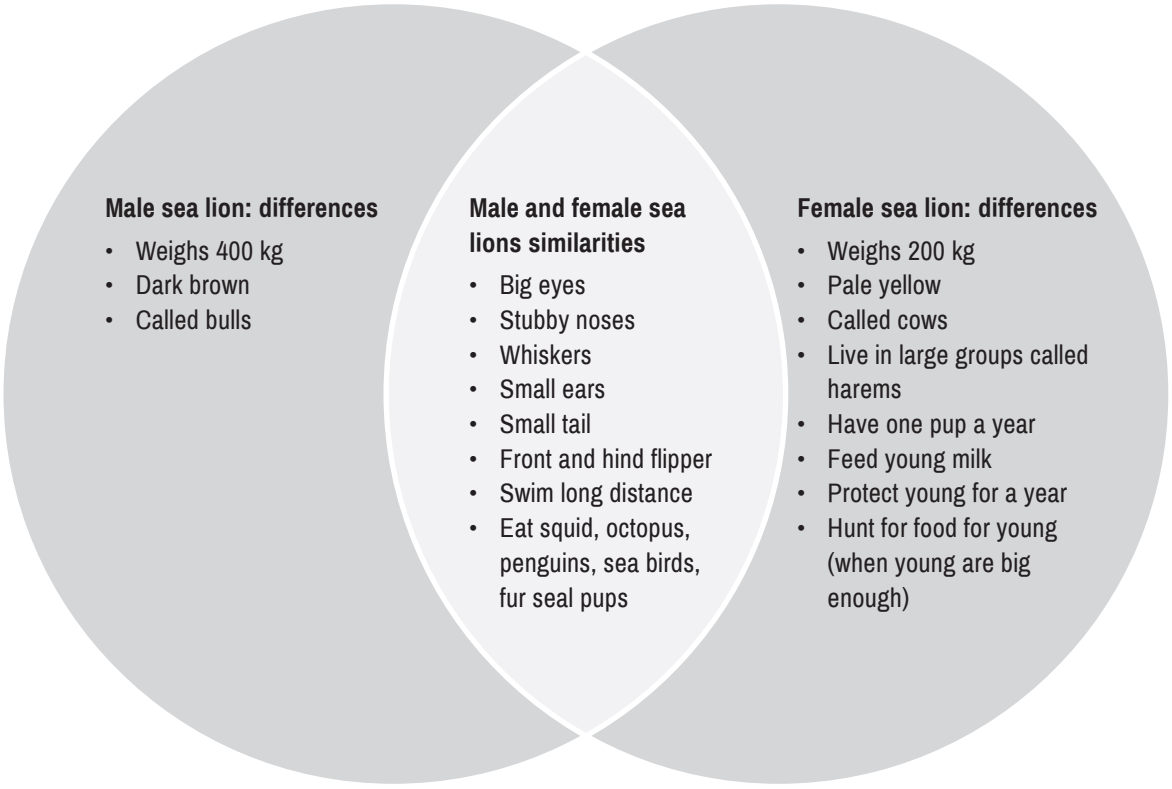
Figure 8.3 Compare–contrast (weave) concept map for North and South Islands

	North Island	South Island
Size (area)	113,729 sq km	151,211 sq km
Population	3,677,200	1,115,800
Cities	Auckland Hamilton Tauranga Palmerston North Wellington	Christchurch Dunedin Invercargill
Features	Lake Taupō (largest lake in New Zealand) Active volcanoes (e.g. Ruapehu, Ngauruhoe, Tongariro, White Island) Sky Tower Māori culture experiences (e.g. Rotorua) Geothermal activity (e.g. Taupō, Rotorua, Hot Water Beach—Coromandel) Capital—Wellington	Fiords Southern Alps
Great Walks (10)	**3 Great Walks:** Lake Waikaremoana Tongariro Northern Circuit Whanganui Journey	**7 Great Walks:** Abel Tasman Coastal Track Heaphy Track Kepler Track Milford Track Routeburn Track Rakiura Track Paparoa Track

Venn diagram concept map

The Venn diagram concept map shows the differences and similarities between two concepts. The differences are in the sections of the diagram that do not overlap and the similarities are in the section of the diagram that does overlap. We have found the Venn diagram to be an excellent tool for discussion, particularly when discussing concepts that have similarities and differences. The "New Zealand Sea Lions" (Sorrell, 2009) article lends itself to using a Venn diagram concept map (see Figure 8.4).

Figure 8.4 Venn diagram for male and female sea lions (based on article "New Zealand Sea Lions", Sorrell, 2009)



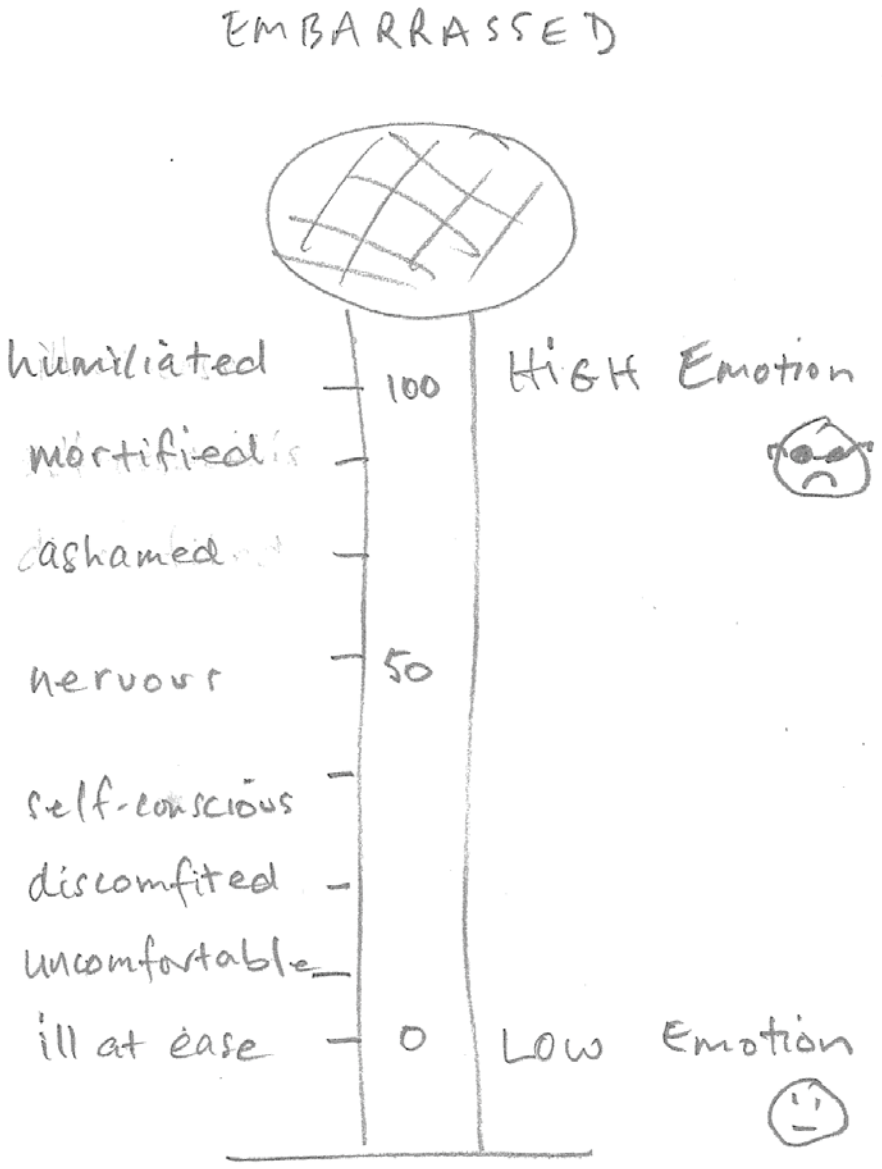
Thermometer concept map

A thermometer concept map is a way of thinking about the 'right' word for the situation, especially in terms of depth of emotion. For example, how Dad felt when he could not find his own gumboots and instead had to wear his wife's green and white spotted gumboots to work (see the *Junior Journal* story "Where's My Gumboot?" (Parry, 2012). What would be the right word to describe his feelings? Students might suggest *embarrassed*. The teacher might suggest the class look at synonyms for the word *embarrassed*. WORD lists several synonyms including: *uncomfortable, self-conscious, ashamed, nervous, mortified, humiliated, discomfited, ill at ease*.

Students could rank the words from low level of emotion to high emotion; after that, they could discuss which would be the best synonym if the author wanted to use the right word for the story.

A possible ranking of synonyms for feeling 'embarrassed', from high emotion to low emotion could be: *humiliated, mortified, ashamed, nervous, self-conscious, discomfited, uncomfortable, and ill at ease* (see Figure 8.5).

Figure 8.5 A thermometer graph for levels of emotion for the word *embarrassed*



Multiple-meaning words

Children may know the meaning of a word in one particular context (e.g. that a 'pup' is a baby dog; or that a 'cow' produces milk for us to drink). They may not know that a 'pup' also refers to baby sea lions and 'cow' refers to an adult female sea lion (refer to the *Junior Journal* article, "New Zealand Sea Lions" (Sorrell, 2009). There are many everyday words with multiple meanings. Johnson, Moe, and Baumann (1983) found that, of the 9,000 frequently occurring words in English, seven out of 10 had multiple meanings. *Bank* is a polysemous or a word with multiple meanings. For example, "We sat on the *bank* of the river"; or "After work I went to the *bank* to make a deposit." The following common words from the *New Zealand Sea Lions* (Sorrell, 2009) article have multiple meanings: *safe, tail, heavy, dive, roll, rich, milk, love, tag, left, pup, cow*. It is important to teach that many words have more than one meaning.

General Service List

The General Service List (GSL) is a list of the 2,000 most frequently used words. These words are common words. Encourage students to also use words that are not on this list. A revised GSL is available from http://www.newgeneralservicelist.org/

Dictionary and thesaurus

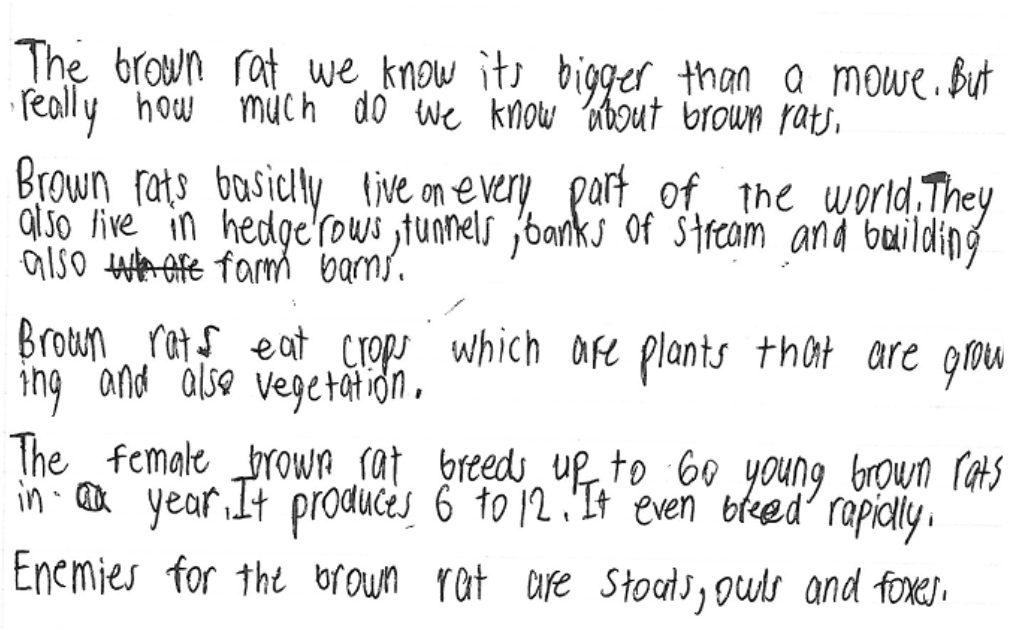
The dictionary and thesaurus are important tools for writers and spellers. Teachers could use print copies of these or use online versions. Teachers could demonstrate, and model dictionary and thesaurus use. It is important to have a range of dictionary types in the classroom, from smaller to larger, and dictionaries that cater for all spellers and writers. Students could also use the internet. If selecting print copies, Nicholson and Dymock (2010, p. 122) identified criteria to consider for dictionaries. Teachers should consider whether the dictionary:

- has a clear, easy-to-read print
- gives the part of speech of the word
- gives a pronunciation guide
- gives a definition
- gives the word origin (i.e. what language the word comes from)
- gives an illustrative context that shows how the word is used in a sentence
- shows other words that come from the word
- gives similar words with the same meaning (i.e. synonyms).

The thesaurus is an excellent source of synonyms for writers. The term 'thesaurus' comes from Greek and means 'a treasure house'. Writers of all ages should be encouraged to use this treasure house of words to enhance their writing. Diversity of words is one of the six vocabulary categories that Olinghouse and Wilson (2013) used when analysing writing. An online or print thesaurus will help writers to develop word diversity in their written work.

When conferencing with students, either as a whole class, group, or one-to-one, teachers can help students enhance their writing through vocabulary instruction. Writing sample 1 (see Figure 8.6) is the first draft of a descriptive article on the brown rat written by a Year 6 student. While there are a number of possible conference topics (e.g. no title, introduction, elaboration of content, and conclusion) the present focus is vocabulary. Content vocabulary is an important characteristic of descriptive nonfiction/informational writing. When conferencing with this student we suggest discussing appropriate content vocabulary for an article describing the brown rat. The student could include Latin-based words such as *rodent, mammal, habitat,* and *predator* as well as the Greek origin word *diet*.

Figure 8.6 Writing sample 1: Descriptive article on the brown rat (Year 6 student)



The brown rat we know its bigger than a mouse. But really how much do we know about brown rats.

Brown rats basicly live on every part of the world. They also live in hedge rows, tunnels, banks of stream and building also ~~wh are~~ farm barns.

Brown rats eat crops which are plants that are growing and also vegetation.

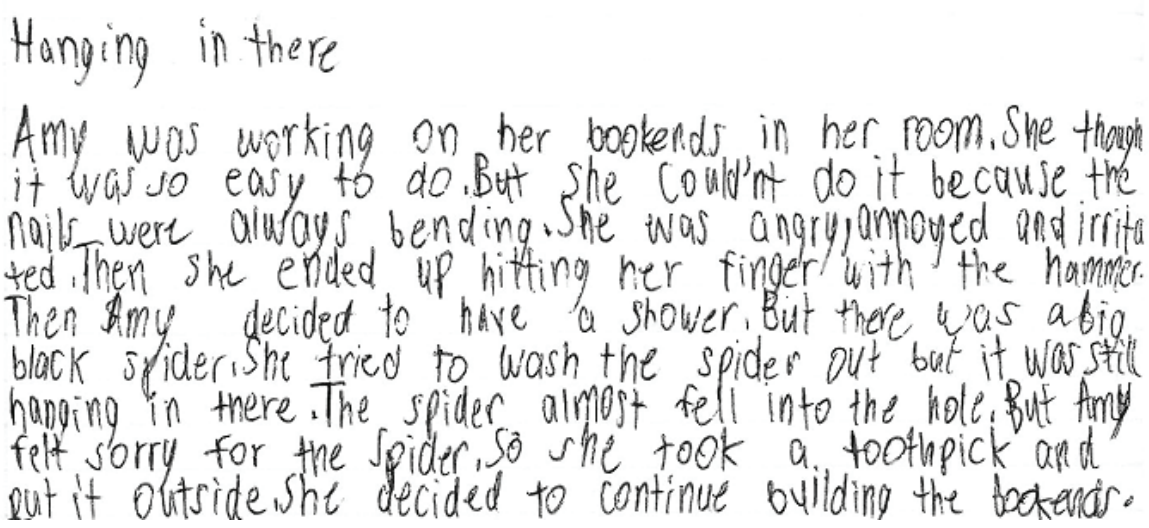
The female brown rat breeds up to 60 young brown rats in a year. It produces 6 to 12. It even breed rapidly.

Enemies for the brown rat are stoats, owls and foxes.

The second and third writing samples are summaries of stories also written by a Year 6 student. The first writing sample is a summary of "Hanging in There" (Leach, 2002) and the second writing sample is a summary of "The Terrible Techno Turn-off" (Hager, 2004). We have made vocabulary suggestions for simliar meaning words (i.e. synonmys) and elaboration (i.e. modifiers of a noun phrase, including adjectives).

Some possible synonmyms for writing sample 2 (see Figure 8.7) include: *easy* (simple, straightforward); *big* (enormous, huge, gigantic); *sorry* (empathy, concern); *hole* (shower drain). Possible noun modifiers for writing sample 2 (see Figure 8.7) include: bookends (*wooden* bookends); nails (*long* nails); finger (*index, small,* or *middle* finger); it (it outside *on the grass*; it outside *in the garden*); spider (spider *in the shower*).

Figure 8.7 Writing sample 2: Story summary of "Hanging in There" (Leach, 2002)



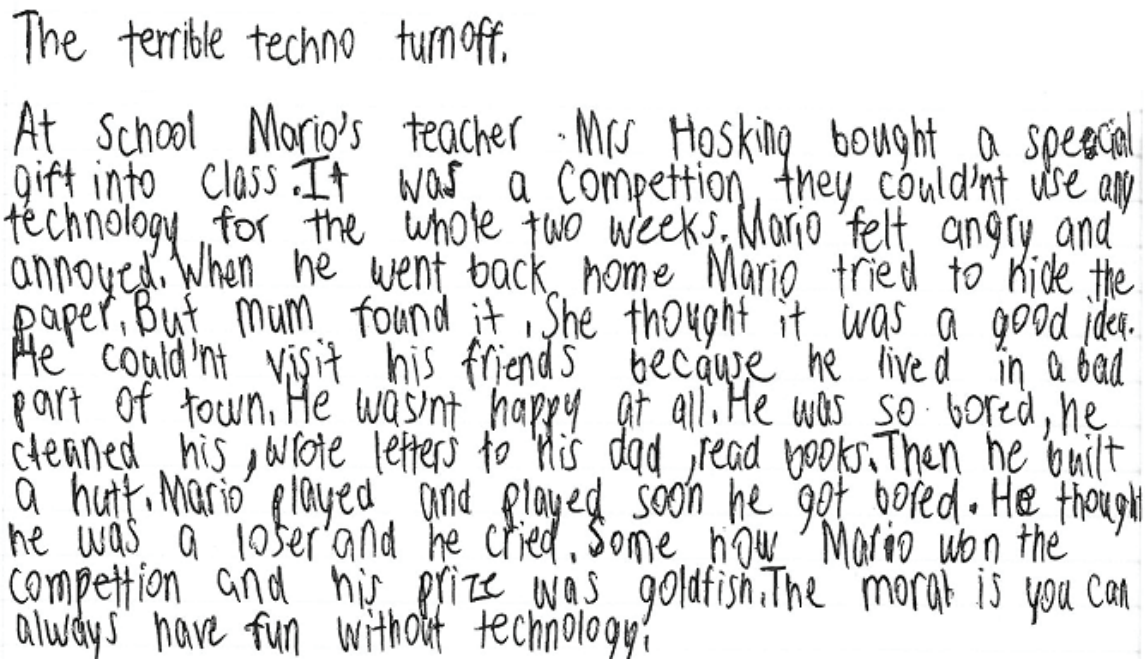
Hanging in there

Amy was working on her bookends in her room. She though it was so easy to do. But she could'nt do it because the nails were always bending. She was angry, annoyed and irrita ted. Then she ended up hitting her finger with the hammer. Then Amy decided to have a shower. But there was a big black spider. She tried to wash the spider out but it was still hanging in there. The spider almost fell into the hole. But Amy felt sorry for the spider, so she took a toothpick and put it outside. She decided to continue building the bookends.

Possible synonmyms for writing sample 3 (see Figure 8.8) include *good* (excellent, great); *bad* (undesireable, dangerous); *loser* (nobody); *cried* (wept); *paper* (written notice).

Possible noun modifiers for writing sample 3 (see Figure 8.8) include *teacher* (*Year 4* teacher); *hut* (hut *in the shed*; hut *in the old shed*); competition (*class* competition).

Figure 8.8 Writing sample 3. Story summary of "The Terrible Techno Turn-off" (Hager, 2004)


The terrible techno turnoff.

At School Mario's teacher Mrs Hosking bought a special gift into class. It was a competition they couldn't use any technology for the whole two weeks. Mario felt angry and annoyed. When he went back home Mario tried to hide the paper. But mum found it. She thought it was a good idea. He couldn't visit his friends because he lived in a bad part of town. He wasn't happy at all. He was so bored, he cleaned his, wrote letters to his dad, read books. Then he built a hutt. Mario played and played soon he got bored. He thought he was a loser and he cried. Some how Mario won the competion and his prize was goldfish. The moral is you can always have fun without technology.

Summary

There is no debate about the important role of vocabulary in writing. The purpose of this chapter has been to highlight writers' use of different categories of vocabulary for different text structures (e.g. the use of appropriate content words in nonfiction/informative writing) and the critical role the teachers play in enhancing students' vocabulary through teaching structural analysis, the use of concepts maps, encouraging the use of the dictionary and thesaurus; and promoting reading. Having a large vocabulary not only enhances writing but also makes writing easier. As a 3-year-old said recently: "Look at that garbage. That's not good for the environment. Oil is not good for the environment either." While this 3-year-old has yet to learn to spell she is developing a good vocabulary that she can, and does, use in her 'writing'.

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CHAPTER 9

Teaching grammar and punctuation

Teaching punctuation

In a review of the literature on teaching punctuation, Hall (2009) wrote, "One of the less studied aspects of written language development is punctuation" (p. 271) and that the lack of research is surprising given that punctuation miscues are a topic of concern (Truss, 2006). It seems that the demands of writing are great in terms of getting ideas on paper and students simply forget to check for punctuation (Hall, 2009). Students tend to invent their own punctuation strategies, for example, only putting a full stop at the end of the piece of writing, or scattering them through the text to break up the lines. Of course, punctuation is not about spacing out full stops across a page of text; it is about grammar, which is why this chapter looks at both punctuation and grammar together.

The apostrophe

Confusion about the possessive apostrophe seems to be because children have a misunderstanding that you always put an apostrophe before the final letter 's' in a word. This is very common (Bryant, Nunes, & Bindman, 2000). Students can learn how to use the apostrophe correctly with some instruction that explains the difference between the morpheme 's' meaning more than one (e.g. that the 's' in "the trees in the park" indicates more than one tree) and the grammatical meaning of possession (e.g. the 's' in "the tree's leaves") (Bryant, Devine, & Ledward, 1997; Stuart, Dixon, & Masterson, 2004). It seems that many students do not see the difference (Hall, 2009). Another difficulty in punctuation is speech marks. Students are sometimes not sure which parts of their writing need speech marks or not since everything they write on paper is arguably their speech (Hall, 2009). Differences in terminology that

teachers use to describe speech marks could also be confusing (e.g. terms like ‘sixty sixes’ and ‘ninety nines’, quotation marks, inverted commas).

Should we teach punctuation?

We were unable to find very much research on this. We can report the results of a study we carried out on spelling in which two groups of Year 3 children received spelling instruction while the third group did comprehension and punctuation activities related to book reading (Dymock & Nicholson, 2017). The punctuation group was taught about punctuation as part of a shared book reading lesson twice a week for 10 weeks. We taught about capital letters, full stops, speech marks, and commas mostly. The stories are ones that we have included in this book. Three of the lesson plans are in Appendix 9.1 at the end of this chapter.

A simple chart for beginners

Below is a chart that includes some of the most common punctuation marks we found in stories for junior school students. The definitions are kept fairly simple even though some terms are quite complex to define. Bryant et al. (1997) reported that we do not know how long it takes for children who are English speaking to learn some aspects of punctuation such as the apostrophe. There is not much research on this. Formal punctuation teaching does not usually begin until Years 5–6. The punctuation examples below are from *School Journal* stories.

Table 9.1: Ten punctuation marks for beginners (Samson, 2015)

	Punctuation marks	Notation	When to use	Example
1	Capital letters	ABC	For the first word in a sentence	We all wanted to help.
			For the first letter in names, places, and days of the week	Hippy Red, Jane, Monday
			Each word in title of a story or article usually has a capital letter	Lost Property
2	Full stops	.	To end a sentence	We all giggled.
3	Question mark	?	To end a sentence	Is it a treasure chest?
4	Exclamation mark	!	To end a sentence	“Ahoy there!” or “Oh no!”
5	Comma	,	Shows a pause	On Sunday, Uncle Leo took us fishing.
			Separates a list of things	One, two, three, four.
			Use before or at end of speech	She said, “Come home.”
				“Come home,” she said.

	Punctuation marks	Notation	When to use	Example
6	Speech marks—look like 66 and 99	“Hello”	They go around only the words that are spoken	“An airport,” she said.
7	Apostrophe	‘	Not for plurals Used for abbreviations Used for possession	trees (not tree’s) It doesn’t matter Ernie’s cat
8	Hyphen	-	To add a little bit more to the sentence	Inside were a packet of peanuts and a carrot – but no sandwiches and no apple. For a whole week Harry didn’t have to sit down – because he couldn’t.
9	Parentheses		To go around some words in the sentence	Jason, Amelia, and the workers at the factory (especially Ernie) were very pleased to see him.
10	Ellipsis	…	To indicate that words are left out	She hid behind the bushes and waited and waited …

Lesson plans on punctuation

Although research indicates you can teach punctuation, the question is, how best to do it? Martin (2017) has argued that teaching punctuation will not transfer to writing if it is done out of context. It would therefore be better to teach punctuation in context, as in reading the class a book and pointing out punctuation while reading aloud. This is what we did in our spelling study reported above. Talking about punctuation in the context of reading a Big Book or an enlarged copy of a story or article seems a more engaging way to relate punctuation instruction because students can see the punctuation marks in the context of writing. The appendix to the chapter has some of the lesson plans we used.

Teaching grammar—better to teach it in context

The first thing to say about the topic of grammar is that much of the research is against the teaching of grammar as a way to improve writing. Teaching traditional grammar explicitly, as in teaching the parts of speech, does not transfer to writing; in fact, it has a negative effect (Locke, 2009; Myhill & Watson, 2014; Graham & Perin, 2007). In addition, many teachers were not been trained in grammar when they were at school or university so it is a difficult task for them to teach grammar (Myhill & Watson, 2014). On the other hand, you could argue that by teaching grammar (e.g. parts of speech, types of sentence constructions) you are giving students a metalanguage that will help them to talk about their own writing. The argument against this utilitarian view is that studies have shown teaching of grammar does not help

writing. Instead, students are better off to acquire implicit knowledge of grammar through extensive reading (Smith & Elley, 1997). A middle view might be that a brief introduction to grammar that makes it interesting to students would be helpful but not make it a major part of the teaching of writing.

What is grammar? When someone says "grammar", we think immediately that it means saying or writing a sentence correctly and not making a mistake. Grammar is all about the way we put words together to construct sentences and texts. It is about the implicit language 'rules' we use. Grammar can be about the words we choose (nouns, adjectives, and other parts of speech), the ways we construct phrases and sentences, and the ways in which we make our spoken and written discourse coherent and cohesive. A good website for the beginner to look at to explain and give examples of the components of grammar is:

www.cybergrammar.co.uk

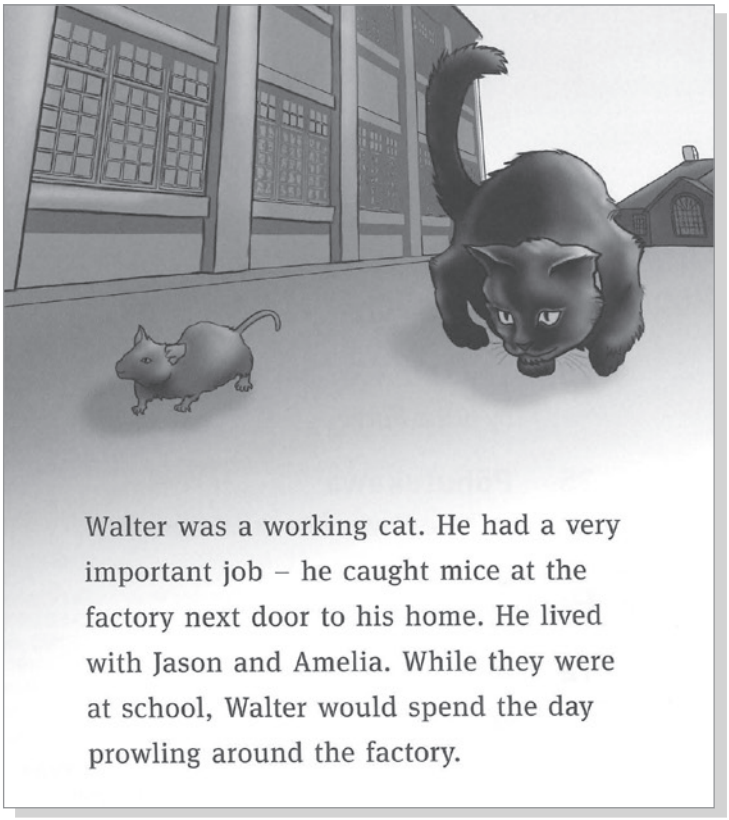
An informal way to teach about grammar might be to teach students about aspects of metalinguistic awareness that are relevant to grammar. Metalinguistic awareness is the ability to think about and reflect on how language works (Tunmer, Pratt, & Herriman, 1984). In thinking about grammar, metalinguistic activities that focus on syntactic and pragmatic awareness might be useful in encouraging students to consider how grammar is important for meaning. If you have syntactic awareness then you are sensitive to whether a sentence is correct in terms of grammar; if you have pragmatic awareness you are sensitive to whether the meaning of the sentence is appropriate or adequate. An example of pragmatic awareness would be to ask students if the following paragraph makes sense: "Gail got a new bike for her birthday. One day a car ran over Gail's bike and broke the wheel. Gail picked up the bike and rode away". It does not make sense, in that you cannot ride a bike if the wheel is broken. Pragmatic awareness helps the student to know if the meaning of what they write is making sense. An example of syntactic awareness might be to ask students if the following sentence is correct, "The bike hit". The sentence does not seem complete in that there is no object of the verb. The teacher and the class could discuss how to write the sentence so it is syntactically correct and the bike "hits" something, e.g. the bike hit the wall. Talking about language in this way would help students to engage with grammar and see why it is important for their writing. Martello (2001) found that more developed writers were better able to use metalanguage to discuss their writing.

Teaching grammar is not very helpful if taught in isolation, because students may not see how to transfer this learning to actual writing. There is quite a lot of agreement about this (Locke, 2009; Myhill & Watson, 2014). However, grammar taught in context might be more helpful than the research tends to show. Locke (2009) reviewed the debate about grammar and writing. He explained that early research found that the teaching of grammar in secondary school had little impact, that good writers in Year 9 were still good writers in Year 11, and that poor writers had improved very little. However, Locke (2009) argued that grammar instruction in the context of writing might be helpful.

An example of grammar taught in context is a study by Feng and Powers (2005) who looked at whether they could help students reduce the number of grammatical mistakes they made in essays. They studied the effect of mini-lessons in grammar on the writing ability of 22 5th Grade children. Children wrote three different essays: one at the beginning of the school year, one in the middle, and one at the end. Topics were: my friends (pre-test), my spare time (middle), and fun time with friends (end). The mini-lessons (they did not say how many there were) focused on the errors of grammar (e.g.

using sentence fragments (i.e. incomplete sentences); lack of subject–verb agreement (i.e. whether the subject and the verb in the sentence agree in person and number), and on mechanical errors involving spelling, and punctuation.

A sentence fragment looks like a sentence because it starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop but it is not a complete sentence. A fragment can be a clause or phrase disconnected from the main sentence or where a noun or verb is missing, or where there is no subject–verb agreement. Sentence fragments are used by writers a great deal to avoid unnecessary repetition of words but sometimes in student writing the sentence is hard to follow. An example of a sentence fragment in the text below might be if the text was, "While they were at school." The sentence is not complete. Sometimes a verb or noun is missing: "Spends the day prowling the factory." In the text below, an example of lack of subject–verb agreement that would not work in Standard English might be, "Walter were a working cat."



In Feng and Powers (2005), teachers projected a sample paragraph on the whiteboard each day and the class improved on the grammar. Then students worked together to write better sentences for the paragraph. The results showed a clear reduction in errors at mid-test and at post-test in mechanics though less in grammar. They concluded that mini-lessons by teachers are helpful, especially in the revising and editing stages of writing. A limitation of the study, however, was that there was no control group, so it is difficult to know if the improvement was due to the instruction.

Another example of grammar taught in context was a study by Lee (2016), involving Grade 7 students in Hong Kong who were learning English as another language. Three classes totalling 79 children were in the intervention group and one class of 25 children was in the control group. The control group spent

the same amount of time in writing but did not receive the instruction. In the grammar group, children learned how to use stronger verbs; for example, to replace *is* with *comprises*, to use action verbs like *gurgle* instead of dull verbs, and to use mental state verbs like *agree* and *prefer*. The instruction involved looking at paragraphs and thinking of verbs (especially) that would improve the writing. There were significantly better gains for the grammar group than for the control group, even though there was only one lesson given. Students said that the instruction helped them to describe the setting and characters better and to use more varied verbs to make their writing more interesting.

A grammar intervention that has had positive results is teaching students how to combine sentences. In one study, Saddler and Graham (2005) used peer tutoring and mixed ability students working in pairs to teach sentence combining. An example of this was giving students the following sentences and asking them to combine them to one sentence: "Ralph is a mouse. Ralph is grey. Ralph has many brothers. Ralph has many sisters." The teacher showed how to combine the four sentences into one sentence: "Ralph is a grey mouse with many brothers and sisters." The training in combining sentences improved the quality of sentence composition and the quality of their stories. Saddler and Asaro-Saddler (2010) reported that more than 80 studies have shown that teaching students to combine sentences improves the quality of their sentences and their story writing. For example, combining two simple sentences can express the same ideas more effectively (e.g. "The girl is tall. The girl has long hair."). Combining the sentences can be more effective, as in "The tall girl has long hair." In the passage above, the teacher might rewrite it and then the class could work on how to combine sentences to improve the writing. For example, "Walter was a working cat WHO had a very important job." Another possible combination from the above story page is, "He lived with Jason and Amelia AND while they were at school, Walter would spend the day prowling around the factory." When sentence combining is in the context of reading an actual text, it is possible for the class to discuss whether the more complex construction improves the meaning or not; whether the combined sentence is more grammatically appropriate. Such discussions encourage students to use grammar more effectively in writing.

Summary

Punctuation and grammar may seem to be less important than the content of writing but they are part of the overall effect of the writing and can make a difference. It does seem important to give them attention as part of the writing programme.

Many children learn punctuation intuitively while reading and writing but many do not do so. Teaching punctuation in the context of reading a mentor text, as shown in this chapter, would be a nice way to make the teaching seem relevant to students. A sentence with correct punctuation is always more impressive than one that has errors.

Teaching grammar may also be helpful if it relates to the texts that students are reading and writing. Writing that is grammatically correct gains better marks but students need to see how grammar works in texts, not in isolation. Talking about how to write 'sparkly' nouns, verbs, or adjectives for a piece of writing is far more impacting than lessons about these parts of speech taught in isolation.

Appendix 9.1—Examples of lessons that teach punctuation in the context of reading a story

Lesson 1—Text is "Something Very Scary"—focus is on uppercase letters

Introduction:

T: Hello, we are going to look at punctuation today with the story called "Something Very Scary" (Renner, 2012). Punctuation is very important for spelling and writing. What we focus on today are capital letters, full stops, and speech marks.

Lesson: (using the Big Book)

T: I am going to re-read some pages (1–4) from "Something Very Scary". When I stop reading I'll ask you some questions.

T: Before we start, look at the cover. What is scary? Yes, those eyes. How many are there? Yes, 8. What does 'shiny' mean? Yes, it means that something sparkles, it is so bright. Now, please listen carefully to the story. [Teacher reads the story]

Activity: Punctuation

T: Let's go back through the story and look at punctuation. First we will look at the use of **uppercase letters** (we sometimes call them capital letters). Uppercase letters are different from lowercase letters. Uppercase 'B' is different from lowercase 'b'. When we write we will use an uppercase letter for the first letter in some words. Words that start with an uppercase letter are often names (first and last), places, and days of the week. We also start the first word of a sentence with an uppercase letter. Look at the title of the story. Notice that each word in the title starts with an uppercase letter. We do this with the title of a story to make sure it stands out. Notice that the author's and illustrator's names have uppercase letters.

T: Look at page 2—Monday starts with an uppercase letter because we spell days of the week with uppercase letters. Sammy starts with an uppercase letter. Why is this? Mrs Ngatai—her name starts with an uppercase letter. Why? Kia ora starts with a capital letter? Why is that?

T: On page 2, the author uses **speech marks**. Which words have speech marks? Yes, when Mrs Ngatai talks to Sammy she says "Kia ora Sammy." Remember the speech marks only go around words that are spoken.

T: Look on page 3—Which words start with an uppercase letter? [Kia ora, Mrs Ngatai, Sammy, There's, Room 10, It, Something, I, Let's] Room 10 has a capital letter because it is a special place.

T: On page 4, how many **full stops** are there? [4] Why do we have full stops? Yes, to end a sentence.

T: On page 6 there is a capital letter for Mister Breeze. We use capital letters for Mr, Mrs, Miss, and Ms.

T: Now let's look at other punctuation in this book. The **comma** is used to indicate a pause in the writing, or to separate out a list of things, or at the start or end of speech. On page 2 it comes after Kia ora, to indicate a pause. It comes after Sammy because that is the end of the speech. Let's look at the other pages. Can you tell me where the commas come? [page 3 after speech on line 1, to show a pause on line 5]

T: Let's look at some other punctuation. We use a question mark for a question. What lines have the question mark on page 3? [line 7 and line 9]

T: On page 3 there is also an apostrophe. There is a lot of confusion about when to use the apostrophe. It is not used for plurals (e.g. bananas' is wrong). We do use it to indicate an abbreviation, putting two words into one, like on page 3 Sammy says THERE'S which means "THERE IS". Can you find another apostrophe? [Let's]

T: At the end of a sentence we can end with a full stop, a question mark, or an exclamation mark—but only one of these. On page 4 can you find an exclamation mark—which line? [lines 3 and 6] An exclamation mark is to show the speaker is saying something with force or loudly.

Lesson 2—Text is "The Stowaway" (Furie, 2012)—Focus is to review—focus on capital letters, full stops, and speech marks

Introduction:

T: Hello, we are going to look at punctuation today. Punctuation is very important for spelling and writing. What we focus on today are capital letters, full stops, and speech marks.

Lesson:

T: I am going to re-read "The Stowaway". You have your own copy of the story. As we read, I'll ask you some questions. You will have to circle some punctuation marks in your copy of the story. Your buddy will check that you have circled the right ones.

Activity: Punctuation

T: Page 2. Review. What are some punctuation marks on page 2?

P: Capital letter, full stop, comma, hyphen.

T: Why is the title of the story in capital letters and in big, **bold font**?

S: To make the title stand out.

T: Page 2. On line 1, put a circle around the first capital letter. On line 2, put a circle around the hyphen.

T: Page 3. On line 6, put a circle around the apostrophe. Why has the author put an apostrophe? [for possession—it is Ernie's lap]

T: Page 4. Line 4. Put a circle around each speech mark. What is a speech mark for? [to show where the character is speaking, where it starts and where it finishes]

T: Page 5. Why is this line in italics? [to attract our attention, to make us think about the question]

T: Page 6. Why is the word BANG in capital letters? [to make us think of a loud noise]

T: Page 7. Why does the author use a hyphen? [it was a trick of the writer—to add a little bit more to the sentence—to remind us that the cat is not alone, the mouse is also with him]

T: Page 9. Line 1. Why is there an **exclamation mark**? [to show force or emphasis—that the quarantine office was shocked, surprised]

T: Page 10. Line 8. Put a circle around the **parentheses**. Why are they there? [to add an extra detail to the sentence, to expand the idea of the sentence a little bit more]

T: Now, I want you to write down the signs we use when we make the following punctuation marks: capital W, full stop, comma, speech marks, hyphen, exclamation mark, parentheses:

Answers are — W . , “ ” - ! ( )

Lesson 3—Text is “Marcus and the Wind” (Parry, 2013)—focus on capital letters, full stops, speech marks, and ellipses

Introduction:

T: Hello, we are going to look at punctuation today. Punctuation is very important for spelling and writing. What we focus on today are capital letters, full stops, speech marks, and ellipses.

Lesson:

T: I am going to re-read “Marcus and the Wind”. You have your own copy of the story. As we read, I’ll ask you some questions. You will have to circle some punctuation marks in your copy of the story. Your buddy will check that you have circled the right ones.

Activity: Punctuation

T: Page 2. Review. What are some punctuation marks on page 2?

S: Capital letter, full stop, comma, apostrophe.

T: Why is the title of the story in capital letters and in big, bold font?

P: To make the title stand out.

T: Page 2. On line 1, put a circle around the first capital letter. Line 2—apostrophe—why has the author put an apostrophe? [It is a contraction: wasn’t = was not]

T: Page 2: Speech mark. Question mark. Why is there a question mark?

T: Page 3. Apostrophe. Marcus’s (second to last line). [Marcus’s—shows possession]

T: Page 4. Have students circle speech marks. Question mark. Notice that the speech mark goes after the full stop.

T: Page 6. Line 4—two commas. Let’s read the sentence with the two commas. What does the comma tell the reader to do? [Pause] I will read it, then you read the sentence with me.

T: Page 6. Exclamation mark—Line 5. Circle. Why is there an exclamation mark?

T. Page 7. Why does the story end with …? What is …? Sometimes people say dot dot dot. It means some words are missing—intentionally—the author meant to leave out the words (it does not mean that the author made a mistake). This kind of punctuation is called an **ellipsis**. (Yes, ellipsis is an uncommon word but it is worth knowing because it is a term we use for talking about punctuation when some words are missing and the writer has deliberately put three dots.)

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