



Transactional Writing: Explanation

ACCESS THE ENGLISH EXEMPLARS ONLINE AT www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/exemplars/eng/

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How to Make a Hangi

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The teacher began to explore the forms and features of explanation writing by modelling on a topic he thought would fascinate them - "How Do You Get Smelly Feet?". He and the students got their information from *Icky Sticky Body*, a book of explanations by Suzy Cato. In his modelling, he focused on:

- developing an engaging introduction
- importance of sequence and sequence words
- using passive voice
- using present tense for regular occurrences
- topic-related vocabulary.

From this initial work, he developed a template for "explanation writing" with the class.

He reinforced these concepts of explanation writing by getting his students to refer to a *School Journal* article, "How To Freak Your Mother Out With a Dinosaur"(3.3.92). From this initial work, he developed a template for explanation writing with the class.

The students then attempted and shared their own explanations of the "Smelly Feet" topic, often adding elements of personal flavour!

The teacher then moved the students on to another topic, "How Do You Make a Hangi? He selected this topic because he realised that:

- it linked with an upcoming study on "Healthy Foods"
- many students had had personal experiences with the topic
- it involved a clear set of procedures
- it offered potential for rich language.

The students began by identifying the key vocabulary and brainstorming the procedures that should be followed in making a hangi. They incorporated this information into a flowchart and checked it, through shared reading, against the text of *Hangi*, by Trish Puharich.

They began to draft their explanations against their criteria and flowchart. In stages, they all wrote and then peer-reviewed the main sections:

- introduction
- the first three steps of the process
- the final steps
- conclusion.

The teacher's biggest challenge was to move the students away from "a set of instructions or procedures" to "an explanation", which many students found difficult. To do this, he modelled and instructed them to identify any "bossy language" and replace it with "softer language", for instance replacing phrases like "You remove ..." and "You lay..." with phrases that include the words "is", "are", "can". This was his approach to teaching passive voice.

Teacher-student conversations

As the teacher was very pleased with the progress that Nikita was making in his use of passive voice, he decided to focus on some of the "grammatical challenges" Nikita was facing as he began to experiment with longer or more complex sentences, such as "The rocks are added on preferably volcanic ones or else normal rocks will explode".

Teacher: I see that you've crossed out "or else" and ticked it again. Why's that?

Nikita: It sounds better with "or else".

Teacher: I agree. But I think you've still got to work on that sentence. For instance, what sort of punctuation could you put into it to make it clearer to the reader?

Nikita: Um, maybe commas or brackets. Maybe I could even cross some words out.

Teacher: Have a go at it.

In his second draft Nikita experimented with brackets around "preferably volcanic ones".

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Opportunities should be sought in classroom reading programmes for students to respond to written and visual texts, identifying how processes or phenomena can be explained. Picture books with narrative text will be useful, with teacher prompts to focus students on topics that lend themselves to explanation. Exposure to transactional texts will be essential. The "reading to" programme will be an opportunity for discussing specific vocabulary, language features, and diagrams, which may be transferred to student writing and drawing.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Nikita towards the next learning point, the teacher could help him to focus on:

Structure

- developing a more powerful and engaging introduction
- strengthening the summary statement so that it matches the tone of the rest of the piece.

Language features

- ensuring more consistent use of passive voice, and present tense for actions or conditions that occur regularly.

Grammar

- continuing to check sentence structures for clarity of meaning.

This could be done by:

- modelling of writing using these strategies, and discussion about the process
- exploring models of writing that exemplify the strategies which need to be developed
- giving feedback against the criteria that have been set with Nikita, particularly on the need for editing and revision.



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CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 4: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions and recount events in authentic contexts.

Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should explore choices made by writers, and identify and use the common conventions of writing and organisation of text which affect understanding.

Thinking Critically: Students should identify and express meanings in written texts, drawing on personal background, knowledge and experience.

Processing Information: Students should identify, retrieve, record, and present coherent information, using more than one source and type of technology, and describing the process used.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35-36
www.tki.org.nz/r/language/curriculum/p34_36_e.php

REFERENCES

Cato, Suzy (2001). *Icky Sticky Body*. Auckland: Random House.

Ministry of Education (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Puharich, Trish (1995). *Hangi*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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How to Make a Hangi

WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Nikita clearly and logically explains a process that he has researched well. His main challenge has been to transform a set of procedures into an explanation by focusing on use of passive voice. He has largely succeeded in this.

Student's first draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Includes ideas that are mostly objective or factual.

Supports data with some comments.

Structure

Sequences explanation confidently: begins with topic definition, ends with summary statement.

Uses some time-relationship words.

Beginning to use relationship phrases to link ideas.

Uses paragraphs confidently.

Sentences

Uses variety of structures, beginnings and lengths.

Vocabulary

Uses key topic-appropriate words.

Uses precise and colourful verbs and some adjectives for impact.

Language features

Beginning to demonstrate confidence with passive voice.

How to make a Hangi

A hangi is often prepared on special occasions. Like birthdays or Christmas dinners. Some people prepare them in different ways. Here is one of them.

Firstly peices of earth are removed to make a hole big enough to fit the food baskets in. Logs are placed in order of biggest to smallest.

The rocks are added on preferably volcanic ones or else normal rocks will explode. Now the fire can be lit.

The fire will blaze and smolder until the rocks are white hot. When the fire has stopped burning the ash and embers are now removed to a safe place to be extinguished. Now the rocks are placed in the pit and the food baskets are added too. Damp sheets are put on top of the baskets to protect the food, then the damp sacks are set down to create steam.

Dirt shall be placed until the steam is no longer seen. The food shouldn't be ready until 3-4 hours. so until then watch tv or something Then the food is unearthed and ready to eat.

Surface features

Spelling

Demonstrates good understanding of most basic sounds and patterns in written English – errors will be easily amended with spelling aid.

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions well with support, given that using passive voice is new to him.

Punctuation

Punctuates with increasing independence – errors should be easily amended with revision.



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How to Make a Hangi

Student's first draft

(How to make a Hangi)

Intro. A hangi, is often prepared on special occasions like birthdays or Christmas dinners. Some people prepare them in different ways. Here is one of them.

Firstly pieces of earth are removed to make a hole big enough to fit the food baskets in. Logs are placed in order of biggest to smallest.

The rocks are added on preferably volcanic ones ~~or else~~ normal rocks will explode. Now the fire can be lit.

The fire will blaze and smolder until the rocks are white hot. When the fire has stopped burning the ash and embers are now removed to a safe place to be extinguished. Now the rocks are placed in the pit and the food baskets are added too. Damp sheets are put on top of the baskets to protect the food. Then the damp sacks are set down to create steam.

Dirt shall be placed until the steam is no longer seen. The food shouldnt be ready until 3-4 hours, so until then watch tv or something. Then the food is unearthed and ~~time~~ ready to eat.