

Education Bureau Funded Professional Development Programme

Grammar as Choice: The Role of
Grammar in Enhancing Students' Writing
in the Senior Secondary English
Language Classroom

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Warm-up reflections on teaching grammar in writing lessons

Read a teacher's quote below. To what extent do you share this teacher's view? How is this relevant to the teaching of grammar in your writing lessons?

"It's easy if you ask them to rewrite the sentences, because they find it easy to follow... However, they just don't know when we are supposed to use passive voice and when we are supposed to use active voice. And, one student even asked me why we have to use passive voice in our daily lives. I find this question difficult to answer, and in fact so do my colleagues. No one can give me a correct answer. I've thought about it, but even now I really don't know how to handle the question. I finish the worksheets with them and they know how to rewrite the sentences. But, I don't know how to explain to them when it is used. " (Andrews, 2007)

Overview

1. The notion of text grammar: What is it and how can we promote it in our senior secondary writing lessons?
2. Reflections on reading-to-write teaching units:
 - Example A: A proposal letter
 - Example B: A letter to the editor
3. Understanding the language criteria in the HKDSE Writing Paper with students' sample essays

1. What is text grammar?

- Teaching grammar through texts enables students to see **how the choice of language items is affected by the context** and **how it shapes the tone, style and register of a text.** (CDC, 2017, p.68)



Text grammar

Nine-second reading challenge:

- Read the start of a text below for three seconds. Can you guess what the text type is?

Once upon a time, I was a chef – tall hat, white coat, checked pants, the works!
I left the restaurant business in 2003 when my first child was born...

- Now read what comes next in the text for another three seconds. Would you change your mind?

Now, I'm cooking for my family and sharing all my tested and perfected recipes with you here. The recipes on this site reflect my life: as a mom, I need easy meals the whole family will enjoy but the chef in me needs to eat too!

- Read the final part of the text for three final seconds. Your final comment on the text type?

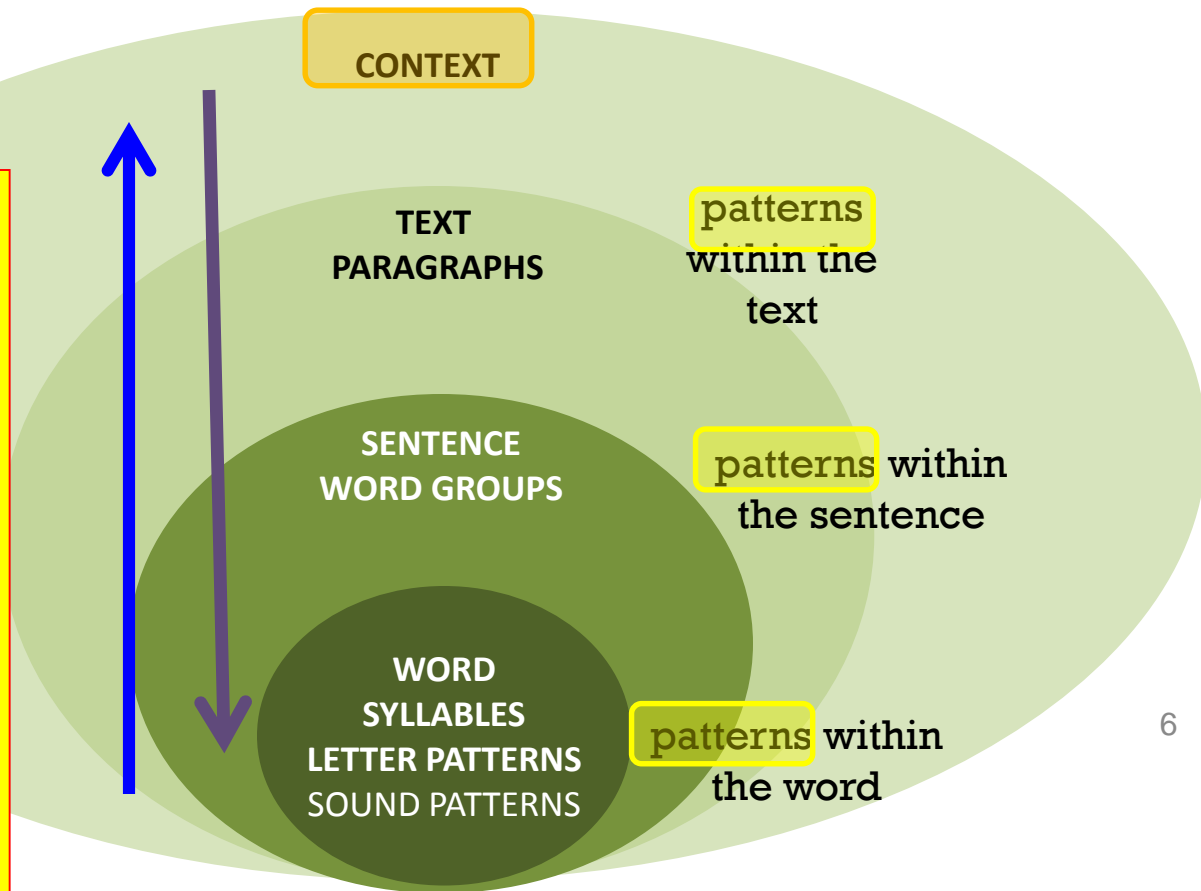
–WHAT YOU'LL FIND HERE:

- Tested and perfected recipes that work for you the very first time
- Step-by-step photos
- Ingredient recommendations that take the guesswork out of grocery shopping
- Menus for holidays, entertaining and everyday family meals

+ A Functional View of Language in Context (Rose, 2005) (The Genre Egg Approach)

→ Provide scaffolding to students through different levels

Grammar is across all levels of language. Let's take 'short stories' as an example!



Grammar as Choice: Short Stories

- What can be the purpose of the short story that the students are to write?
- What can be its rhetorical structure?
- What sentence patterns/vocabulary can they use?

Grammar as Choice: Other Genres

What can be the communicative purpose(s) of each of the genres? What are the grammar choices writers use to achieve those purposes?

Debate speeches

Procedural texts

Expository essays

Witness reports

Sometimes writers or poets intentionally break the typical grammatical conventions to create certain effects.

e.g. “I’m loving it”!

How can we promote text grammar in our secondary classrooms?

Reading-to-write tasks

Example A: A proposal letter

Example B: A letter to the editor

2. Reading-to-write tasks:

Example A: A proposal letter

Example B: A letter to the editor

- **Goal:** Building students' awareness of uses of grammar items in texts (through which communication takes place)
- **Strategy:** Analysing texts and matching grammar items with their communicative purposes with the rhetorical structure of common genres

Alignment between text grammar and TBLT:
grammar integrated with communication
through the four macro skills

Reading-to-write Example A

—A proposal letter

Reading-to-write Example A—A proposal letter:

October 15, 2015

Mr. Nadim Dalwal
English Language Coordinator
Dar Al-Jandal School, Riyadh

Dear Mr. Dalwal,

Subject: Proposal To Hold An ELT Book Fair At Your School

Dar Al Jarad Publishing and Distribution House is pleased to invite your school to host an English Language Teaching (ELT) book fair.

We at Dar Al Jarad believe it is essential that we work directly with schools in Riyadh in order to enhance English literacy among students. We have chosen to approach your school to host one of these events because we are aware of your high educational standards and your interest in improving English literacy at your school.

Objectives:

Our objectives for holding the book fair at your school are as follows:

- To empower both teachers and students with our valuable ELT educational resources which include: readers, textbooks, support materials, and exam books.
- To introduce the students and the teachers to new ELT resources that are available on the market and how these resources can enhance literacy in the classroom.
- To familiarize parents with new ELT materials and the selection process that Curriculum Coordinators go through when developing an English program.
- **Benefits:**
Direct benefits that will come from hosting a book fair will be:
 - The school will receive valuable publicity which will result in increased student enrolment.
 - 15% of the proceeds from each title sold will go toward supporting the school's English program.
 - The school staff and administration will work closely with the ELT distributor which will enhance cooperation between the school and Dar Al Jarad.
 -
 -

Step 1: Reading a model text exemplifying typical genre features for meaning!!!

Reading-to-write Example A—A proposal letter:

Section	Function in the text	Typical language/sentence patterns (examples)
Subject	To state what the letter is about	A noun phrase beginning with 'Proposal to...' e.g. Proposal To Hold An ELT Book Fair At Your School
Introduction (first two paragraphs)	To...	
Objectives	To...	
Benefits	To...	
Arrangements	To...	
Conclusion	To...	

Step 2: Analysing grammar features typical of the genre with the use of a sentence making table

How can we vary this step to cater for learner diversity?

Example for the use of writing frames: A proposal letter

_____ (Date)

_____ (The receiver's full name and position)

Dear Mr/Ms _____,

Subject: _____

(introduction)

I am _____ (introducing yourself). *Our group*

have _____ . *I am writing to* _____

_____ (state the reason for writing)

Objectives:

Our objectives for holding _____ :

- *To...*
- *To...*
- ...

Step 3:
Guiding students to use the grammar features identified to write their text with a writing frame

How can we vary this step to cater for learner diversity?
The use of sentence-making tables

Sentence making tables

Communication function	Sentence patterns
Giving suggestions	It is suggested/proposed that...
	...is a good idea

Communication function	Sentence patterns
Giving explanations	This results from...
	This is due to...

Communication function	Sentence patterns
Giving examples	Take... as an example.
	For instance,...

Reading-to-write Example B

—A letter to the editor

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

- We're going to examine this example more closely from both the perspectives of the teacher and the senior secondary students. You'll switch roles between the two.

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Part 1: Read Text 1 *“Key to a happy Hong Kong family could be a mobile messaging group on WhatsApp or WeChat”* and answer the following questions.

1. Read line 18: “The quality of your family communication will be better” if the elderly are in a family messaging group.
2. Identify two words in the text which can replace ‘enhance’ (Line 49).

boost (line 26)

improve (line 38)

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

3. The purpose of Text 1 is...

A) to promote the use of mobile messaging groups.

B) to report a study and a project launched by a university.

C) to explain how local families should take care of the elderly.

D) to ask for more resources from the Government on family service.

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

4. Decide whether each of the following is true, false or not given.

	True	False	Not given
i) All Hong Kong families communicate through mobile platforms like WhatsApp.		<input checked="" type="radio"/>	
ii) The government's integrated family service centres are currently not functioning well.			<input checked="" type="radio"/>
iii) Social workers will communicate with their clients more through WhatsApp.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>		

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Part 2: Compare Texts 1-3. What do they share in common? What are the differences among them? List as many points in the table below as you can. You may find the following prompting questions useful:

Do the texts...

- focus on the same topic?
- target the same group of readers?
- adopt a subjective or objective tone?
- belong to the same text type?

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Similarities among the three texts:	Differences among the three texts:		
<p data-bbox="96 411 589 521">Same topic</p> <p data-bbox="96 554 788 664">Same target readers</p> <p data-bbox="96 696 1014 806">Inclusion of quotation marks</p> <p data-bbox="96 839 966 1039">Arguments supported by evidence</p> <p data-bbox="96 1096 1027 1296">What are the grammar patterns suggesting these?</p>	Text 1	Text 2	Text 3
	Different genres		
	Different purposes of writing		
	Different language styles/formalities		

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Part 3: Read Text 2 and Text 3 again and answer the following questions.

1. What is the text type of both texts?

Letter to the editor

2. What is the purpose of this text type?

To express personal opinions on an issue

3. Circle/underline all the verb groups in Text 2 and Text 3. Then answer the following:

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

3a) What tense(s) is/are used in this text type? For what kind(s) of meaning? Complete the following table.

Tense(s) used	Example(s)	Meaning(s) expressed
Present simple	The article refers to...; People use...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Putting forward the writer's arguments - Describing what the writer thinks is true to support the arguments made
Present continuous	I am writing to...; ...is increasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stating the writer's intention - Describing trends
Past simple	The researchers also emphasised...; ...said they were not ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reporting survey/report results for supporting the writer's arguments

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

3b) Some verb groups are not in any tense. Can you identify them and the meanings they express?

Verb group type(s)	Example(s)	Meaning(s) expressed
Modals, e.g. can, should, may, might	can help boost...; may not be able to...; Why should people...	- Stating obligations, possibilities, abilities etc. in supporting the writer's arguments
Imperatives	Take action directly; Care for people...	- Making suggestions in relation to the writer's arguments
To infinitives	To answer Mr Wong; To teach the elderly	- Stating purposes
Gerunds	having no choice...; Being able to stay in...	- Describing phenomena, facts

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Tenses/Verb group type(s)	Example(s)	Meaning(s) expressed
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Suggestions on catering for learner diversity:

- For weaker students, teachers may focus on less verb forms or scaffold their students in completing the above two tables
- For more able students, teachers can focus on additional verb forms like those in conditional sentences and present and past participles as verbal adjectives

Do these tables look like the **sentence making tables** exemplified in Example A?

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

4. Circle/underline all the cohesive devices in Text 2 and Text 3. What meanings do they express?

Cohesive devices	Meaning(s) expressed
And; also; besides; too	Introducing an additional point which is in line with the previous one
However	Introducing a comment which contrasts with the previous one
As	Because
When, if	Introducing a condition for a consequence
They; many	Referring to a group of people mentioned in the previous clause
Such as	Introducing example illustrating the writer's arguments
This	Referring to and summarising the ideas in the previous clause/sentence


Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

4. Circle/underline all the cohesive devices in Text 2 and Text 3. What meanings do they express?

Cohesive devices	Frequency of occurrence?
And; also; besides; too	Which are the more frequently used cohesive devices?
However	
As	
When, if	
They; many	
Such as	
This	

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

5. Complete the following graphic organiser summarising the rhetorical structure of Text 2 and Text 3. You may use the information in the help box or your own words.

	Major stages of the text	Special language features found in each stage
Stage 1:	Heading	A simple statement or question with the use of a modal verb
		
Stage 2:	Stating the purpose of writing and the topic of the text	A statement beginning with 'I am writing to...'



Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

5.

	Major stages of the text	Special language features found in each stage
Stage 3:	Stating the writer's stance on the topic	The adjective frames: 'it would be + adjective + to...' and 'it is + adjective + that...'
↓		
Stage 4:	Giving evidence justifying/illustrating the writer's stance	Rhetorical questions (answers known to everybody already)
↓		
Stage 5:	Summarising the text with the writer's stance restated	Conditional sentences: 'If/when/no matter..., ...will.....'

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

6. Do you know the meaning of the following expressions? If not, can you deduce their meaning from where they are found in Text 2 and Text 3:

...regarding the trend of... (Text 2, line 9)

...can benefit... (Text 2, line 20)

...is much more important and better than... (Text 2, line 26)

...is key for... (Text 3, line 10)

...may not be able to... (Text 3, line 11)

...means... (Text 3, line 20)

...help boost... (Text 3, line 25)

Rationale:

Introducing vocabulary at the phrase level (i.e. collocations) that the students can make use of in the subsequent writing task; thereby achieving lexico-grammar

Reading-to-write Example B—A letter to the editor:

Part 4:

With reference to the tables completed in Part 3 above, write your response to the following prompt:

“It has been claimed that in the workplace many Hong Kong fresh university graduates are less hard-working and less willing to face challenges compared to those in the past.

You strongly disagree with this opinion. Write a letter to the editor of the Hong Kong Daily disagreeing with this opinion. Support your view with three reasons and/or examples.”

(HKDSE 2017, Paper 2: Q8)

Debriefing on Examples A & B

- Following a genre-based pedagogical approach
- Focusing on grammar items typical of the target genre(s), and the meaning functions they express within the rhetorical structure of the genre(s)
- Potential for promoting self-directed and self-regulated learning
- Useful references for promoting text grammar:
 - Thornbury, S. (1999). How to teach grammar. Harlow: Longman.
 - Thornbury, S. (2001). Uncovering grammar. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.

Let's have our well-deserved
break!

**UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE
CRITERION IN THE HKDSE (PAPER 2)**

Being able to ...

- use the criterion to **inform our teaching**
- **raise learners' awareness** of the criterion and what it means to be an **effective writer**
- use the criterion when **responding to and grading** students' writing
- use the criterion when following up on identified **students' needs** eg formative uses of summative assessment (FUST)

Focussing on grammar, using a genre-based perspective, to...

- recap the **criterion** for DSE writing (Paper 2)
- explore the **demands** of DSE questions
- consider the grammar that might **typify written texts** required by the task
- **compare** the use of grammar in **students' writing** on Paper 2
- consider the **needs** of students based on their writing and implications for **future practice**

**UNDERSTANDING THE
COMMUNICATIVE AND LITERACY
DEMANDS OF A QUESTION: DSE PAPER
2B**

Demands of a Question

GENRE

SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATIVE PURPOSE

AUDIENCE

RHETORICAL STRUCTURE

TONE, REGISTER, STYLE

What are the demands of these Paper 2 Questions from 2018?

- Q1: Letter to parents
- Q2: Marathon running
- Q4: Letter of advice
- Q5: Class position
- Q6: Athleisure

**(RE)FAMILIARISING OURSELVES WITH
THE CRITERION FOR DSE PAPER 2**

CONTENT

LANGUAGE

ORGANISATION

Level 7

CONTENT	LANGUAGE	ORGANISATION
<p>➤ Content entirely fulfils the requirements of the question</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p>	<p>➤ Spelling and punctuation are almost entirely correct</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p>	<p>➤ Text is organised extremely effectively, with logical development of ideas</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p>

Level 7

CONTENT	LANGUAGE	ORGANISATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Content entirely fulfils the requirements of the question➤ Totally relevant➤ All ideas are well developed/supported➤ Creativity and imagination are shown when appropriate➤ Shows a high awareness of audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Very wide range of accurate sentence structures, with a good grasp of more complex structures➤ Grammar accurate with only very minor slips➤ Vocabulary well-chosen and often used appropriately to express subtleties of meaning➤ Spelling and punctuation are almost entirely correct➤ Register, tone and style are entirely appropriate to the genre and text-type	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Text is organised extremely effectively, with logical development of ideas➤ Cohesion in most parts of the text is very clear➤ Cohesive ties throughout the text are sophisticated➤ Overall structure is coherent, extremely sophisticated and entirely appropriate to the genre and text-type

Where might grammar be assessed?

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EXPECTATIONS OF A TASK: TEXT GRAMMAR

INSERT Paper 2B Question

- Marathon runner recount / persuasive text, letter of advice OR letter out of office emails?

Exploring the Grammatical Demands of a Text

Content	Language	Organisation
Audience	Range of sentence structures (including complex structures) Accuracy of grammar Choice and appropriacy of vocabulary Register tone and style	Organisation of text and logic of development of ideas Cohesion Cohesive ties Coherence of overall structure and appropriacy to the genre and text-type

COMPARING STUDENTS' WRITING

Look at the 4 samples of students' writing. Which is an example of a grade 1, 3, 4 and 5 script?

ANALYSING AND EVALUATING STUDENT'S WRITING

- *Look at the sample of student's writing assigned to you. What are the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of the student's **use of grammar** in the text in relation to the assessment criterion discussed?*
- Highlight the relevant parts of the text.

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS' NEEDS IN OUR TEACHING

- *What aspects of grammar use in texts might this learner most benefit from help with?*
- *Think back to the first part of the workshop. What kind of reading-to-write activities could you devise?*