

# How language works:

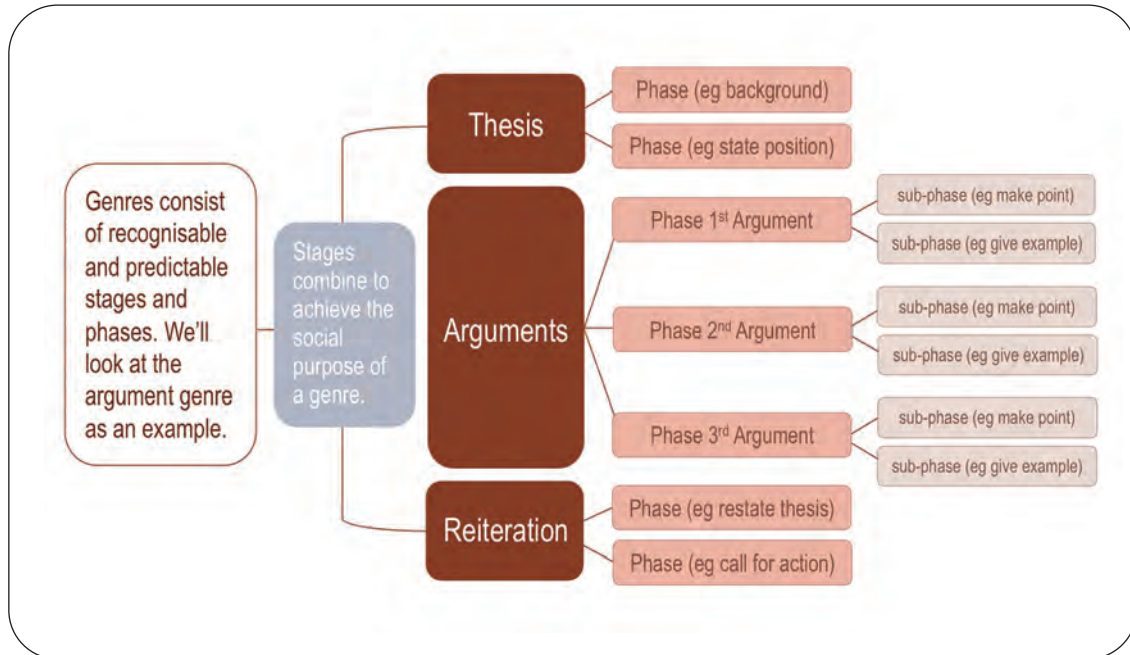
## Success in literacy and learning

PARTICIPANT MANUAL

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**RESOURCE NOTE 2** *Stages and phases within a genre*

In any given genre, there are a number of identifiable stages that a text will go through to achieve its purpose. These stages are quite stable and predictable in their sequence. Within any stage, there can be a number of phases which, together, achieve the function of the stage.



The phases are much more variable. For example, the initial stage of an argument is the thesis, and its function is to introduce the reader to the issue and indicate the stance of the writer. Within this stage, there can be a number of phases, which function, for example, to:

- provide a context for the argument (The recent threat of a new flu strain has generated a great deal of public debate.)
- attempt to engage the reader personally (Have you had a flu vaccine?)
- give background information (Every year, thousands of people die as a result of contracting the flu virus in this country alone.)
- define key terms (Flu, short for influenza, is caused by viruses that infect the respiratory tract.)
- state a position (New strains of flu pose a serious national and global threat and immediate action is needed.)
- preview the arguments (Such action includes: greater restrictions on travel, public education campaigns and compulsory vaccinations.)

The number and sequence of these phases can vary widely.

## Contrasting language choices: Register

We have seen that texts are patterned according to their social purposes, with predictable stages and language patterns. In addition, each text unfolds in a particular situation and aspects of this situation also shape the language of the text according to three variables: the field, tenor and mode, which together are called the register. The three register variables can be located on continua, reflecting the expectations placed on students in educational contexts as they move through schooling.

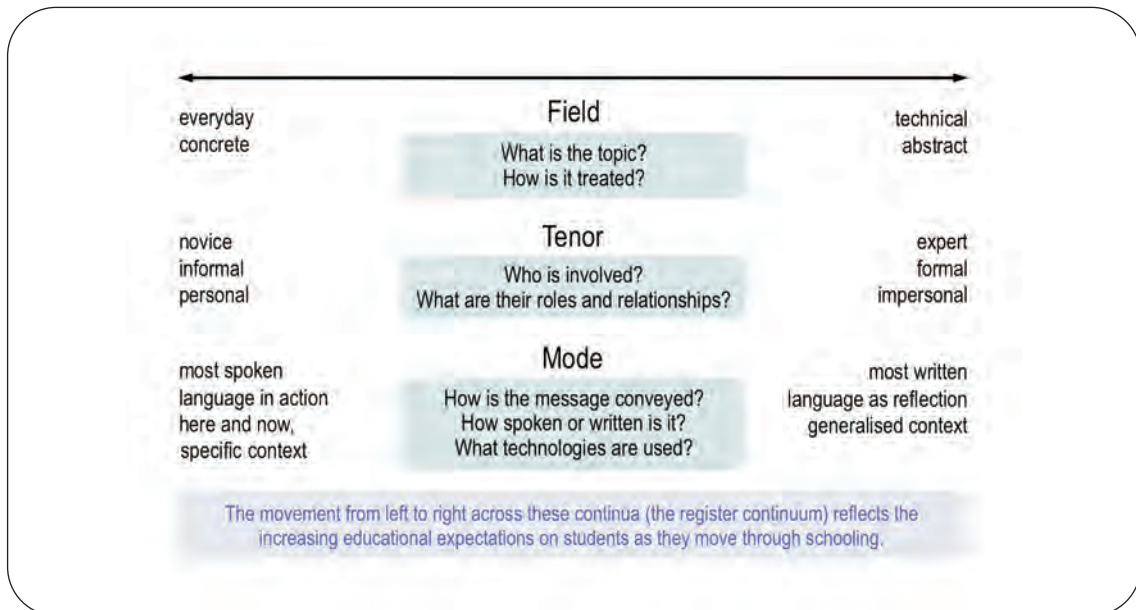


Figure 4: Register continuum

### ACTIVITY Modelling of analysis

- Read the two texts below and consider the context of situation for each using the three register variables of field, tenor and mode.

#### Text 1

'Paul, pass one of those will you.'  
'Here.'  
'No, the bigger one.'

#### Text 2

Puppetry has long been an important part of Japanese culture. In the Middle Ages, puppets were used as a means of appeasement at shrines and only later took on the theatrical forms we know today.

*Notes*

### 3 Introduction to processes, participants and circumstances

We will start in this module by exploring how experiential meanings are realised at the lexico-grammar level through the functional groupings of participants, processes and circumstances.

*Notes*

#### Difference between class and functional labels

##### **ACTIVITY** Identifying the difference between traditional and functional grammar

Before moving into exploring participants, processes and circumstances, we will undertake a short activity which explores the difference between identifying words according to their class labels (traditional grammar approach) and identifying words in terms of their functions (functional grammar approach). The activity involves some jumbled words that need to be sorted into a sentence.

- You will need to gather around the table on which your tutor has arranged a set of cards.

*Notes*

#### Defining processes, participants and circumstances

As we have seen from the previous activity, it is possible to look at different groupings within any given stretch of language. Because we are interested essentially in how we make meaning, we focus on how words group together in particular ways to make different kinds of meaning. This module focuses on how we make experiential meanings, meanings about the world, through the functional groupings of participants, processes and circumstances.

In understanding these groupings and how they work together, we need to consider the clause, which can be defined as the fundamental unit of meaning. At its simplest, it represents some happening, some unfolding process and can be as simple as 'Stop!' or 'Go!'. Typically, though, there are people, things or phenomena closely involved or participating in this process, as in 'They' in 'They go to the market every weekend' and 'Her ability' and 'everyone' in 'Her ability astounded everyone'. We can also see some groupings like 'to the market' and 'every weekend' providing further but less central information about the events themselves.

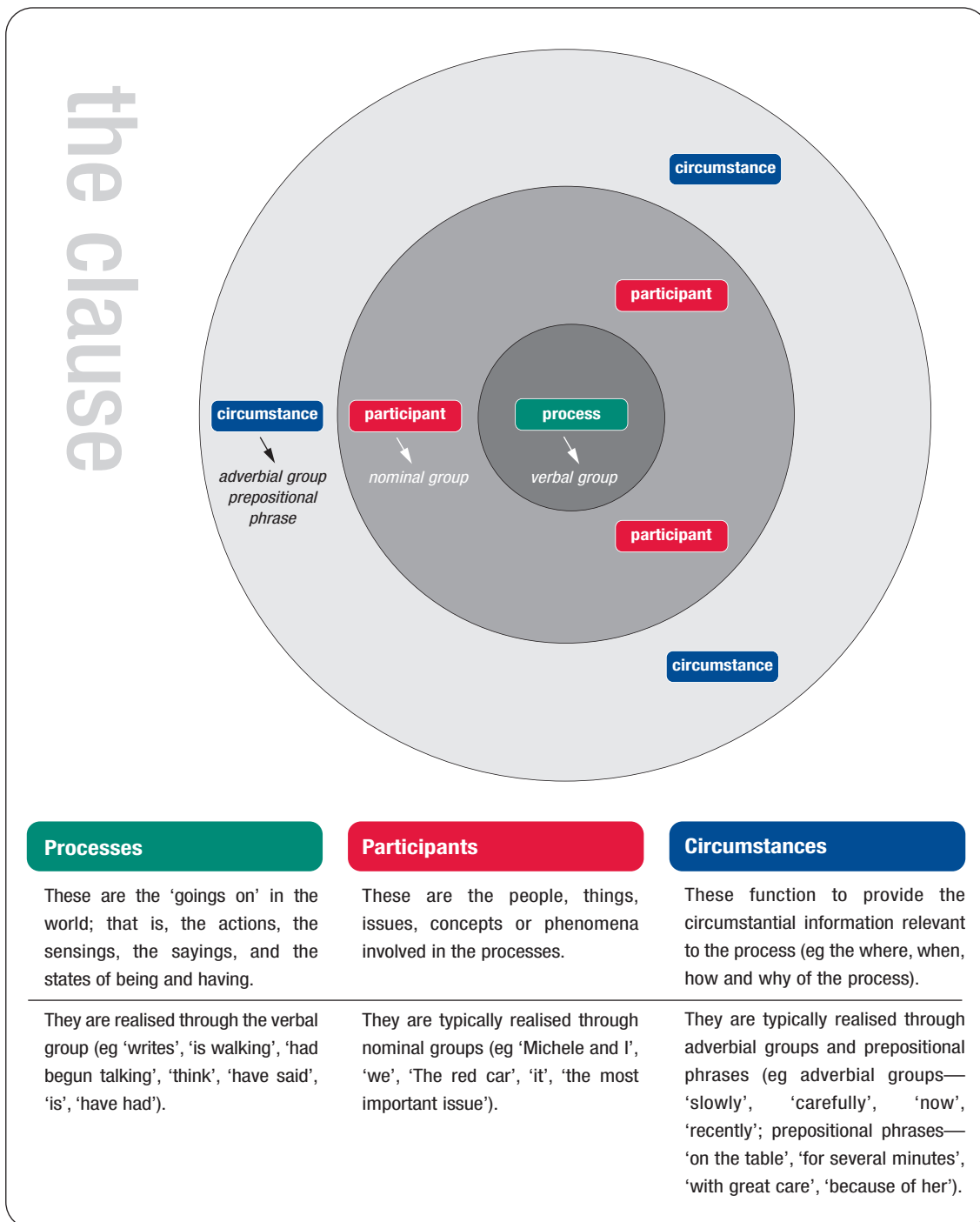


Figure 2: The experiential structure of the clause (Adapted from *An introduction to functional grammar*, 3rd edition by MAK Halliday and CMIM Matthiessen published by Hodder Education, p 176. Copyright © 2004. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK)

## 4 Nominal groups

### Introduction

In the previous session, you discussed the function of circumstances and participants and how their features vary according to both genre and register. In this session, we focus on the form of both these groupings by looking at the nominal group, which is any group of words built up around a noun.

It is through the nominal group that we are able to classify, describe, numerate and qualify our world. In making more specialised and complex meanings as we move across the register continuum, we draw on the huge potential of the nominal group to do this.

We begin by seeing the relationship between the nominal group and participants and circumstances and then move to describing explicitly its various components.

### ACTIVITY Finding nominal groups

#### Extract 1

Place some water plants into the bottle  
and seal this with a stopper and delivery tube.  
Pour water into the evaporating dish.  
Fill a test tube with water  
and invert it into the evaporating dish.

#### Extract 2

The humpback whale's greatest threat is, of course, whaling.  
Today, whaling is not practised as often as in earlier times.  
It might have totally wiped out every species of whale.  
if international laws restricting the extent of whaling had not been introduced.

#### Extract 3

The main reason for Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War seems to be  
the Government's conviction of an external Communist threat.

Register continuum



*Notes*

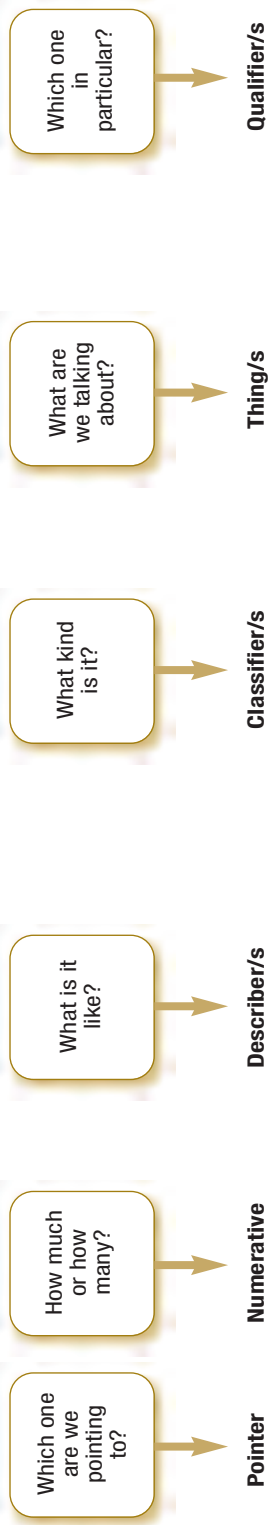
## Working with nominal groups

### **ACTIVITY** Analysing nominal groups

- You will be using **Worksheet 3: Analysing nominal groups** at various times during this activity.
- Use the notes box below to record the various nominal groups that you construct.

*Notes*

**WORKSHEET 3** *Analysing nominal groups*






## 'Stop telling me what to do!'—exploiting the grammar

### ACTIVITY Expressing commands

<b>Exploiting the grammar</b>			
Context	You enter a stuffy room in which there are familiar people	Someone (unfamiliar) is already sitting in your booked train seat	You hear an announcement on the PA system saying the store is closing
Desired reaction	Windows to be opened	The person to vacate the seat	The shoppers to leave the store
What would be a direct command?			
Commands that look like statements			
Commands that look like questions			

Figure 2: Exploiting the grammar when making commands

### RESOURCE NOTE 1 Being polite in English

#### Being polite with direct commands

To be polite with direct commands, we are restricted in what we can use:

**Please** don't do that.

Don't do that, **please**.

**Kindly** take your trays to the counter.

#### Being polite with indirect commands

It's because commands demand time or energy or money to be 'invested' by the person being commanded, that it is a speech function that is very sensitive to the context. And, in English, it is typical that the grammar is exploited, whether it is to be polite or threatening or sarcastic. A lot of this interpersonal work can be done by making the grammar typical of a statement and then loading the front of the clause complex.

**You should** hand in your assignments to me by Friday.

**I would like you to** hand in your assignments to me by Friday.

**It would be in your best interests if you were able to** hand in your assignments to me by Friday.

Research has shown that the more polite we want to be in formal English contexts, the more work we do at the front!

# How language works:

## Success in literacy and learning

TUTOR MANUAL

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## Comparing structure: Phases

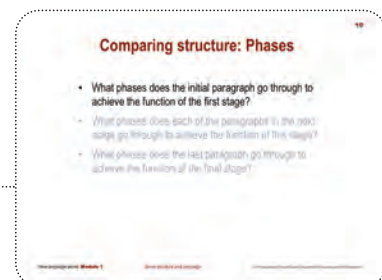
(15 minutes)

### ACTIVITY Identifying genre phases

- Point out that while arguments typically go through three stages to achieve their purpose, other genres may go through two, three or four stages. Explain that each stage can be made up of one or several paragraphs and that any stage can go through a number of phases.
- Refer participants to **Resource note 2: Stages and phases within a genre** and show **Slide 9**, which breaks this down visually.
- Click through the animations to show the relationship between a genre and the stages and phases within a text.
- Direct participants to the paragraph beneath the visual in **Resource note 2** in their Participant manual and allow time for them to read and ask questions.
- Show **Slide 10** and ask the question: ‘What phases does the initial paragraph go through to achieve the function of the first stage?’
- Explain that you will model the process with Text A and then ask them to work in pairs to analyse the phases in Text B, which will illustrate that, while the structure is quite stable and predictable in its sequence, the phases are far more variable.
- Work through **Slides 11** and **12**, pointing out that you will work through it sentence by sentence; sometimes one sentence might do the work of more than one phase and at other times several sentences might work together to make a phase.

Note that different colours have been used to indicate the three phases within the thesis stage with the function of each provided in a text box with a matching coloured border. The colours have no meaning other than to differentiate first, second and third phase and the corresponding function of each.

- Then ask participants to work in pairs and do the same for Text B. Allow 2 minutes.
- Call on someone to share his/her analysis.
- Show **Slide 13** to confirm the solution.
- Direct participants back to Text A and, using **Slides 14** and **15**, show how the two main arguments introduced in the thesis are taken up in the argument stage.



Colour has again been used to show a correspondence between various parts of the argument stage and the two arguments foregrounded in the thesis stage.

- Explain that one of the BMAs asks them to continue this activity and consider the phases of the argument and reiteration stages of these two texts.

## Contrasting language choices: Register

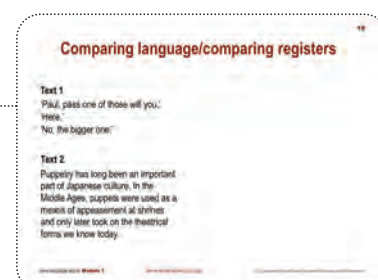
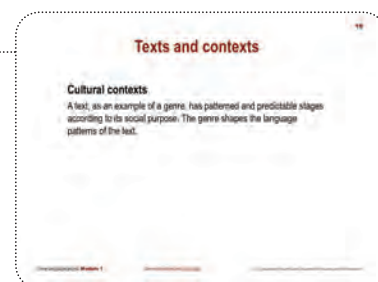
(20 minutes)

We have seen that texts are patterned according to their social purposes, with predictable stages and language patterns. In addition, each text unfolds in a particular situation and aspects of this situation also shape the language of the text according to three variables: the field, tenor and mode, which together are called the register. The three register variables can be located on continua, reflecting the expectations placed on students in educational contexts as they move through schooling.

- Direct participants to **Figure 4** in their books which shows the register continuum.

### ACTIVITY Modelling of analysis

- Show **Slide 16** as you explain that the previous activity illustrated the patterned and predictable stages of a given genre and that the genre also shapes the language of the text. However, texts also unfold in particular instances and these particular situations also shape the language patterns of the text.
- Show **Slide 17** and make the following points as you click through it. Language chosen for a particular situation will also vary according to three factors:
  - the topic and how the topic is being treated, which is called the field
  - the roles and relationships of the writer and reader or listener and speaker as well as the relationship of the writer/speaker to the topic, that is, what he/she knows about the topic and how passionate he/she is about it, which is called the tenor
  - how the message is being conveyed, whether the text is written or spoken and what technologies are being used to convey the message, which is called the mode.
- Show **Slide 18** and ask participants to read the two texts (which are also in their books) and consider what they could say about the context of situation for each using the three register variables.
- Click through the animations to illustrate these.



## Defining processes, participants and circumstances

(5 minutes)

- Show **Slide 3** of **PowerPoint: Introduction to processes, participants and circumstances**.

As we have seen from the previous activity, it is possible to look at different groupings within any given stretch of language. Because we are interested essentially in how we make meaning, we focus on how words group together in particular ways to make different kinds of meaning. This module focuses on how we make experiential meanings, meanings about the world, through the functional groupings of participants, processes and circumstances.

In understanding these groupings and how they work together, we need to consider the clause, which can be defined as the fundamental unit of meaning. At its simplest, it represents some happening, some unfolding process and can be as simple as 'Stop!' or 'Go!'. Typically, though, there are people, things or phenomena closely involved or participating in this process, as in 'They' in 'They go to the market every weekend' and 'Her ability' and 'everyone' in 'Her ability astounded everyone'. We can also see some groupings like 'to the market' and 'every weekend' providing further but less central information about the events themselves.



- Explain how the circle in **Figure 2** represents a clause. Explain that, in order to understand how experiential meanings are made in the clause, we need to investigate the system of processes, participants and circumstances and the ways they combine together to make these meanings.
- Emphasise that the circle diagram represents the notion that the process is seen as the nub of the clause, that there are participants directly involved in the process and that there are also circumstances concerned with the process but less central than the participants; that is, providing an 'environment' in which the process occurs.
- Point out that there is only one central process in any clause. Clauses can have one, two or three participants and can contain three or more circumstances.
- Take participants through the **Figure 2** definitions of processes, participants and circumstances and ways of identifying them. Point out that processes will be identified with the colour green, participants with the colour red and circumstances with the colour blue.
- Hand out a copy of **Tutor resource: Identifying processes, participants and circumstances** to each participant. Explain that it will help them identify the various groupings.
- Stress the importance of asking the 'key questions' with students when identifying these groupings in the classroom.
- Discuss briefly the 'typical' realisations of each of these groupings and explain that this will be taken up further on in the course.

It might be useful to quickly check with participants that they know how to identify both a preposition and an adverb. If necessary make a short list.

## Identifying processes, participants and circumstances

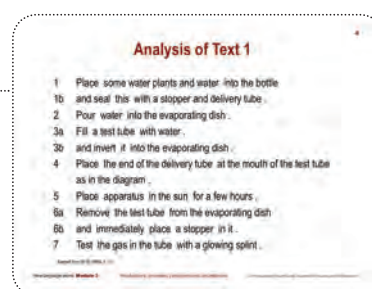
(35 minutes)

In this next activity, we will undertake our first transitivity analysis. This is a technical way of saying that we will be identifying the processes, participants and circumstances of any given text.

The text we will be analysing here, a procedural text, is a very good entry point for introducing students to processes, participants and circumstances. Our analysis will be made easier because the text involves actions and things that the students can see, touch and do themselves. As we will see, they also have a distinct pattern which students will immediately notice.

### ACTIVITY Analysing Text 1

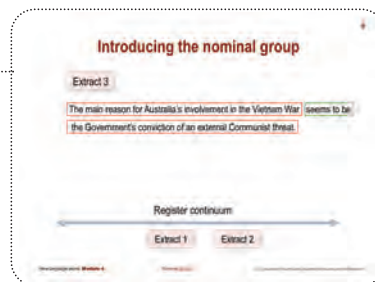
- Refer participants to **Worksheet 1: Method section from a science procedure** and explain that you will be working with them very closely to analyse the text which has been put into clauses for them.
- Remind them to use the handout **Tutor resource: Identifying processes, participants and circumstances** supplied earlier.
- Point out that they are replicating what has been done with even very young students.
- Show **Slide 4** and tell participants that they will be doing a joint analysis of this method section taken from a science procedure.
- Give participants time to read the text.
- Ask participants to read clause 1a and follow with ‘What is the process or action going on here? What action are we being asked to carry out?’. Click to reveal the process ‘Place’.
- Ask ‘Place what? What should we place into the bottle’. Click to reveal ‘some water plants and water’ and explain that this is a participant.



It is helpful to model to participants that they can ask the same question a slightly different way. Also note that by asking the question ‘What should we place into the water bottle?’, you are limiting the possible response to ‘some water plants and water’. In this way, you are scaffolding them into the particular responses required.

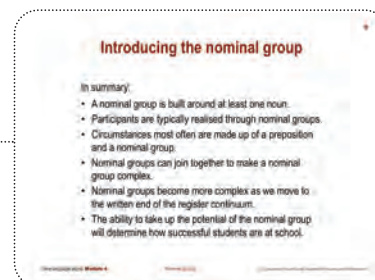
- Ask ‘Place some water plants and water where?’ and click to reveal ‘into the bottle’. Explain that this is a circumstance of place because it tells us the place where the participant (some water plants and water) will end up.
- Ask participants to read clause 1b and follow with ‘What is the process or action going on here? What action are we being asked to carry out?’. Click to reveal the process ‘seal’.
- Ask ‘Seal what? What should we seal with a stopper and delivery tube’. Click to reveal ‘this’ and explain that this is another participant.

- Show **Slide 5** and repeat as for above.
- Remind participants about the difference between the three extracts in terms of where they lie on the register continuum and then ask them to see whether there is a pattern in the length of the nominal groups and whether this pattern in length is related to where they are on that continuum.



What the teachers should find is that the nominal groups are generally shorter on the left-side of the register continuum and then they tend to increase in length as they move along the register continuum to the very right. This will be taken up in much more detail when we look at the difference between spoken and written language but suffice to say here that the more spoken a text is the more likely the nominal groups will be short (spoken language is more 'dynamic' and is centred around the verb) while the more written a text is the more likely the nominal groups will be long (written language is more 'static' and is centred around the noun).

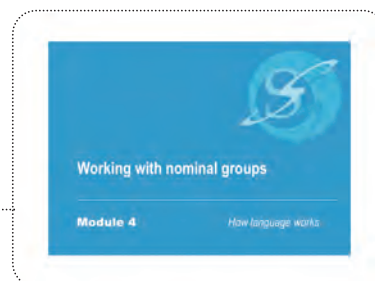
- Complete this short activity by saying that all the other words in each nominal group are there to modify the core or key noun in some way and that is what will be looked at in the following activities.
- Conclude this section by showing **Slide 6** and work quickly through each of the points.



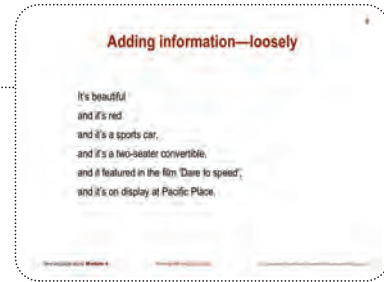
## Working with nominal groups

(45 minutes)

- Introduce this session to the participants by saying that they will now be involved in a series of activities in which they will learn about nominal groups.
- Point out that, at times in this session, they will be asked to take on a role as student and, at other times, their role as a teacher.
- Open **PowerPoint: Working with nominal groups**.
- Tell participants that the following activities suggest some ways of introducing the notion of nominal groups to students.
- Show **Slide 2** and ask participants to suggest some features of the car.



- After some suggestions show **Slide 3**, click and read the blue text.



- Show **Slides 4–6**, reading out the blue texts in each slide in turn.



- Show **Slide 7** and tell participants that they will be exploring patterns in the nominal group by asking particular questions. Click through **Slides 7 and 8** which identify the various parts of the nominal group associated with each of these questions.



- Show **Slide 9** and read out the text.



- Show **Slide 10** and ask participants to suggest possible answers as you work your way through the slide.



Most people will offer 'old', 'brown' or 'red' for the describers. If they suggest 'two' in response to how many, then ask if there is another way to say two ('a pair'). This is the process that was used in the classroom. Boxing may be a field beyond the experience of most students and they may need assistance with this one. The 'They cost \$25 000' is given so that the students see that the nominal group is a participant and not a clause.