

# Conventions

## Overview

This chapter focuses on building students' knowledge of speaking and listening conventions. Being able to control and understand these conventions allows students to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts. When listeners and speakers are choosing conventions for a particular context, they observe and reflect on the purpose, the situation and relationship between the speaker and the listener. This helps them to 'read' the context and choose appropriate conventions for their 'role' within that context.

Students need to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes to select the appropriate conventions of Standard Australian English for particular purposes. This includes identifying and selecting the content, linguistic features, non-verbal conventions and medium appropriate to the context.

This chapter includes information on developing students' knowledge and understanding of conventions. The two sections are as follows:

- **Section 1 — Effective Teaching of Conventions**
- **Section 2 — Developing Understanding of Conventions**



Figure 3.1

## SECTION 1

# Effective Teaching of Conventions

The long-term goal is for students to develop a repertoire of skills, knowledge and understanding that allows them to communicate effectively in a wide variety of contexts. The behaviours that facilitate effective communication are complex and have implications for students' lives in and out of school.

Students are faced with complex challenges when attempting to meet the demands of communicating in social and academic contexts. They must be able to choose the right words at the right time, as well as the right volume, the right tone of voice and the appropriate non-verbal behaviours to accompany their spoken interaction.

An 'analytic' approach, where students research a particular context for speaking and listening, will help them to discover the types of choices needed for a range of speaking and listening contexts. The model shown in Figure 3.2 can be used as a teaching and learning plan for all of the conventions outlined in this chapter.

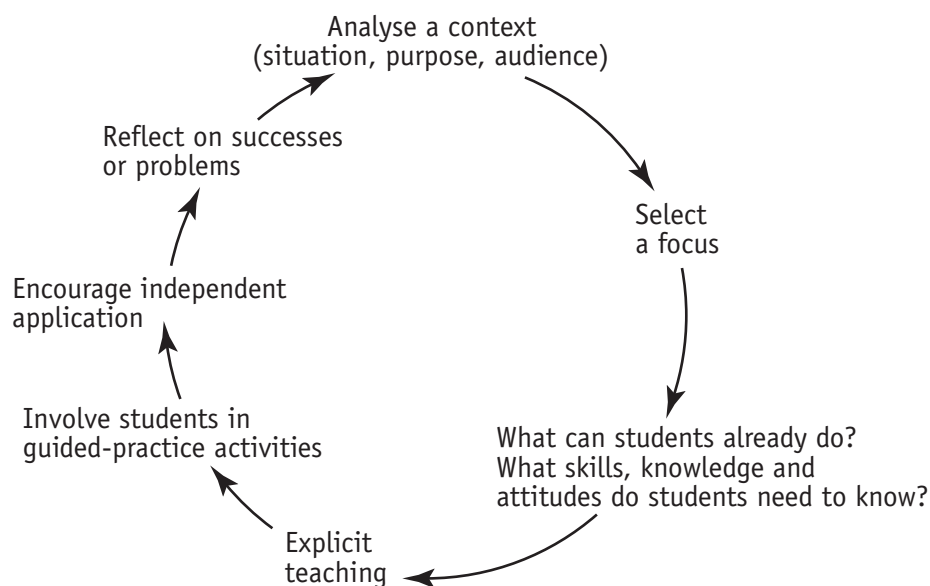


Figure 3.2 Model of Analytic Approach

## Analyse a Context

Teachers are able to assess students' prior knowledge and experience by discussing a specific context. For example, if students are going to host a parent evening to showcase their learning, they will need to know how to greet unfamiliar adults, how to explain an aspect of their work (perhaps using a rehearsed explanation), how to offer refreshments and how to farewell guests. They might need to discuss the type of listening that will be required, when questions will be asked and what type of questions they will be. Gathering this type of data helps teachers make decisions about the teaching and learning that needs to take place.

Hymes suggested that teachers and students can think of speech as taking place within a hierarchical structure, or a speech pyramid, containing a speech situation, speech events and speech acts (Hymes, cited Oliver et al 2003). Students would need to consider the conventions required within each level of speech.

### *Speech Situations*

Speech situations are situations associated with speech, e.g. ceremonies, sporting events, school assemblies, classroom lessons.

### *Speech Events*

Speech events are composed of one or more speech acts, e.g. conversation, instructions, anecdotes.

### *Speech Acts*

Speech acts are individual utterances, e.g. greeting someone, making a comment, thanking someone.

## Select a Focus

After analysing a context, teachers and students could select a study focus to suit a particular need. They might need to know more about the conventions required for a particular speech situation and, in turn, particular skills for speech acts. Teachers will need to highlight the demands of a particular context in order to help students understand the expected verbal and non-verbal behaviours.

Students will need to consider the following questions:

- What is the purpose for speaking?
- Who is your audience?
- What is the situation?

- Where have you heard this type of talk before?
- How will you organise what you want to say?
- What words or phrases will help you?
- What behaviours will be expected?

### ***What Can Students Already Do?***

By discussing previous experience and prior knowledge, teachers will be able to assess what students do and do not know. Ask questions such as these:

- What has worked well for you in previous experiences?
- What have you found difficult in previous experiences?

### ***Explicit Teaching and Problem Solving***

As students are involved in analysing, investigating and evaluating speaking and listening conventions, they need to have some way to record their findings. They could use video or audio recordings, or they could write about their experiences in a journal. Use class charts to remind students of the skills needed, or as a way of illustrating what they have learnt.

### ***Guided-practice Activities***

Guided-practice activities involve structuring learning experiences to support and scaffold students as they practise their understandings, e.g. role-plays, generating and rehearsing particular phrases, practising appropriate body language and gestures, developing lists of effective words to use.

### ***Encourage Independent Application and Reflection***

Encourage students to use the skills they have learnt for a particular context. The teacher and students can reflect on the experience and provide feedback about those conventions that were used well and those that need more practice. Involve students in self-assessment and goal setting.

## SECTION 2

# Developing Understanding of Conventions

## Conventions of Social Interaction

Spoken language plays an important role in students' personal and social development. It allows them to gain an understanding of themselves and others, and strengthens social relationships. Students draw on their social skills to express their ideas, opinions and feelings with peers and teachers.

While most students will engage in social interaction without much conscious effort, such interactions are governed by intricate 'rules'. Many of these rules are assumed and will not be discussed; they are learnt through interacting with other speakers. Students learn through experience how to take turns in a conversation and how to repair a misunderstanding. Parents and teachers teach students about polite and acceptable behaviour. Students learn how to listen for various purposes, and are taught to respond according to the situation and expectations of those participating in the interaction. However, there are cultural and individual differences. Some cultures subscribe to different rules and some individuals may not acquire the 'rules' to the same extent as others (Oliver et al 2005).

### What Students Need to Know

Students become more adept at participating in conversations as they develop. Students in the early phases might need to be taught how to instigate and develop a conversation. Older students might need to learn about repairing miscommunication, or how to anticipate others' needs. Teachers can help build students' awareness of the way conversation works by considering the 'rules', which are often unconscious. Oliver, Haig and Rochecouste (2005) describe these rules as:

- Turn-taking
- Floor
- Adjacency pairs
- Repair
- Politeness.

### **Turn-taking**

Turn-taking is the way in which a speaker is chosen to have their turn in a conversation. The speaker might select who will speak next, or the speaker might choose to keep on talking. Students need to recognise pauses in conversation where they can take a turn, interrupt or change the subject. Turn-taking is often fluid when students are engaged in conversations or exploratory talk, with speech overlapping.

Turn-taking is more clearly defined in more formal situations. Teachers can explicitly teach turn-taking so that all students are encouraged to speak, e.g. seating students in a circle for a discussion so that everyone has a turn; asking students to work with a partner and choose who will go first.

### **Floor**

The person who is currently speaking is said to 'hold the floor'. During conversations, speakers and listeners use gestures, eye contact, body language and pauses in conversation to judge the moment when a change of speaker can occur. Provide opportunities for students to hold the floor for more extended periods in the classroom by introducing planned speaking events, e.g. interest talks, oral reports, debates, formal presentations.

### **Adjacency Pairs**

Adjacency pairs are sequences of two utterances next to each other, produced by two different speakers, e.g. a greeting and a response, a question and answer. Teachers may need to support students with words and phrases to meet this convention when they are speaking to unfamiliar people, such as visitors to the school.

### **Repair**

Repair occurs when speakers have to 'fix' something they have said, e.g. 'I said she, I mean *he*, could come'. Sometimes the listener will ask for a repair. This could be expressed through a question, a facial expression or body language. It is in this way that speakers and listeners negotiate meaning. A listener might:

- request clarification through a question, e.g. **What do you mean? What does that word mean?**
- request clarification through a statement, e.g. **I'm not sure what you mean. I don't understand.**
- repeat a statement or request to confirm what was said
- repeat phrases or ask questions to check their comprehension, e.g. **Do you mean ... ? Have I got that right?**

































