

COURSE IN EXPOSITORY WRITING
Unit 1. We write to influence others

Lesson 1a (2 hours)

We write because we want people to do something for us or to think about our topic in a certain way. Or we hope they will agree with our view and think well of us. Writing is a **social activity**, just like talking to friends or sending them SMS messages.

Just like talking to friends, writing always takes place in a **situation** that involves other people. When we write, we have some **social goal** in mind. Study this example to understand what *social situation* and *social goal* mean.

Example 1:

<p>What a student (Adi) writes: →</p>	<p>A letter to a friend in England. The friend is planning to visit Singapore for the first time.</p>
<p>Social situation:→ Context (What has happened? What's happening?) Reader</p>	<p>O-level English exam. Examiner wants to find out if students can say what they think and explain/argue their point of view. Examiner's question: Write a letter to a friend in England who is planning to visit Singapore for the first time. Your friend is interested in history and culture. Who? Reader 1: English examiner. Reader decides whether Adi has done what the question asks students to do, and whether he has written an interesting letter. Reader 2: the friend in England who is planning to come to Singapore. Reader expects: Reader 1 expects a letter that makes the friend think of Singapore as a place rich in history and culture. Reader 2 expects to know what to look forward to in Singapore.</p>
<p>Adi's social role and goals: →</p> 	<p>Writer's Role: Friend writing to a friend living in England, to tell the friend what nice things to expect in Singapore. Writer's Goal 1: Persuade the friend to think of Singapore as an interesting place to visit because of its history and diverse culture. Writer's Goal 2: Persuade the examiner to see that the writer (Adi) is able to choose suitable details, words and grammar to paint a picture of Singapore as an interesting place for the friend to visit.</p>

We will now study a text to help you understand better these ideas:

- Writing takes place in a social context
- A writer plays a role in that context. He/she forms social goals to guide the writing process.

Activity 1.1 Deconstruction

1. Form a group with 3 or 4 other classmates. The teacher will tell you which question your group has to do and how much time you have. The teacher may tell you to read only one text.
2. Choose one group member to be the scribe. The scribe's job is to write down the group's decisions. Choose another member to be the spokesperson. He/she will report the group's decisions to the whole class if the teacher asks.
3. Do not read the text first. Read the question given to your group; then look for the answer in the text.

Text 1 A

1. Several letters have been written recently about traditional medicines. I believe in natural, herbal remedies, especially traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).
2. TCM is thousands of years old. But it has been forgotten by many because of Western medical science.
3. I suffered from adult acne for nearly ten years before giving up on 'advanced' Western treatments. Not only did the 'scientific' skin treatments cost thousands of dollars, they made my skin

worse. Advised by older relatives, I turned to TCM.

4. The TCM doctor prescribed a box of pearl powder (\$3.60) and a packet of sea-horse concoction (\$7.40). They worked.

5. Has Western medical science really advanced? Does advance mean expensive new products? We can save a lot of money if we have more faith in treatments that are thousands of years old.

Adapted from a letter to *The Straits Times* Forum. October 2004.

Text 1B

Can sea horses really cure your acne?

1. In a letter to the Forum page recently, Ms Wee S. C. said that she had spent thousands of dollars on Western treatment for acne without being cured. She turned to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and was cured with "a box of pearl powder and a packet of sea horse concoction". Ms Wee now believes that TCM is better than Western science.
2. Contrary to Ms Wee's claim, there is no Western versus Chinese science, just good versus bad science. The only way to prove that a treatment

works is to subject it to randomised, double-blinded trials. Anecdotal evidence is not good enough.

3. A study is double-blinded when neither the patient nor the doctor knows who is in the test group or in the control group. People in the test group are given the treatment while those in the control group receive a placebo. Individuals are placed in either group randomly, as by a coin-flip.

4. What Ms Wee is offering, instead, is just anecdotal evidence, which is bad science.

5. But why do sea horses seem to work? First, many non-fatal diseases are self-limiting; the body can heal itself after a period of time. The natural history of some illnesses, like arthritis and allergies, has ups and downs. If you use TCM when the disease is naturally becoming less severe, it appears to be a cure.

6. Second, if improvement occurs after someone has had both TCM and

scientific treatment, the TCM often gets the most credit. This is selective affirmation. People will believe what they want to believe.

7. For these reasons, anecdotal evidence, which can have a very strong emotional impact on the believer, must be rejected. Forget the superstitions. Listen to the science instead.

Adapted from ‘Can sea horses really cure your acne?’ by Andy Ho. *The Straits Times*, 16 October 2004. p.29.

Do the question given to your group.

- First, read the question. (Don’t read the text yet.)
- Look for the answer by reading the paragraph and sentences indicated. Read other parts only if you need to. Also use your own knowledge of the situation.
- Share your answer with the group. Also share your knowledge of the situation and topic. This is not a comprehension exercise. The group can arrive at one answer or two answers.
- The scribe writes down the answer(s).
- The spokesperson presents the answer(s) to the class (when the teacher asks for it).

1. Social context: events and beliefs

Describe the social situation in which W (the writer) was writing by answering these questions:

- a. What happened before the writing that caused W to write?
- b. What kinds of beliefs do people in W’s society have about the topic of discussion (TCM, western medicine)?

Text 1A: Read paragraphs 3 and 4, then paragraph 2 for past events and beliefs. Also use your own knowledge of the topic (TCM, western medicine, illness).

Text 1B: Read paragraph 1 for past events and beliefs. Read paragraph 2 for another set of beliefs. Also use your own knowledge of the topic (TCM, western medicine, illness).

2. Reader: identity, beliefs, expectations

- a. Who are the readers? Who will want to read about this topic?
- b. What are their likely beliefs about the topic?
- c. What questions will they have which they think W may answer?

Text 1A: Read paragraphs 1, 2 and 3. Read paragraphs 2 and 5 for mention of a different set of beliefs. Also use your own knowledge of people's beliefs about the topic (TCM, western medicine, illness).

Text 1B: Read paragraph 1 for one set of beliefs. Read paragraphs 2 and 5 for another set of beliefs. Also use your own knowledge of people's beliefs about the topic (TCM, western medicine, illness).

3. Writer's social role, writer's goal

- a. What knowledge and experience does W have that he/she wants to share with others in the community?
- b. What position (point of view) does he/she wish to defend?
- c. State W's goal by completing the sentence: *Persuade people to/not to...*

Text 1A: Read paragraphs 1 and 5 for W's position. Read paragraphs 3 and 4 for W's experience. Also use your own knowledge of people's beliefs about the topic (TCM, western medicine, illness).

Text 1B: The writer, Andy Ho, is a doctor turned journalist. Read paragraphs 2 and 3 to find out what he knows about science and medicine. Read paragraphs 5 and 6 to find out what he knows about disease and patients. Look for his position in paragraphs 2 and 7; say it in your group's own words. Now work out W's goal.

Whole class discussion

Listen to the other group's answers and the teacher's comments. Look at the board/screen as the teacher builds a chart with:

- The social situation: Events before and possibly after the writing; the community's beliefs and talk regarding the issue. Reader or readers – Who? What does R (the reader) expect?
- Writer's social role and goal.

You will write a better essay, letter or proposal if you think about the situation, reader, and writer's goal as you write. Even if the situation, reader, and writer's role are not mentioned in the examiner's essay question, they are there. You have to make them visible to yourself. Learn to build a picture in your mind of events, your readers and yourself in a certain role. Let us now practise doing this.

Activity 1.2 Constructing social situation and writer goal

1. Work in groups of 3 or 4 on the tasks (2a, b and c). Each group will work on a topic from this list. (The teacher will tell you which topic your group is to do.)

Topics:

1. Essay topic: Are examinations essential?
2. Essay topic: Online chatting: Harmful or beneficial?

3. Proposal: Propose holding a fun fair to raise funds for needy students in your school. (Note the word *propose*. Do not just tell R what you are going to do.)
 4. Letter: Write a letter to your school principal appealing for the change of a school rule.
 5. Social studies exam question: The need to compete in the global economy is the most important factor that influences Singapore's education policies. Do you agree?
 6.(Topic of the day to be given by the teacher).....
2. Name three members to record the group's discussion, a different person for each of the tasks (a), (b) and (c). All the members of the group must contribute to the group's answer to the questions in each task.
 - (a) Create the social situation in which the writing of the essay, letter or proposal is taking place. What has happened? What does W hope will happen after the writing is read? What are the community's beliefs relating to W's topic?
 - (b) Construct R (the reader). Who is R? Is there another R? What are R's beliefs and attitudes regarding W's topic? What is R's role? What is he/she supposed to do after reading W's text? R's beliefs and role make R expect to see certain things in W's essay, letter or proposal. What are R's expectations?
 - (c) Work out W's role and goal. In the social situation you have created, what role is W supposed to take? In this role, what is W's goal? Through his/her writing, what does W want to get from R? How does W wish R to think or act after reading W's text? This is called W's **rhetorical goal**.
 3. The three recorders write down the group's final decision on one sheet of paper to be shown to the teacher at the end of the lesson.
 4. The teacher may ask some groups to present their answers to the class. Listen to the teacher's comment on the social situation and writer goal for each topic.

Lesson 1b (1 hour)

An expository or argumentative essay usually begins in a certain typical way. [From now on, when we say "expository essay", we mean "argumentative" as well.]

Today you will learn:

1. To carry out two essential acts in the opening paragraph of an expository essay.
2. What grammar to use so that the reader knows you have done the two essential acts.

Listen to the teacher explain the two essential acts in Text 1C, the introduction to an expository text. Text 1C is the opening paragraph from an article in the *Reader's Digest*.

The writer's rhetorical goal: Persuade the reader to agree that machines that translate languages are unlikely to be very successful.

Text 1C Opening paragraph

¹The US military is developing an electronic device that translates 150,000 commands and questions into 53 languages, including Russian and Arabic. ²You speak into the device, called the Phraselator, and it translates what you say into the language of your choice. ³As I do not think much progress has been made in the field of voice-recognition technology, I have serious doubts about how well such a device will work. (Adapted from “Lost in translation” by Rolf Potts. *Reader’s Digest* October 2004.)

Opening paragraph acts	Grammar
<p>Tell R (the reader) how the topic came up – what has happened or is happening to make the topic something to talk about. This is called reader orientation.</p> <p>Keep reader orientation short; one or two sentences will do in an essay of 400 words.</p>	<p>To say that something is going on, we use present continuous tense verbs (<i>doing</i> words): is/are/am + ___ing (<i>is developing</i>).</p> <p>To say that something has happened, we use present perfect tense verbs: has/have + ___n or ___ed (e.g. <i>has taken, has made</i>). Use present perfect when you think of the event as not yet over.</p> <p>In Sentence 3, W uses <i>has been made</i> (passive present perfect) to say: “no need to worry about who is responsible for making not much progress”.</p> <p>If something happened in the past- an event we think of as over, we choose the simple past tense (Last year the military <i>developed</i> a device ...).</p> <p>Why do we bother about which tense to use? The tense helps to answer R’s question: Why are you trying to interest me in topic <i>x</i>? What kind of event or situation makes <i>x</i> relevant? Is it an event that’s over, not over, or still happening right now?</p>
<p>Say your position on the issue or topic. We will call this the position statement.</p> <p>We must, of course, first decide on a position. Taking a position means to *evaluate the thing or situation that we are going to write about. When you evaluate a situation, you show the examiner that you can think, that you have a point of view. (Later you will learn how to support</p>	<p>Words for evaluating, judging things: Adjective + N (noun) or N + Verb + adjective: Saying how I think/feel (<i>I have serious doubts about...</i>) Saying how something looks to me (<i>The textbooks are dull and childish</i>).</p> <p>Words for saying how I **interpret or see a situation: Comment on the situation or on someone’s view (<i>There is...good versus bad science... See Text 1B</i>) Or say what you think can be done to solve a problem. Use nouns that refer to a whole group. (<i>It is everyone’s responsibility to keep our</i></p>

your position.)	<p><i>environment clean.</i>) Or use words that say ‘obligation’. (<i>Everyone should be responsible for ...</i>)</p> <p>In the exercise below, you will see some other ways of telling R that you are evaluating and interpreting.</p>
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*You **evaluate** something when you say it is good/bad, useful/not useful, desirable/not desirable and so on. Your evaluation may be somewhere between the two poles. Example: *Examinations are essential if there is no other fair method for selecting students for university.* [The teacher will explain what the two pole positions are.]

**You interpret a situation when you say what it means, how you see it. Example: *The Singapore Idol contest is not a test of singing talent.*

Activity 1.3 Grammar for starting expository essay

Each group will study one of the texts below and answer these questions:

- 1(a) Mark with [square brackets] the reader orientation, the part where W (the writer) leads R into the topic. Reader orientation may include information about W’s identity and his/her role during the writing.
- (b) What situation does W use to interest R in the topic? Underline the tense that tells us whether the situation is past, is still there or is going to happen. What other words tell us what kind of situation caused W to write?

- 2(a) Look for W’s position. Place {braces} round the words that say the position.
- (b) Underline the words showing that W is evaluating something or interpreting a situation.

If necessary, the teacher will use the first text to show you how to do the above questions.

Text 1D. Opening of a letter to the newspaper	Social situation:
As a Secondary 4 student, I admit that the Chinese syllabus is outdated, dull, and childish. Unrealistic talking cats, inane dialogue and 1960s propaganda-like passages do not interest 16-year-olds.	Letter is written by a student. In the weeks before, there was a lot of news and discussion in the paper about the teaching of Chinese and students’ difficulties learning Chinese.

Text 1E. Opening paragraph of an article in a newspaper	Social situation:
To cane or not to cane – that is the question. My father is a strong believer in two proverbs: “You have to be cruel to be kind” and “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” My father caned me. Even though I agree that I deserved the punishment, I still think that parents should not hit their children especially if it is done in anger.	Adapted from the opening section of an article published in <i>Today</i> , 06 October 2004. The article was written by a 14-year old boy. At the time there was much discussion about whether the cane should be used to discipline children.

<p>Text 1F. Opening paragraph of a student’s essay. Topic: Should voluntary work be made compulsory in secondary schools?</p>	<p>Social situation:</p>
<p>Some people feel that an all-rounded education includes only a multitude of subjects which the student has to cram for during examinations. However, I beg to differ. My perception of “holistic education” includes building up character and team spirit. Voluntary work offers the opportunity to strengthen character and learn team work. By helping others we learn to be civic-minded as well as understand what it is like to be less fortunate. Thus, I agree that voluntary work should be made compulsory for secondary school students.</p>	<p>This essay was written by a Secondary 4 student for an examination. The topic was set at a time when the Government was trying to encourage more people to become volunteers. This student is aware that her examiner-reader is likely to be a teacher who believes that more people should be volunteers.</p>

<p>Text 1G. Opening paragraph of a letter to <i>The Straits Times</i> Forum</p>	<p>Social situation:</p>
<p>I write in total disagreement with Mr Ngiam Tong Dow regarding whether Singapore should have a casino. Gambling in whatever form is the root of evil.</p>	<p>This letter was written by a taxi driver after reading another letter on the casino topic. At the time, there were many reports and letters on the question of whether Singapore should have a casino.</p>

<p>Text 1H Opening paragraph of an essay written for the ‘O’ Level exam. Topic: Which household tasks are you prepared to do and which do you try to avoid? (O-level paper November 1999, Q. 2)</p>	<p>Social situation:</p>
<p>The word ‘household’ makes me think of someone trapped in the house doing housework. ‘Tasks’ is a negative word to me – it spells unpleasant chores.</p>	<p>The O-level examiner assumes that everyone has to do household chores of some form and that most people do not like it. O-level examiners tend to set topics relating to experience that is familiar to most Sec 3 and 4 students.</p>

Text 11 Opening paragraph of an article in the newspaper	Social situation
I attended a wedding recently. As is my habit, I wore a suit. I thought that it being an important occasion for the couple and their families, I would show my respect for them in the way I dressed.	The writer wrote this article after a hotel restaurant turned away a customer who was wearing Bermudas and a t-shirt. People wrote letters to the newspaper giving their views on what is or is not suitable dress for different occasions.

The teacher will ask groups to present their answers to the whole class. Notice the different ways (grammar and language) that writers can use to orient the reader and say their position.

Activity 1.4 Write a position statement

Work with a partner to write a position statement on one of the topics in Activity 1.2. The teacher will tell you which topic to do. Remember to:

- Think of the social situation. Think of your goal.
- Use words to say that you are evaluating or interpreting something.

Follow this example:

Exam essay topic:	Teenagers and discipline
Social situation:	Many adults think teenagers are not disciplined.
My rhetorical goal:	To argue that teenagers can be as disciplined as adults.
My position statement:	There are many teenagers who are as disciplined as their hardworking teachers and parents.

You may have more than one possible position statement. Choose the one you can support. Discuss with your partner what you can do if someone challenges your position (e.g. *What makes you think that teenagers are disciplined?*) Can you defend your position if you have to write the essay? If you can, this is the position to take.

If the essay topic is a question, your position statement should respond to the question.

Examples:

Essay Topic	Student's position statement
Should parents cane their children?	Parents should not cane their children because caning can result in more harm than good.
"The challenges of life bring out the best in young people." Do you agree?	I agree that challenges can bring out the best in young people because challenges, such as failure or loss of a loved one, make us stronger.

Your teacher may ask you to read out your position statement. Note that more than one position is possible on any essay topic. But when you have chosen a position, you must stick to it throughout the essay. You will learn how to do this in later lessons.

Activity 1.5 Write your essay's opening paragraph

Your teacher will tell you what topic to do. Follow these steps:

- Think of the social situation in which people will be interested in the topic. What has happened to create an interest? Who will be interested and for what reason?
- Decide on your role and rhetorical goal in the essay/letter/proposal. How do you want the reader to think or feel after reading your essay? Write down a goal. Satisfied with the goal? Use it to plan a position statement.
- Write the opening paragraph. Provide reader orientation in one or two sentences. Announce your position. Do not write more than 4 or 5 sentences. In an essay of 350 to 500 words, if you use too many words just to start the essay, there may not be enough words left to persuade the reader to accept your position.

Your opening paragraph must be ready for the next lesson. Your teacher will show you how to check whether your paragraph has reader orientation and a position statement.

Unit 1 Activity 1.2: Constructing social situation and writer goal

Members of group:

Topic:

.....

Circle the number of the task you are doing: 2(a) 2(b) 2(c)

Write your group's thoughts and decisions below.

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Chandrasegaran, A. (2005). Materials for intervention in the teaching of expository writing (Research Project CRP 5/04 AC). Available from *SingTeach* Web site, <http://singteach.nie.edu.sg>