The mulga tree is a truly amazing plant.

The sun’s rays burn off the leaves helping the plant to stay cool.

The mulga can grow in some of the hottest places on Earth.

So can plant life grow so well in such dry, hot and little places?

Mulga plains

The biggest shock for many land travellers is the dense spinifex that covers much of the arid plains. This scrub can be so low that it is difficult to walk through. Travellers begin to wonder if they are really in arid country.

The mulga tree that grows so densely across the desert is so well adapted to the arid climate that it covers one-third of our arid lands. The desert romps and rocky outcrops are surrounded by gently sloping hills and plains. This is red earth country and is the country of the mulga tree.

The mulga tree can grow in some of the hottest places on Earth.

Surviving the long drought

Mulga likes long droughts — if it is too wet mulga trees will grow.

The shape of the mulga tree is a key to surviving dry times.

Branches of the mulga fan out from the bottom — like a huge fan.

The branching leaves and stems catch the rain and it runs down to the soil. This tree needs more rainfall than the tree straight up. The mulga catches more water than a gum.

This water is stored in the soil to be used by the tree during dry times.

The soil is not very fertile in these red earths.

The mulga tree flowers once a year. It does not always grow needs two or three times a year. It must rain in the summer and winter.

Students stand at the board, writing and discussing the problems presented.
ABOUT THIS BOOK

In this book we explore patterns of meanings in texts, that are essential for guiding your students in reading and writing. Patterns of language at the level of texts are known as discourse patterns.

We first introduced the discourse systems of lexis, appraisal, conjunction and reference in the R2L writing assessment in Book 3. By now you should be very familiar with recognising these patterns in your students’ texts. This book provides more detail about each system, that you will find immensely useful in analysing texts, planning lessons, and diagnosing your students’ learning.
## Contents

**Information: the rhythm of texts**  
Information is the patterns of starting points and end points in a text, that tell readers where the text is heading, and why it went it there. Information patterns at the level of whole texts includes introductions and conclusions. At the level of the paragraph it includes topic sentences. At the level of the sentence it include Themes and News.

**Reference: keeping track of people and things**  
Reference is the set of words that keep track of people, places and things from sentence to sentence. They include the ‘pointers’ in noun groups, that we discussed in Book 7, such as a, the, this, these, those, each, other, more, less, as well as personal pronouns, he, she, it, they, you, me, and so on.

**Conjunction: logical relations**  
Conjunction is all the logical relations between sentences and clauses. Logical relations include addition ‘and/or’, comparison ‘like/unlike’, time ‘then/before’, and cause ‘so/because’.

**Lexis: people, things, processes, places and qualities**  
Lexis includes the lexical words in each sentence, as well as the relations between lexical words from sentence to sentence, such as repetitions, similarities and contrasts. These are known as lexical relations. Lexical relations construct the field of a text as it unfolds from sentence to sentence.

**Appraisal: evaluating feelings, people and things**  
Appraisal includes all the words we use for evaluating feelings, people and things. Appraisals can be positive or negative, happy/sad, good/evil, beautiful/ugly. They can also be amplified, happy/joyous/ecstatic. And they can be sourced to the writer, I believe that…, or to others It is widely acknowledged that…

**Classroom metalanguage for patterns in texts**
INFORMATION:
THE RHYTHM OF TEXTS

Texts are organised in waves of information, at the levels of the sentence, the paragraph and the whole text. A text is like a journey. At each of these levels, there are starting points and end points. The waves of information tell us where we are going, and when we have arrived.

At the level of the text, starting points are traditionally known as ‘introductions’, that tell the reader where the text is going. At the level of the paragraph, starting points are traditionally known as ‘topic sentences’, that tell us where the paragraph is going. Most genres begin with an ‘introduction’, such as Orientation or Thesis. Some genres also end with a ‘conclusion’, such as a Restatement or Evaluation. But only argument genres typically have ‘topic sentences’. Stories and factual texts usually don’t need them.

Analysis 1: Information waves in texts

In the exposition Thesis below, the writer states the topic of the essay in the first sentence, and then previews the supporting arguments in the next two sentences. This preview predicts the topics to be presented in each argument. Each argument is announced by a conjunction, and then stated in its topic sentence. The next sentences then give examples and evidence.

While the Thesis previews the arguments, pointing forward to each argument, the Restatement (or Reiteration) reviews the arguments, pointing back to each argument. Finally in the last sentence it restates the thesis - the writer’s point of view.

Highlight the conjunctions, then the topic of each argument, then the preview of each argument in the Thesis (the first one is underlined already). Then highlight the reviews.

We must not stand in the way of progress because it has benefited our world in many ways. It has improved our standard of living and has made things easier for us. We have more leisure time, communication is easier, our entertainment has improved, and services are quicker.

Firstly progress has made life easier in the home. For example, cooking is made a lot easier with gas or electric stoves and microwaves. We can have more leisure time instead of having to go outside on a windy night to chop wood and make a fire.

Secondly the invention of advanced forms of communication has saved many people. We are able to use telephones to help people who are injured or in danger. All we have to do is pick up the phone, and police, ambulance or fire brigade can be contacted. Furthermore, telephones help people to communicate with friends and relatives. We can simply ring someone instead of travelling to see them.

Thirdly, television is another great product of technological progress. If we have nothing to do at home, we can turn on the television and watch movies, comedy or cartoons. In addition, the news on television shows us what is going on around the world as it is happening.

Finally, activities like banking takes less time because we have quicker service, thanks to technological advances such as teller machines. Instead of waiting in a queue to sign our name on pieces of paper, we now have plastic cards that are recognised by these teller machines.

In conclusion, progress has created technologies such as appliances that give us more leisure time, telephones to improve our communication, television to provide entertainment and information, and teller machines to save time. All these things have improved our standard of living and made life easier for us.
Analysis 2: Information at sentence level: Theme and New

Like a text or a paragraph, a sentence is made up of chunks of information, including starting points and end points.

But there is an important difference here between a simple sentence and a complex sentence. A simple sentence consists of a single clause, which represents a single activity. A complex sentence includes two or more clauses, each of which represents an activity.

For example, the following story (from Butterfly Song by Terri Jaenke) is divided into clauses, with one clause to each line. The starting point of each clause is called its Theme. The end point is its New information. (Capital letters are used to denote linguistic functions, such as Theme and New.)

The Theme of a clause is everything up to and including the first person or thing. In the text, the first few Themes have been underlined.

Underline the other Themes in each clause of the story below.

I can see the beach
where we used to go swimming as kids, in the colder months, before the stingers came out.
I remember how my blue swimming togs always held a pile of sand in the crotch.
Somewhere in the dunes I lost my red bucket.
It was the day we deliberately left Nobby at the beach.
The three of us kids cried a lot.
Nobby was a stray mongrel dog that had moved into our house.
Clarissa, Shane and I wanted to keep him.
Dad said he was a bad dog
because he jumped up and grabbed clothing, like Dad’s work socks, off the clothesline.
Nobby also chased cars
and gave the postman on his bicycle a hard time.
So that day, we left the beach without him.
The next weekend, when we went back for a swim,
Nobby was still there, hanging around the car park.
He looked very sad and dejected.
Dad made us act as if we couldn’t see him.
‘Pretend he’s invisible.’
Later, on the beach, we set up our picnic.
Shane had just learnt to walk -
well, really he went straight to running.
Dad was having a swim
and my mother was making sandwiches
when Shane disappeared.
We searched the beach and the car park
and could not find him.
Nobby was still there,
so my frantic mother said to him,
‘Shane, help us find Shane.’
She had watched too many Lassie movies.
Nobby barked and headed towards the estuary.
Sure enough, Shane was there, within metres of the deep water.
‘We have to take the dog,’ my mother insisted.
That’s how Nobby won his place in our family.
To think that was around twenty years ago -
but the beach looks just the same
Marked Themes

In stories, the Themes of most clauses are people or things - I, we, the three of us kids, Nobby, he. It is the identities of the characters in the story that are presented as the starting point of each clause. But sometimes a time, place or other circumstance comes before the person - Somewhere in the dunes, It was the day, The next weekend, Later, on the beach.

Why do we vary sentence beginnings like this? Here is the story again with the places and times highlighted at the beginning and end of each clause.

I can see the beach where we used to go swimming as kids, in the colder months, before the stingers came out.
I remember how my blue swimming togs always held a pile of sand in the crotch.
Somewhere in the dunes I lost my red bucket.
It was the day we deliberately left Nobby at the beach.
The three of us kids cried a lot.
Nobby was a stray mongrel dog that had moved into our house.
Clarissa, Shane and I wanted to keep him.
Dad said he was a bad dog because he jumped up and grabbed clothing, like Dad's work socks, off the clothesline. Nobby also chased cars and gave the postman on his bicycle a hard time.
So that day, we left the beach without him.
The next weekend, when we went back for a swim, Nobby was still there, hanging around the car park.
He looked very sad and dejected.
Dad made us act as if we couldn't see him.
‘Pretend he's invisible.’
Later, on the beach, we set up our picnic.
Shane had just learnt to walk - well, really he went straight to running.
Dad was having a swim and my mother was making sandwiches when Shane disappeared.

Usually the places and times come at the end of a clause. When they come at the start, they mark the event as especially significant. Somewhere in the dunes I lost my red bucket. It was the day we deliberately left Nobby at the beach. So that day, we left the beach without him. This markedness is often used to signal the beginning of a new phase or stage in a story. Thus The next weekend signals a new problem. Later, on the beach signals the start of the Complication.

This is a very common pattern in stories. For example, the Complication in ‘Good Tip for Ghosts’ is signalled with a place Theme - A little way off behind some old rusting car bodies, I thought I heard a noise. And the Resolution is signalled with time and a quality Theme - Finally, with bursting lungs, we crawled into the back of an old car.
So places, times and other circumstances that start a clause are known as marked Themes.
Analysis 3: Marked Themes in history

In history genres, time Themes are often used to signal each new phase.

To see this pattern, underline the Themes in the following biography.

Nganyintja AM

Nganyintja is an elder of the Pitjantatjara people of central Australia, renowned internationally as an educator and cultural ambassador. She was born in 1930 in the Mann Ranges, South Australia. Her early years were spent travelling through her family’s traditional lands, living by hunting and gathering, and until the age of nine she had not seen a European.

At that time her family moved to the newly established mission at Ernabella, 300km to the east of the family homeland. They were soon followed by most of the Pitjantatjara people, as they were forced to abandon their Western Desert lands during the drought of the 1940s. At the mission, Nganyintja excelled at school, becoming its first Indigenous teacher. She married Charlie Ilyatjari and began a family that would include four daughters, two sons, eighteen grandchildren and ever more great-grandchildren.

In the early 1960s the family moved to the new government settlement of Amata, 100km east of their traditional lands, which they visited with camels each summer holiday, renewing their ties to the land and educating their children in their traditions. Then in 1979 they were able to buy an old truck and blaze a track through the bush to re-establish a permanent family community at Nganyintja’s homeland of Angatja.

In those years the tragedy of teenage petrol sniffing began to engulf the Pitjantatjara people. Nganyintja and Ilyatjari established a youth cultural and training program at Angatja, and worked for many years to get young people out of the settlements in the region and educate them, both in their cultural traditions and in community development skills. In addition, Nganyintja became a widely respected leader and spokesperson for her people.

During the 1980s Nganyintja and Ilyatjari hosted many visits from students and organisations interested in learning about Indigenous Australian culture. In 1989 they established a cultural tourism venture known as Desert Tracks, that has brought hundreds of Australian and international visitors to Angatja, and provided income and employment to many Pitjantatjara people, as well as winning major tourism awards.

In 1993 Nganyintja was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for her services to the community.
Theme and New in writing

In written texts, Theme and New are used to organise information into chunks, that readers can follow from sentence to sentence.

The topic of the following paragraph is ‘marriage among the Kulin people’, so the Theme of the first sentence is in marriage.* The New information about marriage is that Kulin men seek partners from outside their own clan. This is picked up as the Theme of the next sentence, as its converse the giving of a daughter in marriage, and the New information is the reason for this giving.

The next sentence starts with Kulin people and its New is interclan gatherings. This is picked up in the next Theme with each clan, and the New is a particular location. This is then picked up in the next Theme with the site, and the New is the place. Each of these elements is highlighted in the text to show these patterns.

So information in written text often flows in chunks, from Theme to New to Theme to New to Theme again.

There may be a lexical relation between each chunk of information, so that the meaning flows from chunk to chunk, e.g.:

- contrast – men -> daughter; seek -> give
- part-whole – partners -> marriage
- member-class - Kulin men -> Kulin people
- whole-part – interclan gathering -> each clan
- synonym – clan -> group; location -> site -> place.

There is even an implicit class-member relation between the village of Melbourne and interclan gatherings, since they are both groupings of people; and a contrast between kinds of people - the first settlers and the Kulin.

*Note: As this text is a report, not an argument, this paragraph does not begin with a topic sentence.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>topic of the phase</th>
<th>New</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In marriage</td>
<td>it was the practice for Kulin men to seek partners from outside their own clan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The giving of a daughter in marriage</td>
<td>ensured that groups could call on one another in times of need and abundance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kulin people</td>
<td>would meet regularly for interclan gatherings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and each clan</td>
<td>would camp in a particular location.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The site selected by the first settlers for the village of Melbourne</td>
<td>was precisely the place most favoured by the Kulin for interclan gatherings.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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