Explicitly teaching students to knowingly manipulate their oral language use based on the principles of functional grammar has the potential to be deeply empowering. This article provides examples of activities that can be used with primary students to increase their awareness of how oral language works within the register continua.

**Introduction**
I love teaching young people how to use language, or perhaps more precisely, how to knowingly manipulate words to their advantage. Functional grammar works well for me as a framework to explain how language operates both structurally as well as socially (Halliday, 1994). It is important to teach that language use can be directed to position the speaker/writer and the listener/reader. This short article will provide examples of how I use functional grammar to explicitly teach about oral language to primary school students.

A functional model of language analyses texts in context as well as the context itself. That is, language is not used in a social vacuum but is rather a creation of and creator of a social context. It is highly valuable to explicitly teach students to understand the mechanics of language within the social context.

Particular situations ‘shape the language of a text according to three variables: the field, tenor and mode’ (Govt SA, 2011, p. 33). Students are taught that text features change along the register continua to suit the purpose of that text and that as students move through their education, they are increasingly expected to be able to produce texts that move from the left to the right across these continua.

**Activity 1: Introducing mode continuum**
Mode has the most obvious connections with oral language as it analyses texts as being more or less like spoken or written texts. A useful way to introduce the mode continuum to students is to discuss how their language use changes from the playground to the classroom. Therefore, a very useful point in the day to talk about mode is immediately after a lunch break or recess, as the students are returning to the classroom.

The aim of this activity is to discuss different texts in terms of mode. Before long the teacher will be able to simply point to the mode continuum on display.
This activity will highlight how the text features change when the language changes from a face-to-face, active text in the here and now to a reflective text from a third party. That is, how the context and situation affect language.

**Conclusion**

Teaching young people to knowingly manipulate texts has potential to be both subversive and empowering. It is important to be explicit to teach how language works and functional grammar is a very useful model to develop a metalanguage with students that enables them to be highly knowledgeable language users. The register variable of mode is particularly useful when teaching students to recognise the different features of texts that are closer to spoken or written texts.

**References**


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### Activity 2: Mode cline

A similar activity can be done with prepared cards and the concept of a word cline that focuses on mode.

Students are given examples of text types to rank along a cline based on how spoken or written it is. Excerpts of texts could be printed onto cards and laminated for pairs to sort, then share their reasoning with the whole class. Excerpts could include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text 1</th>
<th>Text 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Hey, Jono, pass me that one.’ ‘Here.’ ‘Nah, the red one.’</td>
<td>There are two main categories of dinosaurs: lizard-hipped and bird-hipped. There were no true dinosaurs in the oceans or air; there were marine reptiles and avian reptiles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text 3</th>
<th>Text 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good morning, students, teachers and our special guest, Mrs Toffanello. Today I will present my report on the findings of our science experiment.</td>
<td>R U coming 2? wha? pool party l8r</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students read each text and rank each one along a cline from most like spoken language to most like written language. Guiding questions need to focus on mode, particularly if students have already practised analysing language in the other register variables of field and tenor. This activity facilitates discussions that closely analyse the features of a text in terms of mode and increases student awareness of how language works.

### Activity 3: Rewrite a text

Another activity to highlight for students how oral language changes along the mode continuum could be to take a single text and rewrite it for the other end of the continuum. Record a short conversation between pairs of students. Several days later, have a different student listen to that recorded conversation and then retell that conversation to the whole class.

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