LANGUAGE DISORDER AUSTRALIA

# Discourse-Level Language

Discourse-level language refers to the use of language beyond the single sentence level to build larger units like conversations, stories or paragraphs. These larger units are used to share complex ideas, maintain social interactions, or achieve specific communicative functions (e.g., making requests, giving opinions).

**Keywords:** *Oral language, discourse, social communication, pragmatics*

## Background

Discourse-level language refers to the use of language in larger units to share information with others, either spoken or written. The quality of discourse-level language can be reviewed in terms of content (i.e., vocabulary and semantics), coherence (i.e., organisation) and cohesion (i.e., logical relationships between ideas). Other factors that can influence discourse-level language include:

- Context and environment (e.g., setting and audience).
- Pragmatic function (i.e., the purpose of the message).
- Genre (e.g., conversation, narrative, exposition).

## Discourse Genres

### Conversation

Conversational language is informally structured and made up of a mixture of single words, short phrases and sentences. Language skills applied in conversation include greetings, topic maintenance and introduction, turn-taking, asking and answering questions and commenting.

### Narration

Narratives form a key part of discourse at home, in the classroom and in social interactions. Stories help us to learn about our world, and to share our experiences with others. There are different types of narratives we use for different purposes:

- Personal Narrative: An account of real-life past events
- Fictional Narrative: Imagined events, characters and settings
- Narrative Retell: Recount of a story previously heard or read

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**Exposition**

Expository texts provide information or explanations about a specific topic and are particularly important for secondary students. Formats can include compare-contrast, description, problem and solution, cause and effect and procedural texts.

**Persuasion**

Persuasive or argumentative discourse aims to convince another person to perform an act or take on a presented point of view. This is a complex language task and a key skill for secondary students. This discourse genre is also an important part of everyday social communication (e.g., negotiating and compromising, arguing, and debating topics such as politics).

**Written Communication**

Written communication is often more formally structured than spoken communication, and may include the following formats:

- Personal writing (e.g., stories, diaries, blogs)
- Factual writing (e.g., research reports, news articles, textbooks)
- Analytical writing (e.g., essays)

We also regularly engage in more informal written communication modes such as text messaging and direct messaging.

**Key considerations for discourse-level language:**

- Topic maintenance
- Informativeness
  - Is there too much detail or too little?
- Information sequencing
- Referencing
  - Are there clear links between pronouns and specific people/objects?
- Conjunctions and connectives
  - How are the ideas linked together?
- Fluency
  - How do the ideas flow?
  - Is it repetitive?

**Want to learn more?**

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or **hello@languagedisorder.org.au**

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