This document supports the *Literacy Focus* *for Writing, Genre in the primary curriculum* section located in the Literacy Teaching Toolkit (Department of Education and Training, Victoria).

**Explanation**

Explanations can be written as stand-alone texts or part of a macro genre, particularly in Levels 3 to 6. For example, an information report about volcanoes might also include an explanation about how a volcano erupts. There are three main types of explanation that students in the primary school might write: causal, sequential and cyclical.

**Causal explanations**

Causal explanations written at Levels F to 2 will be quite rudimentary. However, exposure to the genre through reading and providing opportunities for students to provide oral explanations and write simple explanations about phenomena they are learning about are important. For example, students can be asked to talk or write about:

simple cause and effect or time related explanations

What happens if plants do not get watered? If plants do not get watered, they will die.

What happens when you mix paint with water? When you mix paint with water, the water changes colour.

simple definitions of phenomenon

Daytime is when you can see the sun shining. Night-time is when the sun is on the other side of the Earth.

tell how or why something happens

A rainbow happens because the sun shines through raindrops.

**Sequential explanations**

Sequential explanations explain a process and are quite simple ways of explaining a phenomenon. This type of explanation presents the sequence of a process rather than a causal explanation. Sequential explanations differ from recounts because they are written in the timeless present tense and they are about a generalised phenomenon rather than specific events or phenomena. The passive voice is also used in sequential explanations, although young writers will not necessarily have developed this skill. Passive voice is used to emphasise the action rather than who is doing the action. The passive voice can be modelled through texts which are read to or written with the students.

**Cyclical explanations**

Cyclical explanations explain a cyclical phenomenon, for example, the life cycle of a butterfly, the water cycle. This type of explanation involves the events in the cycle but can also include some causal explanation.

**Explanation**

The following is a **summary of major** **language or grammatical features** for explanation at different levels in the primary years organised under the Language sub-strands of the Victorian Curriculum. The language or grammatical features can be highlighted, modelled and taught through the use of model or mentor texts and be the focus of explicit teaching about explanation in writing (and in reading).

|  | **F-2** | **3-4** | **5-6** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Expressing and developing ideas** | **Verbs/ verb groups**  Simple verb groups  Simple present (or timeless present) tense  Action verbs of some technicality related to the phenomenon being explained e.g. sealed, labelled | **Verbs/ verb groups**  Generalised nouns e.g. butterflies, light, sound and nouns/ noun groups of increasing technicality, e.g. metamorphosis, chrysalis, vibrations, sound waves  Action verbs which relate behaviours of the entity/ focus topic which reflect some understanding of technicality and precision about the phenomenon e.g. When the egg **hatches**…, When you sing, your vocal cords **vibrate.** As the Earth **rotates**, it **revolves** around the sun  Relating (being & having) verbs used to define, classify, describe or link with attributes e.g. A butterfly egg **is** round or oval. Butterflies **are** insects. A force **is** a push, a pull or a twist.  Simple present tense (also known as timeless present) | **Verbs/ verb groups**  Verb choices are more precise, technical  e.g. Heat **evaporates** water from the earth’s surface. Water vapour **condenses** into tiny droplets of water.  Action verbs which relate behaviours of the entity/ focus topic with increased range of technicality and precision e.g. Tsunamis **cause** the most deadly coastal floods. The sun’s heat **evaporates** water from the earth’s surface. Water vapour **condenses** into tiny droplets of water.  More frequent use of more abstract and technical language and precise choices of vocabulary particularly through verb groups, noun groups and adverb groups e.g. Volcanoes are formed when magma from within the Earth works its way to the surface.  Varied examples of relating (being & having) verbs used to describe or link with attributes, to classify and to define e.g. The sun heats the water on the Earth’s surface which makes it change from a liquid to a gas. This **is called** evaporation. The Earth's crust is made up of huge slabs **called** plates.  Simple present tense (also known as timeless present), use of other tenses as appropriate |
| **Nouns/ noun groups**  Generalised nouns in simple noun groups e.g. fruit, the fruit, the juice, rainbows, the rainbow | **Nouns/ noun groups**  Simple and expanded noun groups which include pre- and/or post- modification about the topic or phenomenon e.g. **The force of gravity** pulls things towards the Earth. **A tiny caterpillar** hatches from the egg. The caterpillar spins **a string of** **silk** around its body**.**  Noun groups mostly include factual describers or adjectives (answering questions such as ‘What is it like?’, ‘What are its qualities?’) which can be intensified e.g. **A very tiny caterpillar** hatches from the egg. They can also include classifiers (answering the question ‘What type?’) which cannot be intensified. For example, A **push** force, a **pull** force. | **Nouns/ noun groups**  More complex and expanded noun groups which include pre- and/or post- modification about the topic or entity; varied use of post-modifiers (e.g. prepositional phrases, embedded clauses) e.g. **The Earth’s atmosphere** contains **gases that we breathe.** Volcanoes form when **magma from within the Earth** works its way to the surface. Caffeine is **a stimulant** **usually found in coffee that keeps you awake**.  Noun groups mostly include factual describers or adjectives (answering questions such as ‘What is it like?’, ‘What are its qualities?’) which can be intensified e.g. As the water reaches **cooler** temperatures, …. They can also include classifiers (answering the question ‘What type?’) which cannot be intensified, for example, an **active** volcano, a **dormant** volcano, an **extinct** volcano, **volcanic** eruptions |
| **Adverbs, (adverbial) prepositional phrases**  Simple prepositional phrases of time and place, or adverbs of time and place related to the phenomenon e.g. peaches fall **into the boxes,** the sun shines **through raindrops** | **Adverbs, (adverbial) prepositional phrases**  Expanded & varied use of prepositional phrases and adverbs to elaborate the topic or entity e.g. A butterfly emerges **from a chrysalis**. Gravity pull objects **towards the Earth**. **After three months**, the gecko’s eggs hatch. Sound travels **more quickly** through water than air. The caterpillar spins a string of silk **around its body.** | **Adverbs, (adverbial) prepositional phrases**  More precise use of prepositional phrases and adverbs to elaborate the topic or entity e.g. Water evaporates **into the air**. Volcanoes are formed when magma from within the Earth works its way **to the surface**. The friction causes earthquakes and volcanic eruptions **near the edges of the plates**. |
| **Vocabulary**  Some degree of technicality through verb groups and noun groups. | **Vocabulary**  Use of more technical language and precise choices of vocabulary particularly through verb groups, noun groups and adverb groups. | **Vocabulary**  Use of more technical language and precise choices of vocabulary particularly through verb groups, noun groups and adverb groups. |
| **Sentences and combining ideas**  Simple and compound sentences with clauses of equal status – resembling spoken like language e.g. They put the peaches in the can and weigh them.  May include use of unequal or dependent clauses e.g. ***After the fruit is picked…***. | **Sentences and combining ideas**  Simple and compound sentences and higher incidence of complex sentences to include dependent clauses e.g. **When sound waves travel**, the vibrations make a noise. **When you** **sing**, your vocal cords vibrate. **If you make a noise in a large empty room,** you will hear an echo. | **Sentences and combining ideas**  Simple and compound sentences and higher incidence of complex sentences to include dependent clauses to express cause and effect or time linked occurrences/ impacts e.g. **If pressure builds up in a volcano**, an eruption will occur. **As the Moon orbits Earth,** it spins or rotates. **When clouds become too heavy,** rain falls. **As the volcano continues to erupt**, it will get bigger and bigger |
| **Victorian Curriculum Links: English** | Recognise that sentences are key units for expressing ideas ([VCELA143](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA143))  Identify the parts of a simple sentence that represent ‘What’s happening?’, ‘Who or what is involved?’ and the surrounding circumstances ([VCELA178](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA178))  Explore differences in words that represent people, places and things (nouns including pronouns), happenings and states (verbs), qualities (adjectives) and details such as when, where and how (adverbs) ([VCELA179](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA179))  Understand that simple connections can be made between ideas by using a compound sentence with two or more clauses usually linked by a coordinating conjunction ([VCELA214](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA214)) | Understand that a clause is a unit of grammar usually containing a subject and a verb and that these need to be in agreement ([VCELA261](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA261))  Understand that verbs represent different processes (doing, thinking, saying, and relating) and that these processes are anchored in time through tense ([VCELA262](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA262))  Understand that the meaning of sentences can be enriched through the use of noun/groups/phrases and verb groups/phrases and prepositional phrases ([VCELA292](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA292)) | Understand the difference between main and subordinate clauses and that a complex sentence involves at least one subordinate clause ([VCELA323](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA323))  Understand how noun groups/phrases and adjective groups/phrases can be expanded in a variety of ways to provide a fuller description of the person, place, thing or idea ([VCELA324](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA324))  Investigate how complex sentences can be used in a variety of ways to elaborate, extend and explain ideas ([VCELA350](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA350))  Understand how ideas can be expanded and sharpened through careful choice of verbs, elaborated tenses and a range of adverb groups/phrases ([VCELA351](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA351)) |
| **Language for interaction** | **Types of clauses**  Declarative statements e.g. The sun shines during the day. We see the moon at night time. | **Types of clauses**  Declarative statements e.g. The butterfly emerges from the chrysalis. Gravity pulls objects towards the earth. | **Types of clauses**  Declarative statements e.g. Volcanoes can be dormant, active or extinct. Volcanoes are formed when magma from within the Earth works its way to the surface. |
| **Evaluative language**  Little if any evaluation is evident, however some evaluation might be present e.g. The **good** fruit is peeled. | **Evaluative language**  Little if any evaluation, mostly factual describers or adjectives or classifiers e.g. **A very tiny caterpillar** hatches from the egg., a **push** force, a **pull** force.  (see also noun groups in Expressing and developing ideas). | **Evaluative language**  Little if any evaluation, mostly factual describers or adjectives or classifiers (see also noun groups in Expressing and developing ideas). e.g. As the water reaches **cooler** temperatures, an **active** volcano, a **dormant** volcano, an **extinct** volcano, **volcanic** eruptions |
| **Victorian Curriculum Links: English** | Describe some differences between imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, and identify the audience of imaginative, informative and persuasive texts ([VCELY188](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELY188))  Understand the use of vocabulary about familiar and new topics and experiment with and begin to make conscious choices of vocabulary to suit audience purpose ([VCELA237](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA237)) | Examine how evaluative language can be more or less forceful ([VCELA272](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA272))  Incorporate new vocabulary from a range of sources, including vocabulary encountered in research, into own texts ([VCELA293](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA293))  Understand differences between the language of opinion and feeling and the language of factual reporting or recording ([VCELA305](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA305)) | Understand the use of vocabulary to express greater precision of meaning, and know that different words can have different meanings in different contexts ([VCELA325](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA325))  Investigate how complex sentences can be used in a variety of ways to elaborate, extend and explain ideas ([VCELA350](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA350)) |
| **Text structure and organisation** | **Clause/ sentence beginnings**  Clauses usually begin with the subject e.g. The tractor takes the peaches to the cannery. A machine peels the fruit. | **Clause/ sentence beginnings**  Sequence in time can be expressed using time connectives e.g. then, next, after that or through dependent clauses e.g. After the butterfly emerges, …  Dependent clauses might be used to begin the sentence e.g. **If you make a noise in a large empty room,** you will hear an echo. **When sound waves travel**, the vibrations make a noise.  Some use of the passive voice places emphasis on the topic rather than on who or what is doing the action e.g. The fruit is picked. | **Clause/ sentence beginnings**  What occurs at the end of one clause/ sentence is picked up in beginning of the following, through referring words e.g.The slurry passes through **a series of chemical treatments**. **This treatment** is necessary to…  Connections between sentences also established through changing the word class e.g. from verb to noun ‘Gold particles are **smelted**. **Smelting** is the last process in gold mining.  Adverbs, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses may occur at the beginning of sentences e.g. **Over time,** **as the volcano continues to erupt**, it will get bigger and bigger. **When pressure builds up,** eruptions occur.  Passive voice places emphasis on the topic rather than on who or what is doing the action e.g. Small bits of ore are mixed with water to form a thick mud called slurry. |
|  |  | **Nominalisation**  Some examples of nominalisation.  Nominalisation is when verbs, for example, are turned into nouns, e.g. ‘When evaporated water reaches cooler temperatures, it **condenses’** could be written as ‘**Condensation** occurs when the evaporated water cools’.  When words are made into nouns, there is potential to build larger nouns groups, to focus on concepts rather than actions and to compress ideas into simple sentences. |
| **Connectives/ Conjunctions**  Connectives to sequence the process, e.g. then, next, after that.  Clauses joined mostly by simple coordinating conjunctions (e.g. and, but, so), also subordinating conjunctions might be used e.g. after – ***After the fruit is picked…***. | **Connectives/ Conjunctions**  Sequence in time can be expressed using time connectives e.g. then, next, after that or by subordinating conjunctions when dependent clauses are present, e.g. **When sound waves travel**, the vibrations make a noise | **Connectives/ Conjunctions**  Sequence in time can be expressed using time connectives e.g. then, next, after that or by subordinating conjunctions when dependent clauses are present, e.g. **When pressure builds up…**. **As** the earth rotates on its axis, it also revolves around the Sun. |
|  | **Images/ Diagrams**  Images might accompany the explanation sequence or be used to illustrate the phenomenon. | **Images/ Diagrams**  Images or labelled diagrams might accompany the explanation sequence or be used to illustrate the phenomenon. | **Images/ Diagrams**  Images or labelled diagrams might accompany the explanation sequence or be used to illustrate the phenomenon. |
| **Victorian Curriculum Links: English** | Understand that texts can take many forms, and that imaginative and informative texts have different purposes ([VCELA141](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA141))  Create short imaginative and informative texts that show emerging use of appropriate text structure, sentence-level grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation and appropriate multimodal elements ([VCELY194](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELY194))  Understand that different types of texts have identifiable text structure and language features that help the text serve its purpose ([VCELA212](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA212))  Understand that simple connections can be made between ideas by using a compound sentence with two or more clauses usually linked by a coordinating conjunction ([VCELA214](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA214)) | Understand how different types of texts vary in use of language choices, depending on their purpose, audience and context, including tense and types of sentences ([VCELA246](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA246))  Understand that paragraphs are a key organisational feature of written texts ([VCELA259](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA259))  Identify features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text, and understand how texts vary in complexity and technicality depending on the approach to the topic, the purpose and the intended audience ([VCELA277](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA277)) Understand how texts are made cohesive through the use of linking devices including pronoun reference and text connectives ([VCELA290](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA290))  Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features ([VCELY299](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELY299)) | Understand that the starting point of a sentence gives prominence to the message in the text and allows for prediction of how the text will unfold ([VCELA321](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA321))  Identify and explain how analytical images like figures, tables, diagrams, maps and graphs contribute to our understanding of verbal information in factual and persuasive texts ([VCELA340](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA340))  Understand that cohesive links can be made in texts by omitting or replacing words ([VCELA348](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELA348))  Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience ([VCELY358](http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Search?q=VCELY358)) |