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ABSTRACT

This curriculum guide for a public literacy course uses letters to the editor as a way of introducing adult literacy and basic education students to public debate. It consists of three parts. Part 1 is an introduction that provides background, describes how to analyze letters, and details the course structure. Part 2 is a comprehensive teacher's guide. The curriculum is divided into three stages. The first stage familiarizes students with letters to the editor and presents them as examples of public discourse. It starts with problems and solutions and then shows that what is a problem or a solution depends on the angle from which it is viewed. It then points out that point of view is determined by a number of general values. The second stage introduces the idea that public discourse is argumentative. It covers these ideas: argument, rationality, and rhetorical structures for argument. The third stage shows that traditions are the source for the reasoning that occurs in argument. It introduces the main traditions: conservatism, liberalism, socialism, and scientific management. Each of the 21 themes or sections consists of teaching notes, transparency masters, student activities, other possibilities, and homework. Part 3 contains sample letters categorized as follows: those that raise problems, respond to a policy, support other letters, reject other letters, or are grouped around traditions. Each letter is presented in a one-page format with a section for student notes at the bottom. (YLB)

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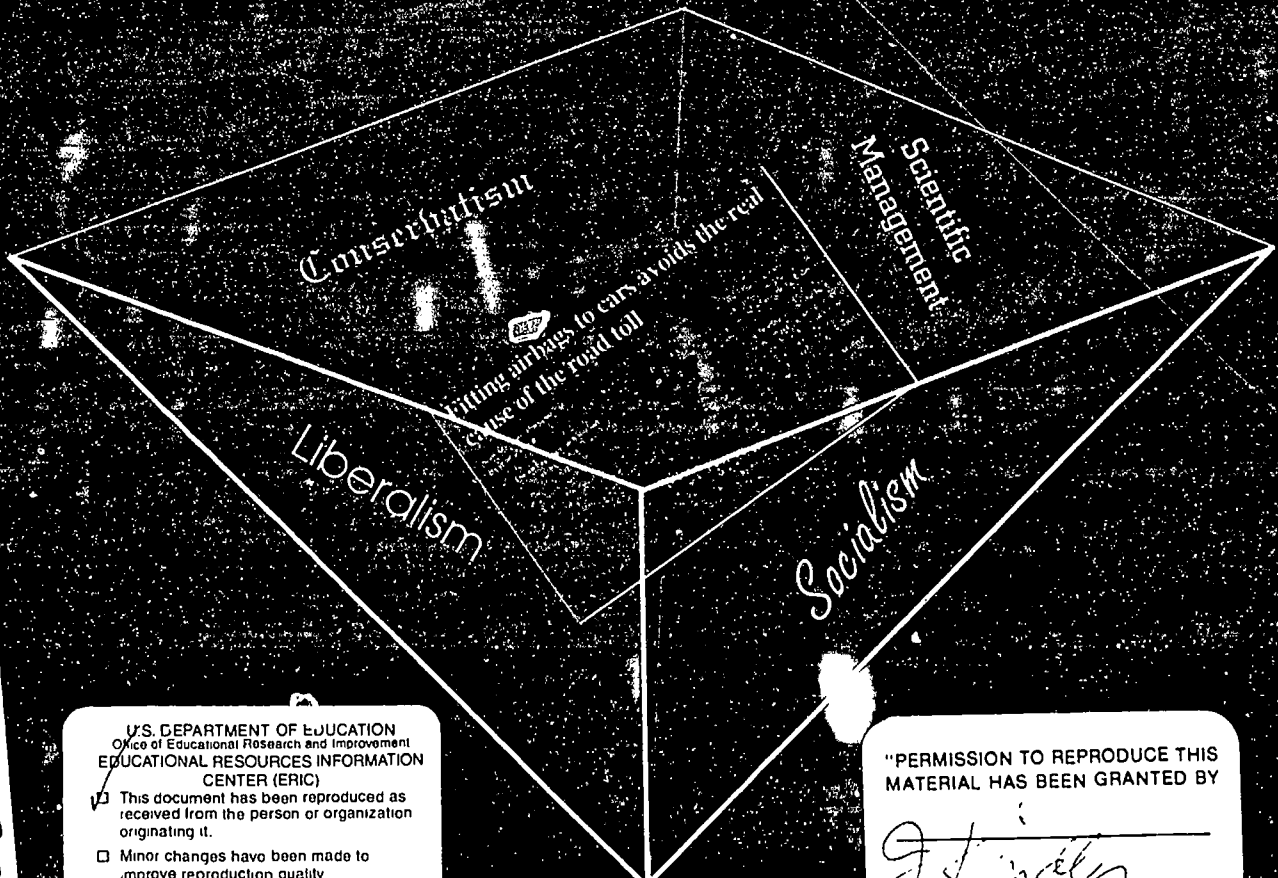
# Public Literacy

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## **Public Literacy: A Curriculum for Adult Basic Education**

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# Public Literacy

## A Curriculum for Adult Basic Education

### *Part 1*

# Introduction

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## 1 Why develop a public literacy curriculum?

### Definition

Public literacy is *the ability to participate in public discourse and argument.*

This notion of public argument is inextricably tied to the idea of democracy and to the idea of citizenship. The aim of this public literacy course is to provide a framework which helps Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) students to understand this public debate and ultimately to participate in it.

### Schemas or facts?

Our experience is that most students are unable to make much sense of the 'news items' concerning public controversy and debate that bombard them in the mass media. The reason for this seems to be that they do not possess any schemas abstract enough into which these news items could be slotted — and thus make sense.

One common suggestion is that what these students need is more 'facts', more experience. But their case is that of having too many facts, too many media-mediated experiences. They do not need more experiences; it is not that they need to see or hear more of what happens inside public institutions or buildings. In fact, the media have already provided them with many glimpses of the physical settings and rituals of social institutions.

Our view is that what they *do* need is to understand the interconnections between these disconnected 'media blips'. They need to understand the conflicting forms of reasoning, the values, the traditions and the forms of interpretation which are mobilised in public debate and embodied in social institutions, legislation and practices.

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*“ The aim of this public literacy course is to provide a framework which helps Adult Literacy and Basic Education (ALBE) students to understand this public debate and ultimately to participate in it. ”*

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## 2 How the course developed

This material developed out of work at Footscray TAFE College with Year 12 students who had to write essays giving their opinions or points of view on public issues. Such issues as gun laws, smoking in public, genetic engineering, drink driving laws, logging of forests, etc. — issues which are matters of publicly contested evaluations.

We came to realise in helping these students that what distinguished successful and unsuccessful student writers was not just poor 'grammar' (knowing prescribed formal English usage), nor even a lack of sufficient information about a particular topic. What made an essay a good essay was much more complex than this.

### Both 'ideas' and linguistic conventions

It had to do with the understanding of the kind of social domain, what Foucault<sup>1</sup> calls a *discursive formation*, which students were expected to participate in through writing an essay, and this included who the writer took, or even unconsciously presupposed, herself to be. And it had to do with specific kinds of linguistic resources that students needed to mobilise to participate in this social domain, linguistic resources which need never have been 'accessed' by students in other domains of their life.

In short, to help students write a good essay we had to help them understand both 'ideas' (including their relationship to those ideas) and the structures and conventions of language which typically realised those 'ideas'.

### Understanding the public domain

Our notion of public literacy is enabling students to participate in the powerful discourses used to shape, understand, and reflect on modern society. This is often interpreted as helping students voice their views in writing on matters of public debate.

We suggest that the capacity for expressing views in this way is not just a matter of confidence; it is a matter of understanding a particular social domain and the ways in which a voice can be developed for that domain. It is not only learning how to use the discourse but also understanding the nature of the discourse.

Our hunch is that learning to participate in this public domain whilst at the same time viewing it as a something which we can imaginatively 'enter' and 'leave', actually makes it possible to reflect more clearly upon the defining features of that domain.

*It is a matter of understanding a particular social domain and the ways in which a voice can be developed for that domain.*



### 3 Other approaches to public debate

There currently exist various ways of approaching public debate and the argumentation that goes with it.

#### ■ Telling the facts

One way that schools have traditionally approached public discourse is in terms of the notion of *evidence*. That is, the focus of attention is on whether an argument represents the facts accurately. This approach builds on students' previous understanding of texts as basically concerned with representing the world. Students have already met texts that tell the facts — either as stories or as factual writing. Thus, history is about what happened in the past, geography is about where things are, newspapers are about what is happening now, and so on.

But to focus on the question of evidence is to treat public discourse as a form of factual discourse. It is to give the impression that the most important feature of public discourse is its relationship to the facts. As a result of this sort of emphasis students become obsessed with the idea that the only justification for making a public statement is its representation of the facts. And they learn to accuse writers routinely of 'not providing enough evidence' — especially statistical evidence. But how much evidence do you need? And why? More evidence is only required because a statement is suspect in some way. The real question is: why is it suspect? If evidence were our only basis for making statements then nothing we said would be adequately supported and we would have to spend all our time trying to provide more evidence for things we say.

Focusing on 'the facts' also gives the impression that there could be something like a photograph of 'the facts', as if we could give a complete inventory of all the facts of a situation and that somehow this inventory would settle public disputes. But public dispute is usually not over the facts: it is over the meaning or significance of the facts. Public dispute is mainly concerned with how to evaluate the facts. Or, to express this in another way, it is concerned with how to *weigh* the facts. Simply listing the facts is of no use at all.

*But public dispute is usually not over the facts: it is over the meaning or significance of the facts.*

So framing public discourse in terms of evidence and facts seriously misleads students about the nature of public discourse itself.

#### ■ Expressing a personal opinion

Most teachers realise that focusing only on the facts is insufficient, so they supplement or replace that approach with a second approach which interprets an argument as expressing personal opinions or beliefs. This approach focuses on the question of sincerity and on saying clearly what you believe. It tries to help students work out what they believe. Thus teachers will encourage students to debate and argue with one another to discover what they really think. There is an image here of students putting into words their inner feelings about an issue. The belief is that if students do this they will be able to engage coherently in public disputes.

As a rule controversial topics are chosen because they are seen to be something that students can really get into; what is valued is strength

*What is valued is strength and sincerity of conviction.*

and sincerity of conviction. As a consequence students may write short vehement texts which are then often viewed by teachers as expressions of thoughtless prejudice. The teacher is caught in a bind between wanting to comment on the student's prejudices and allowing that opinion to stand because after all it is the student's personally-felt opinion.

What do you do when students come out with 'prejudices' or 'ideologies' that are 'unacceptable'? Teachers using this approach are constantly having to decide whether to accept something a student says or writes 'because that is his personal opinion' or whether to argue with the student and try to get him to change his view. This can be an agonising dilemma because according to one understanding of public discourse, liberalism, 'we all have a right to their own personal opinions and beliefs'. So intervening in any way is regarded as authoritarianism or indoctrination. Yet teachers also know that there are standards of acceptability in assessing public argument.

The other consequence of this approach to writing public discourse is that the student's capacities to develop thought in writing are constrained because simply stating one's opinion allows a relatively simple transfer of the patterns of ordinary speech to writing. Merely stating their personal opinion does not create the need for students to develop their grammatical repertoire.

*Merely stating their personal opinion does not create the need for students to develop their grammatical repertoire.*

Framing public discourse as the expression of private opinions has the advantage of emphasising the *evaluative* dimension of public discourse which is overlooked by the approach based on facts and evidence. However, this is achieved at the cost of ignoring (or denying) the existence of public criteria for making these judgements or evaluations. Implicit in this approach is the view that students already possess within themselves the means for participating in public discourse; the only problem is that they need to find a means for expressing these private sources of public meaning.

### ■ Persuading an audience

A newer approach to public discourse is to focus on the relationship between the writer and the reader. Central to this method is the issue of persuasion. The question is whether a particular argument is persuasive for a particular audience. The focus is on argumentation as rhetoric, an exchange between a writer and her audience.

The audience persuasion approach has gone hand in hand with a move away from the essay as a central genre for learning to engage in public discourse. Students are asked to explore other genres such as posters, advertisements, videos, short talks and so on which are considered 'more real' than the traditional academic essay. This approach will often require students to do research to define more precisely who their audience actually is and to think about what sort of reasons would influence them to change their mind and accept the writer's claim.

## 4 Our approach to public discourse

The approach we advocate in this curriculum is different from all of these. It is not that we deny that these approaches all possess valid elements. As Halliday<sup>2</sup> has made clear, any utterance or text involves all these dimensions:

- it says something about the world;
- it is a communication to an audience or readership;
- it expresses the mind or ideas of the author.

So it is not that we reject these dimensions of public discourse. The question for us is what is the most efficient point of entry for students. Which dimension opens up an understanding of public discourse?

### Public discourse is a community of texts

*All utterances and texts take place within a community of other texts.*

Our starting point has been to focus on a further dimension of texts: the fact that all utterances and texts take place within a community of other texts. This dimension of text is sometimes referred to as *intertextuality*.

We focus on the relationship between a specific instance of arguing and the other arguments that exist within the community. For us public discourse is an ongoing domain of discussion, debate, and argument that contains a relatively defined set of reasons which may be drawn on when justifying an argument. We focus on the way an argumentative text positions itself in relation to other possible views or positions. We focus on the fact that public discourse is aimed at a communal space that is already occupied by other texts and views. Arguing is joining a domain of debate that already exists.

We do not interpret the forms of argument that take place in this public domain as a matter of common sense, nor do we regard the capacity for this kind of argument as a natural endowment of each individual. Rather, we view these forms of argument as historically instituted so that students must be initiated into the historically created forms of arguing and reasoning if they are to participate in this domain of public discourse.

### Meaning derives from standard arguments

Our idea has been that a text's meaning comes out of its relationships to a whole range of other texts. In order to understand a text one must understand how it stands in relation to other texts, how it figures as a position within a debate.

*Our students need to be given access to these standard arguments if they are to place a specific argument in the larger framework.*

Of course, it is not true as a simple matter of fact that we assemble in our minds all the other texts we've read in order to identify the meaning of a particular text. What we do, though, is look at the larger argument within which that text is embedded. We have standard arguments in our minds and locate particular texts as part of these arguments. Our students need to be given access to these standard arguments if they are to place a specific argument in the larger framework.

Admittedly, some texts resist our classifications, resist our desire to assimilate them into the already known: these are the difficult texts we don't yet understand but can learn from.

But our capacity to identify a text's meaning depends on our initiation into these arguments. That is, there are 'reading formations' which create common understandings of the meaning of texts. It is clear that students who are unaware of these reading formations point to quite anomalous things in a text as its main point; usually, they are the only ideas they already understand in the text.

*Students...have a right to find out about these governing ideas through education.*

Our approach is predicated on the notion that students (especially those who have not had access in their home lives to the forms of reasoning which frame public life) have a right to find out about these governing ideas through education. Only by engaging with these traditions of public judgement will students be able to form and shape their own views in such a way as to be able to participate effectively in public life.

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*“ Students must be initiated into these historically created forms of arguing and reasoning if they are to participate in this domain of public discourse. ”*

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## 5 Concepts of language

We have noted that public literacy involves understanding both the *ideas* in the public domain as well as the *linguistic structures* and conventions that typically realise these meanings.

While these structures are not unique to public discourse, our students are unlikely to be familiar with them. The linguistic elements we focus on are common in texts within public discourse but may be uncommon in the texts which students have previously created.

### Linguistic structures

At this point, we will briefly describe two structures as examples of the conventions which students need to understand and use.

#### ■ Example 1: Topicalising views

In most texts people do things. The agents of action are real-life doers:

*The men down the road shot the ducks.*

However participation in public discourse typically involves a shift of attention away from people to views or arguments:

*Duck shooting is a sport just like any other.*

*The view that duck shooting is just another sport is absurd.*

This means *views* have to be topicalised rather than *people*. That is, a whole view or position must be made the topic of a sentence so that view itself can be discussed in the same sentence or subsequent sentences. Rather than there being real-life doers of actions, agency is either eliminated or transferred to the ideas themselves:

*The notion that duck shooting is just a sport has had a pernicious effect on our native birdlife.*

When students cannot do this — cannot efface human agency in their writing — there might be two possible explanations:

- They do not understand that the relevant topic is a view and not a person (and this has to do with not understanding the underlying meanings of the public culture they are entering).
- They simply do not command the linguistic repertoire to realise those meanings in writing.

#### ■ Example 2: Metacommentary

Often in an argument a writer must represent other views and show that these views are problematic as well as presenting his own view. How do readers tell which is the writer's view and which are the views the writer is questioning?

Often students who try to include other views in their writing appear to be contradicting themselves simply because they do not know the metacommentary which enables readers to understand how to take the ideas they are reading and who to attribute them to. Alerting students to the words and phrases used to sequence

*A whole view or position must be made the topic of a sentence so that view itself can be discussed ...*

and signal different positions in a single text can be of enormous help to students who may be trying, for the first time, to create a coherent argument.

## Linguistic theory

A central theme of this curriculum is that making a meaningful contribution to public discussion is not so much a matter of knowing more facts but of taking up a stance in relation to the facts; that public discourse is a matter of subjecting a situation to scrutiny in the light of a range of values, and that one judges a situation from the point of view of these values. This emphasis on taking up a position from which to view 'the facts' fits in nicely with the best available account of how language works.

This means that we can draw on some linguistic categories in order to help students with their writing in a way which accords well with our account of public discourse.

Halliday, whose linguistic theory we will use as a touchstone for talking about the details of writing, argues that any utterance or piece of coherent writing always has three dimensions to it<sup>3</sup>. These include:

- the *facts*, or what it is about;
- the stance or *point of view* it takes up in relation to what it is about and to the audience;
- the *texture*, or the threads which hold the whole thing together as a coherent statement.

### Facts

For our purposes the first of these dimensions deals with 'the facts' of the situation, such as what happened, what the effects are, who is affected, and so on — all the details of the particular topic or case. Let's call this dimension the 'facts of the case'.

Now the crucial emphasis in this curriculum is that public discourse is not just about getting the facts right: it is about judging the facts, and this is a matter of bringing a range of values to bear on the facts.

### Point of view

The second dimension — judging the facts in the light of values — is where we take up a stance in relation to the facts and in relation to other interpretations of the facts. So different views will be positioned differently depending on which values or mix of values we invoke to interpret the particular situation.

### Texture

Halliday's third dimension focuses on how a text is made to flow so that it makes sense. This dimension deals both with the *sequencing* of the linguistic surface of a text so that it forms a coherent utterance and with the grammatical *resources* needed for doing this, especially in writing.

*Public discourse is not just about getting the facts right: it is about judging the facts ...*

*It is the rhetorical demands of the writing task which create the pressure for students to develop their grammatical repertoire.*

## Should grammar be taught?

When they try to enact the various rhetorical moves or speech acts of public debate, students experience the need for a more developed grammar and can understand the point of learning and using a range of grammatical structures.

For example, it is when they try to provide a statement of other positions that students realise the point of topicalising other views and of using passive and nominal forms. It is when they want to express a concession in writing that they understand the point of using parallel structures.

So it is the rhetorical demands of the writing task which create the pressure for students to develop their grammatical repertoire.

## To teach or not to teach

However, this doesn't mean that students will learn these grammatical features 'naturally' simply because they have taken on a role and defined the situation. Different students will need different degrees of help with the grammatical structures of written English. Often these structures and patterns can simply be pointed out in other texts to help students recognise their functions in writing.

The danger, of course, is that once grammatical structures are pointed out students may see the text itself as being simply a vehicle for these structures instead of seeing that the rhetorical and grammatical structures should be subordinate to the expression of a well-reasoned argument. However, this danger is not a reason for refusing to point out any linguistic patterns or structures at all, an approach which would again leave many students in the lurch. Teachers will have to make their own judgements about how many linguistic features to point out and how explicitly to focus on them. This will be a matter of judgement in terms of the students, the length of the course, and so on.

However, it is important to be aware of one response commonly met with in students learning a new linguistic pattern. When students learn a new feature they almost inevitably tend to overuse it and use it inappropriately. This is their way of practising and coming to grips with the structure. We think a balance has to be struck between allowing students the chance to play with these new elements and pointing out their misuse. Again, teachers will have to make their own judgements on this.

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*“ A central theme of this curriculum is that making a meaningful contribution to public discussion is not so much a matter of knowing more facts but of taking up a stance in relation to the facts ... ”*

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## 6 What public discourse includes

One of the first problems we face in a curriculum on public discourse is in describing what public discourse is *about*. What are the questions, situations and issues that form the topics of public discourse? What sorts of things is the community interested in discussing and debating? Are there some things that are definitely not subject to public debate and other things that must be publicly discussed?

### Is anything excluded?

For most knowledge disciplines we can say whether something is of interest to that discipline or not. For example, astronomy is not interested in the latest hair styles in Paris; nor is economics interested in the fossil remains of plants from millennia ago. Can we say the same sort of thing about public discourse? Are there things that interest public discourse and other things that are of no interest to it?

Now, public discourse is odd because a community can become interested in any question and debate what this means for the community as a whole. In a sense nothing is in a position to be automatically excluded from public scrutiny and debate. Anything might suddenly become of interest to a whole community and become a subject of discussion and debate.

*Anything might suddenly become of interest to a whole community and become a subject of discussion and debate.*

### Examples

So we often find some people insisting that something should not be a matter of public debate, while others insist that it should be.

- 1 For example, some insist that the spy services and intelligence agencies in a country should not be open to public scrutiny, that the public should not know of them or discuss them, otherwise they will become known to enemy countries and will be unable to continue spying. Others, though, reply that if spies are not answerable to public scrutiny they will become a secret law unto themselves: they will be able to spy on whoever they choose and will inevitably become corrupt and try to exercise secret control
- 2 Another example is that some people say that the personal lives of well-known people should not be a matter for public debate or exposure; that what politicians do in their private lives, for instance, is no one's business. Other people, however, insist that the public has a right to know about these matters and discuss them.

So all we can say is that there are no clear boundaries to public discourse. What is discussed and debated will change with the times. Sometimes the attention of the public will be captured by trivial things; sometimes by strange things; sometimes the community will overlook the important things. All we can say is that whether something should or should not be a topic for public debate is itself a matter for public debate.

*Whether something should or should not be a topic for public debate is itself a matter for public debate.*



## What's included?

Potentially anything at all can become a matter of community concern. For example, something as scientific as the ozone layer is currently a matter of public discussion. If you had said twenty years ago that one day there would be a lot of public concern about the state of the ozone layer, people would probably have laughed at you. Of what possible interest could the ozone layer ever be to anyone except meteorologists and astronomers?

Similarly, if you told young people today that a couple of decades ago there was a vigorous public debate about the length of men's hair, this would strike them as equally preposterous. The topics that come within the scope of public discourse are a reflection of what that public thinks needs to be discussed publicly — and this could be anything.

So don't think that the only matters of public concern are things like the state of the economy or who is in government or what politicians are doing or saying. Public discourse deals with far more than just politicians, political parties or governments.

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*“ Public discourse deals with far more than just politicians, political parties or governments. ”*

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## 7 Public literacy and government

Public literacy is sometimes taken to mean enabling people to gain access to the services of the modern welfare state, services which they have been unwilling or unable to take up precisely because they lack knowledge of the institutions which provide them or because they do not have the skills to access such services.

### Clients

A lack of literacy skills may prevent people from being able to use exactly those services which are intended for them. Public literacy is then taken to be a means for equalising the opportunities of disadvantaged clients of the modern welfare state. Underlying this approach to social literacy is of course a particular image of persons and of the state and society:

*Public literacy is then taken to be a means for equalising the opportunities of disadvantaged clients of the modern welfare state.*

- **the view of the person as consumer or client;**
- **the view of the state as provider.**

What is also presupposed here is the role of the teacher as a kind of mediator who knows how to get things or can help equip people to get things for themselves. This is reflected in the kinds of tasks that students are taught: writing a job application, writing a letter of complaint, writing a Letter to the Editor of a newspaper.

The fact that teachers themselves do not really inhabit this dependent realm — they in fact inhabit a public culture which gives their own lives orientation and sense — will be hidden from the students.

### Citizens

The notion that public literacy can be an important step in enabling students to enter the same public domain as the teacher requires a quite different way of conceiving of public literacy. We are not suggesting that students not be functional members of the society. Rather we are saying that students should not simply be consumers or clients of the state: they should also be citizens.

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*“ Students should not simply be consumers or clients of the state: they should also be citizens. ”*

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# ANALYSING LETTERS

## 1 A sample Letter to the Editor

Here is a letter from the *Age* newspaper.

*What does this letter tell us about the writer of the letter?*

*What would a person have to know and be able to do to write a letter like this letter?*

### Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll

*from M. Oxe, President of  
Bicycle Victoria*

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker ('The Age', 30/3), is a smokescreen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magic rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm. Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma: road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

M. Oxe,  
Ivanhoe

A shorthand way of explaining the aim of this curriculum would be simply to say that it aims to enable students to write letters like this one.

Our aim in this section will be to describe all the things someone must know and be able to do to write a such a letter. This will explain the activities in this curriculum and how they are ordered.

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*“ This curriculum aims...to enable students to write letters like this one. ”*

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## ■ Letters state a community problem

The first thing to say about this letter is that it has to do with *a problem*, the problem of road deaths.

The writer is concerned with the number of deaths on the road. Note that the writer is not writing about a personal problem, or a problem that centres on his own life but rather what he understands to be a problem for the whole community. The writer refers to classes of people, 'pedestrians', 'cyclists', 'our high risk teenage sons'. These are members of the community the writer does not know personally, yet he is concerned for their safety.

### *Statement of the problem*

# Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll

from M. Oxeer, President of  
Bicycle Victoria

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age*, 30/3), is a smokescreen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magic rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm. Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma: road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

M. Oxeer,  
Ivanhoe

We can extend this idea to say that the writer's concern for the number of people dying on the roads shows a commitment to fellow human beings, a commitment to the values of life and the reduction of suffering. Or to put this another way, the letter shows the writer to be taking responsibility as a member of the community for a problem within the community.

At the end of the letter this assumption of responsibility is made explicit: the writer refers to 'our bankrupting road trauma, road transport and vehicle associated environmental problems'. The use of

*The letter shows the writer to be taking responsibility as a member of the community ...*

the word 'our' illustrates the point we are making here. The 'us' or 'we' that the possessive 'our' refers to is the writer as a member of the community assuming responsibility for a problem within the community. Avoidable road trauma is an affront to this writer because of the values he holds. And these values are very widely held — at least in Victoria and Australia. So through adopting this stance, the writer 'produces' himself as a citizen within the community.

*Comment:*

*The writer believes that her contribution to this problem can make a difference.*

We would like to suggest that this stance of the writer as a citizen is characteristic of all Letters to the Editor and we would also like to suggest that it is not necessarily a natural stance. By that we mean that not all people take the kind of responsibility that is adopted in this letter, nor (perhaps more significantly) do people imagine that their 'voice' counts in the way that the writer of this letter believes his voice counts. After all, the writer not only defines a problem for the community but also suggests a solution or direction that should be adopted to deal with this problem. The writer believes that his contribution to this problem can make a difference. In other words the writer presupposes a position of both responsibility and of authority.

'So what?' you may ask.

Before going on to look at other features of this letter, we would like to draw out what we think follows from this interpretation for teaching. It seems that in order to write a letter a student has to be able to adopt a stance like the stance taken by the writer of this letter. That is, the writer has to write from the standpoint of values taking himself as a representative of those values. What that means is that a student has to become familiar with the kind of values that are expressed or realised in letters. This is something to be taught to students.

*The way in which these values are realised (and the authority to voice them) is something that is learnt.*

We wouldn't like to be misinterpreted here: we are not suggesting that these values are foreign to students, that only people who write letters share these values. We are suggesting that the way in which these values are realised (and the authority to voice them) is something that is learnt. Of course people who write Letters to the Editor do not have to take themselves as citizens because they already feel themselves to be so, and as citizens they get angry, indignant or frustrated and may write to the newspaper to put their views in relation to a particular issue.

All we are suggesting is that this feeling, this confidence, is a result of previous learning, a learning which is also a learning of a particular use of language. And for those people who do not share that confidence (which is also a competence) it may be possible to explicitly teach the ways in which a person can project himself or herself as a citizen.

*New ways of imagining oneself make a difference.*

One final remark here. An objection may be raised that we are suggesting that authority and power simply derive from linguistic manipulation when in reality people's powerlessness derives from their actual life position defined by their locations within society, be it as members of classes, ethnic groups, or families. To answer this objection would require a long discussion: all we can offer at this point is to say that new ways of imagining oneself make a difference. What one makes of that difference with respect to other aspects of one's life or in affecting public policy will vary.

*The letter...creates the writer as a citizen.*

## ■ Letters present a consistency of view

The first thing we have said about the letter is that it creates the writer as a citizen, someone who assumes responsibility for the community as a whole, at least as far as this particular problem is concerned.

Why is this important? Why is it important to relocate the student as a person in authority, a person who assumes responsibility for a community? The reason is that it is this location — the combination of a commitment to universal values, the power to enact those values, and the necessity to gain agreement from others who share those values — that creates the motive for consistency of viewpoint.

If students understand themselves to be in that position then they can appreciate the point of being consistent in their view. Otherwise when confronted with a conflict they are likely to write, as we may do in everyday life, 'I agree with this but I also agree with that'.

### Occupying a vantage point

*For some people, the belief that they occupy such a position is inculcated from a very early age ...*

For some people, the belief that they occupy such a position is something that is inculcated from a very early age, and little in their upbringing challenges this conception. There is an ease and lack of self-consciousness about this position, indeed it seems natural; and not only do they easily slip into assuming this particular stance when situations demand, but they also find it difficult to imagine that this is not a position which everyone occupies. Indeed the assumption that all people are like them is part of their self-concept.

It is perhaps this cultural blindness which leads people to conceive of Letters to the Editor as simply expressions of personal opinion. Indeed they do work as such for people whose sense of themselves is as a powerful and duly responsible voice in the community — that is why they may be able to just dash off a letter when they are indignant about something. However for others, whether adults or younger students, taking up a position or vantage point from which to speak is a process which has to be learnt.

#### Comments:

A couple of additional remarks are warranted at this point. First, the notion that there is a position from which utterances are made cannot be identified with one particular tradition of ideas; there are in fact conflicting traditions, all of which provide such positions. Second, although there may be a connection between positions or vantage points and real social location there is no essential identity between these positions and social location, whether that social location be characterised in either class or gender terms.

*In modern democratic societies the imaginary construct is that everyone, or at least every adult, has power ...*

To clarify in a little more detail what one has to believe to write a letter like the one above — it is not that you have to believe you are powerful in the sense that you have a lot of money, that important people know you, that you are a member of the ruling class, or that you enjoy a particular status. Indeed, in modern democratic societies the imaginary construct is that everyone, or at least every adult, has power, and that this power in public life is the power of reason. So the writer of the letter must imagine herself in a society conceived in this way, addressing a community receptive to the power of good reason.

What does this mean for teaching this kind of writing? Students have to be initiated into this construct in order to write, yet it is through the writing itself that this initiation occurs. There is a movement back and forth between providing *general* understandings, and situations that enable students to locate themselves within this conception of society in order to understand the point of writing, and reflecting upon the writing to reach a *specific* understanding of the position from which it is written.

## ■ Letters are usually arguments

We have said so far that this letter presents a problem and a solution. While this bare pattern is characteristic of many letters, it does not always occur. Some letters simply establish a problem, others do much more than that. This letter does more than state a problem and solution; it is itself a response to another view as to how to solve the problem of road trauma. The writer presents a view other than her own, and then, by providing reasons, attempts to show that her view is better than the other view presented. So what the writer does is present an argument.

If students are to learn to write letters like this one, then they too have to learn to write arguments. What does the fact that the writer presents an argument tell us about the writer and the kind of community in which that writer belongs? So far we have said that certain features of the letter show that the writer experiences herself as a citizen who takes responsibility for the wellbeing of the community.

The fact that the letter is, as well, an argument shows two things:

- The community contains conflicting views about how to deal with the problem of road trauma. One approach is what the writer characterises as the 'windbag approach.' The other approach is that adopted by the writer.
- The argumentative nature of the letter shows that in this community the way in which decisions or policies are made, the way in which differences are settled, is through appeal to reason.

So participants and citizens in this community who want the community to act in one way rather than another must appeal to good reason. The writer must show that in contrast to other views her view is the most reasonable.

How does the writer of this letter do that?

### Pointing out discrepancies

The writer points out that as a solution to the problem of road trauma 'the wind bag approach' won't work because people (pedestrians and cyclists) will still be harmed. The other view is shown to have shortcomings. There is something discrepant about the other view. The writer then points out that the reason it will not work is because it is symptomatic of a whole way of looking at the problem of road trauma which is itself wrong. This way of looking at road trauma she characterises as 'technological'. Against this way of looking at the solution to the problem of road trauma the writer counterposes the 'human user factor'. Looked at from this perspective, what is necessary

*The community contains conflicting views about how to deal with the problem ...*

*Differences are settled ... through appeal to reason.*

is 'education and training'. So the writer sees the other view as providing an instance of a whole perspective:

**airbags**

= bike helmets

= technological solutions

= magic rabbits' feet

against which she counterposes her perspective:

**human user factor**

= education and training.

So the way the writer describes different views to show one is better than another is not just by pointing to certain *facts* to show that one solution doesn't work. The argument is that the windbag approach can't work because it is based on a *misconception* of what human beings are like. The writer forges a connection between fitting airbags to cars as a way of solving the problem of road trauma with a particular conception of human beings and of ways of treating human beings — the 'technological or windbag approach'.

The writer then contrasts that conception with another conception of human beings, which emphasises personal responsibility based on understanding, 'the human user factor', and that leads to a different way of conceiving of solutions to the problem — 'education and training'.

The writer's argument could be characterised as follows.

- 1 **Fitting airbags to cars = thinking of human beings as mindless machines.**
- 2 **But we should think of humans as responsible beings.**
- 3 **So we should educate and train them.**

*The way the argument works is not through an appeal to facts or evidence ...*

The point we want to bring out is that the way the argument works is not through an appeal to *facts* or *evidence*; that is, its conclusions are not drawn or inferred from facts or evidence. (The whole traditional vocabulary of 'clear thinking' is in fact an unhelpful way of learning about argument.) Rather, the writer draws on ideas about the nature of human beings to produce good reasons for the community to act in one way rather than another.

## ■ Writers argue from within traditions

One last crucial point about these ideas: they are not simply personal opinions. They are grand *traditions* (in this case the tradition of *humanism*) that readers can recognise because they too share in these traditions. The persuasiveness, or even the fact that the letter makes any sense at all, is inseparable then from some level of identification with these underlying traditions. It is through the tradition of humanism that the writer looks at the installation of windbags in cars and sees this as wrong-headed, and this motivates her to write a letter to the *Age* suggesting another solution.



Of course it could be said that given that the writer is President of *Bicycle Victoria* there may be other reasons why she has written the letter. But whether the writer is simply using the tradition of humanism to mount her case or whether she genuinely believes her argument doesn't make any difference for the presentation itself, although a later writer may point to absences in the argument to suggest another possible reading.

### **But what about creativity?**

The paradox here is that the uniqueness of the writer's 'voice' is related to the application of these publicly shared traditions. The individuality of the writer is not the expression of an inner self but arises from the connections the writer makes between the tradition she draws on and the particular issues she is concerned with.

*It is through these traditions that argument in the public realm occurs.*

How they are related, whether these traditions are resources for finding a voice or become heavy burdens which suffocate voices, or act as different things at different times, is a crucial question. Our overall point, though, is that it is through these traditions that argument in the public realm occurs.

## **Summary**

So far we have used a Letter to the Editor to provide an interpretation of the kinds of understandings the writer of the letter has in order to write such a letter.

We have attempted to bring out three things:

- **the self-concept of the writer as a citizen;**
- **the conception of the community or context in which that writing occurs;**
- **the kinds of reasons that the writer draws on.**

In doing so we hope we have not given the impression that every time people write a Letter to the Editor they think in terms like this about the process; if people did, they would probably be so overloaded that they wouldn't be able to write about what they wanted to at all. For people who write such letters the sources of their capacities are enormously varied, and complex. To say that their learning has been through osmosis is too simple.

Our aim in putting names to things is to focus attention on certain general prerequisites for writing in this particular realm, which many students are unaware of. If what is usually implicit can be highlighted for students, this may help them appreciate the point of writing in this way.

## 2 Other features of letters

We would now like to point out some features of the letter which realise these understandings. In the letter below we have circled and labelled different parts of the letter.

We have used these names

- other position;
- discrepancy;
- concession;
- writer's position;

to identify the features that make the letter an argument.

*other position*

*writer's position*

# Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll

from M. Oxe, President of  
Bicycle Victoria

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age*, 30/3), is a smokescreen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage boys to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magic rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm. Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma: road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

M. Oxe,  
Ivanhoe

*discrepancy*

*concession*

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### Other position

The 'other' position is usually introduced early in a letter. In this example, 'the air bag approach' and 'calls to fit airbags to motor cars' are introduced in the first and second sentences.

### Discrepancy

The problem for this position or discrepancy is raised in the second paragraph, 'Will airbags save passengers? Do we just ...?'

### Concession

A concession is made to the other position in the fourth paragraph, 'Sure helmets reduce head injuries, but...'

### Writer's position

The writer's position is to provide 'education and training'.

In the last paragraph both the other position and the writer's position appear: this is a *summary* of the argument.

One aspect of this letter is that it *is* an argument. The other aspect is that it draws on a particular tradition. What is clearly relevant to this aspect is illustration. Fitting airbags is one illustration of a technological approach, as are bike helmets; similarly training and licensing of truck drivers are illustrations of 'the human user' approach.

### Why identify these aspects of text?

We have used this letter to identify the kind of imaginary space which students have to be introduced to in order to understand the point of Letters to the Editor, and really all texts in public or political debate. However, merely exposing students to such ideas can leave them feeling completely helpless, without any idea of what to do.

To be able to perform in that realm they also have to have some 'tools'. (I have put the word 'tool' here in shudder quotes because the problem with the use of the word 'tool' here is that a tool doesn't usually appear in the product which it is used to produce, whereas these tools are in fact features of the written product.) Enabling students to identify and use these features of text helps them to argue, to show the relationship between ideas and so to become participants within that space.

### A beginning ...

One final remark here. We have taken up considerable space to interpret just one letter to the editor so that the kinds of ideas and activities in this curriculum (and the way in which they are sequenced) may make sense. However no single letter encompasses the range of features with which students must become accustomed to become accomplished participants in public debate. The features of the letter we have identified are really just the tip of a fairly large iceberg. So even though we have taken a lot of time to identify the kinds of

*Merely exposing students to such ideas can leave them feeling completely helpless...*

understandings and features of letters that are crucial for students to learn, we have by no means exhausted all of these features.

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*“ Enabling students to identify and use these features of text helps them to argue, to show the relationship between ideas and so to become participants within that space. ”*

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# THE STRUCTURE OF THE COURSE

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## 1 The curriculum

We have tried to interpret one Letter to the Editor in order to introduce some of the ideas in this curriculum and some of the ideas which lie behind it. We would now like to explain the sequence in which the ideas and activities in this course are presented.

The first part of the curriculum presented in *Part 2 (Themes)* familiarises students with Letters to the Editor. The point of this is to show students that while people write about a whole range of different issues, there are some common features to the letters:

- **letters identify problems and sometimes suggest solutions to these problems;**
- **when letter writers state a problem or state a solution to a problem they are in fact invoking a value;**
- **the values being invoked are not infinite — indeed, despite the huge range of different issues that people write about there are a few core values which writers appeal to;**
- **the kinds of problems and solutions identified are problems and solutions for the whole community, so the writers of the letters are taking themselves to be citizens within the community in the sense described above.**

The letters that students are presented with early in the course have been selected so they emphasise the pattern of problem and solution. That is, we have not included letters which *argue against* other views — even though the one we have just examined as a sample in fact presents just such an argument!

## 2 The three stages

The course is designed to begin with what seem to be just 'the facts' and then slowly and deliberately unveils just how much 'the facts' are really a matter of interpretation and judgement. This way of sequencing the curriculum has been deliberately chosen because most students instinctively think that all discourse is really just about 'the facts'.

### Stages

There are three distinct stages.

#### Themes 1-9

So we start with the more factual aspects — *problems and solutions* — and then show that what is a problem or a solution is a matter of what angle you are viewing it from. We then point out that the angles that things can be viewed from within public debate are determined by a number of general *values*.

#### Theme 10-12

Our next move is to introduce the idea that public discourse is not only about problems and solutions, it is also about other views of what the problems and solutions are. So, public discourse is *argumentative*. It deals not only with 'the facts' as problems and solutions but also with other views. So in a sense public discourse is also an argument about which values are more important or relevant in particular situations.

#### Themes 13-21

The final move in the curriculum is to show that these values have been organised into a small number of *traditions* which organise the conventional stances taken up or adopted in public discourse.

Students will:

- identify particular traditions within texts;
- mark the features of these traditions;
- write from the standpoint of different traditions;
- write their views on issues, applying their learning.

In a sense we could say that the basic thrust of the curriculum is to show that the possible stances that can be adopted in public discourse are fairly well articulated. It is not as if there is an infinite number of points of view that can be adopted. Points of view derive their definition from their relationship to a small number of values and the way these have been organised into traditions. Of course there are still many variations within each of these values and traditions.

Another way of expressing this would be to say that we can construct innumerable points of view by recombining and adjusting the balance of only a few elements drawn from a small number of values and traditions.

*Points of view derive their definition from their relationship to a small number of values and the way these are organised into traditions.*

## Course Summary

### *Themes 1-9*

#### **1 Citizens & problems**

Letters to the Editor of newspapers are presented as examples of public discourse. The public realm consists of:

##### **Problems**

Problems (and sometimes solutions) to a range of issues for the community;

##### **Values**

A range of values appealed to in identifying problems and offering solutions;

##### **Citizens**

The persona of a citizen who draws on values shared within the community to address other citizens for the good of the community.

### *Themes 10-12*

#### **2 Letters as arguments**

Letters do not just raise problems and suggest solutions: they also respond to other views either to agree or ( more commonly) to disagree.

This section introduces these ideas:

##### **Argument**

##### **Rationality**

##### **Rhetorical structures for argument.**

### *Themes 13-21*

#### **3 Drawing on traditions**

While some arguments occur because people disagree about the most effective way of doing something, they also argue because they speak from within different traditions.

The importance of the idea of tradition, from the point of view of reading and writing, is that traditions are the source for the reasoning that occurs in argument.

This section introduces the main traditions:

##### **Conservatism**

##### **Liberalism**

##### **Socialism**

##### **Scientific Management**

### 3 Selecting your own letters

You should feel free to select your own letters according to the state of current public debate and the interests and reading levels of your particular students.

However, there are some rules of thumb:

- *During the first part of the course be careful not to introduce letters of response.*

You will have to keep letters that raise problems separate from letters responding to other positions. Remember that the course is sequenced so that initially only letters raising problems are dealt with. Letters that respond to or argue with other letters or points of view are introduced later.

- *Don't assume that the shorter a letter is the better it is to use.*

In fact what you tend to find is that the short letters assume a lot. They don't bother to spell out what the problem is very fully, nor what their solution is, nor do they justify their solution. In fact they tend to simply focus on the people involved — either other people involved in the public debate or the actual people involved in the problematic situation. And this people-focus is mostly taken up with praising or blaming, supporting or ridiculing.

So for example, there is a section in the *Age* called *Access Age* where people can phone in a short comment and at first it occurred to us that this might be ideal to use for adult basic education students because the comments are short and topical, and their grammar is very speech-like.

But when we looked at them closely what we found was that they were in fact very obscure because they assumed that readers were following the debate and were already familiar with the issues. And as we have already said, they tended to focus on the people involved rather than on the situation itself.

- *Vary your newspaper sources.*

Letters to tabloid newspapers such as the *Sun Herald* are often better in raising problems or suggesting solutions than those to the more up-market newspapers like the *Age* or the *Australian*.

However, the reasoning they invoke is often highly implicit or metaphorical. You will find that it is often better to use longer letters to get at the values and, more especially, the traditions.



# FURTHER INFORMATION

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## 1 Finding out more

The trouble here is that there is not much material available on this approach to public discourse that is easy to read. Most of the material that would help is written by philosophers, and although some of it is not difficult to read, it tends to be in very long books. Let us explain why this is so.

The current approach to public discourse in schools seems fairly obvious and self-evident; in fact almost nothing is actually written about it. It is just a set of teaching techniques and a way of questioning a text that gets passed on from generation to generation. However, even 'clear thinking' originally arose out of the writings of philosophers.

### Clear thinking and empiricism

'Clear thinking' developed out of the empiricist approach which insisted that there were two radically different sorts of statements.

#### Facts

The first sort were factual statements; these were statements about 'the facts' and their adequacy was to be assessed purely in terms of the facts. So these empirical statements were to be judged for their adequacy, their truth, by comparing what they said with what the facts really were.

This notion of empirical statement led to one line of questioning in clear thinking: *has the writer provided enough evidence?* And here students were expected to say things like:

- there is not enough evidence;
- the writer does not provide any proof for the statements made;
- there are no statistics.

#### Value judgements

The other sort of statement recognised by the empiricists was defined simply as non-empirical. Any statement that went beyond a simple listing of the facts — any attempt to judge something in terms of its worth, its value, its morality, its public value — was placed in this rag-bag collection and treated as somehow suspect. Strict logical positivists insisted that the statements from this collection were not even statements at all; they were just nonsense or expressions of feelings.

According to this view the only real statements were statements that spoke about facts and were verifiable in terms of the facts alone. Another view was that statements within this group were not statements but were instead an expression of a wish or a command. They are not saying how things are but how they should be. And, again, this expression of a wish or command had nothing to do with the facts of the situation.

*According to this view  
the only real statements  
were statements that  
spoke about facts ...*

### Values as inner feelings

So the empiricists gradually evolved a theory about this second type which saw such statements not as presenting views or judgements but as expressing inner psychological feelings. What gave meaning to these utterances was the psychological feelings in the speaker. This emphasis on the psychological was then translated into the distinction between *objective* and *subjective*. The objective is a matter of the facts of the situation. The subjective is a matter of someone's inner needs, wishes, hopes and desires.

*People disagreed because they were biased by their inner desires, hopes and fears.*

This provided a way of explaining the fact that there were many points of view. The facts provided any empirical content in an utterance; this was the objective component and all the rest was a matter of subjective bias. So, according to this account, people disagreed because they were biased by their inner desires, hopes and fears.

This subjective basis for statements was then embraced by some as showing that all discourse about values, ethics, politics, and so on was really just an expression of personal opinion. And so the only important question about these sorts of statements was not

'Does it handle the facts of the case?'

but

'Does it express what I really feel?'

'Is it an authentic statement expressing my real feelings?'

This gave rise to the other approach to public discourse which lived alongside 'clear thinking' — the emphasis on the expression of personal opinion and personal response.

### Post-empiricism

This whole theory of the nature of statements was propounded by philosophers from about 1920 through to about 1960. Since then it has been discredited for a number of reasons.

One important reason for this is that it makes most scientific statements non-empirical as well. So even though its model of what a good statement should be was based on science, in fact it was operating with a naive view of how scientists work. The theory assumed that it was easy for scientists to somehow see reality itself to check their statements — but most of the time this is impossible.

The other reason why this theory has fallen into discredit was that it consigned whole areas of human discourse to the rubbish bin of nonsense or subjective fantasy. Many philosophers now insist that just because statements are not scientific does not mean that they are not meaningful and answerable to standards of rationality.

*It consigned whole areas of human discourse to the rubbish bin of nonsense or subjective fantasy.*

### Time lag in schools

However, even though it is now thirty years since philosophers abandoned the dogmatic empiricism which provided the rationale for 'clear thinking' in schools, there has been no real attempt to develop a

*So this curriculum is ...an educational approach to public discourse based on the new post-empiricist philosophies.*

new approach to public discourse in schools. In the tertiary sector philosophy departments there has been some work done on what is called informal logic, but even this is still too closely tied to the analytic techniques of formal logic.

At the school level there has been almost nothing. 'Clear thinking' and 'Expressing your personal opinion' have become entrenched as teaching strategies even though no one can remember why they were developed in the first place, and despite the fact that the theory which justified them is now discredited.

So this curriculum is an attempt to take the first step in developing an educational approach to public discourse based on the new post-empiricist philosophies.

### **All describing is from a point of view**

Contemporary post-empiricist philosophers insist that the distinction between describing reality and judging things cannot be made in any clear way. It is not possible to separate statements into two distinct camps: one group consisting of all the statements that simply tell the facts; and another group which passes judgements or takes up a point of view towards the facts.

*All description is from a point of view.*

According to this new view, all describing takes place within a framework, from a vantage point and in terms of purposes, values, goals and commitments. There is no such thing as pure description. All description is from a point of view. And as you will recognise, this theme is one that runs right through this curriculum: that public discourse is a matter of addressing the facts of the situation from a point of view.

### **Philosophy as history**

Another reason why it is difficult to point you towards accessible references outlining the basis of the approach taken in this course is that these new philosophical approaches have developed by going back and re-looking at philosophies that existed before the 18th Century explosion in science.

So, they have gone back and looked at Aristotle, and even pre-Socratic philosophies, the hermeneutic traditions that developed out of commentators on the Bible such as Vico, and have even re-examined Kant's *Third Critique of Judgement*, Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment's notions of habit and taste.

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*“ According to this new view, all describing takes place within a framework, from a vantage point and in terms of purposes, values, goals and commitments. There is no such thing as pure description. ”*

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This historical revision means that most of the writings by this group of philosophers consist of very long books re-examining these traditions. Consequently they assume some familiarity with the tradition of philosophy on the part of their readers.

## 2. Suggested reading

Anyway, here is a list of books that you might dip into:

- Arendt, Hannah     *The Human Condition*, Anchor Books, New York, 1959
- Halliday, M.A.K.    *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Edward Arnold, London, 1985
- Heller, Agnes       *Beyond Justice*, Basil Blackwell, London, 1987
- MacIntyre, Alister   *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1981
- Robbins, Bruce (ed.) *The Phantom Public Sphere*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993
- Taylor, Charles     *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992
- Walzer, M.          *Spheres of Justice*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1983

And you could always try Aristotle himself — either *The Rhetoric*, or *The Politics*. He is concise and clear, though dry.

A good introduction to the traditions outlined in this course is:

- Heywood, Andrew *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, Macmillan, London, 1992

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### Notes to Section 1

- 1 See Foucault, M., *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972.
- 2 Halliday, M.A.K. and Hasan, R., *Language Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social Semiotic Perspective*, Deakin University Press, Waurn Ponds, Victoria, 1985.
- 3 Halliday, op. cit.

# Public Literacy

## A Curriculum for Adult Basic Education

### *Part 2*

# Teaching Guide

### *Introduction to Part 2*

#### Themes 1-9

Citizens & problems

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# Introduction

*This curriculum introduces public discourse using Letters to the Editor as a medium.*

## Themes

We have arranged the material into themes. Each theme deals with what we consider to be a key understanding in gradually helping students to understand the underlying assumptions and assumed context of statements within the domain of public discourse. A theme might be used for one or several sessions or lessons, depending on the group.

## Using the Teaching Guide

We are not suggesting that you simply work your way through these teaching plans and do nothing else, although we believe you should take into account the suggested *sequence* for introducing the key ideas. It is up to you to decide the pacing and focus of your classes. You will need to decide for each individual class just how quickly to move through the curriculum — when to slow down, when to move more quickly, whether to spend more time on a particular key idea, whether to mix up the sequence a bit.

Similarly, it is up to you to decide what supplementary materials or issues to integrate into this central thread. You will need to decide where to let the class extrapolate from the central thread of the curriculum sequence and detour into the many interesting issues that can spin off from a core sequence of ideas such as this. It is up to you to decide whether to

- take time out to deal with specific 'current affairs' that are dominating the airways of contemporary public discourse
- delve into some history or geography
- follow up a specific issue by introducing a wider range of written materials or audio or video material.

So you can use these materials as a curriculum sequence, or simply as a resource to support your own program, introducing one of the themes or ideas only as it became clear that your students needed it. Whether you present it as an explicit curriculum to students or simply use it as background for your own planning will depend on your particular teaching style and your views about the relationship between intuitive writing and explicit teaching.

Most plans contain a few sample activities for helping students. We assume that experienced teachers will adapt and rework our suggestions to fit in with their existing teaching styles and routines. The plans are in no way exhaustive; in fact, we hope that teachers will develop a wide range of alternative ways of introducing students to public discourse. We hope to be able to gather and include a range of such materials in a later edition.

The background notes contain more explanations of the ideas in the course as well as reflections on some pedagogic issues in teaching this type of material.

## *Themes 1–9*

# Citizens & problems

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*Theme 1*

## **Introducing Letters to the Editor**

*Where do we find Letters to the Editor?  
What are they about?*



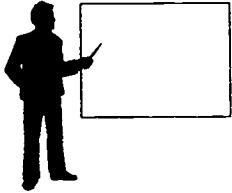
## Summary

*In this session (or sessions) you should do whatever is necessary to make students aware of Letters to the Editor and where they can be found.*

### Main points

- public debate covers a huge range of topics;
- public debate exists on any form of communication that reaches the public.

## Teaching notes



### Getting started

Try one or more of these:

- point out the way newspapers organise their presentation into pages or sections;
- ask students to make a collage of letters;
- bring in a range of newspapers so they gain a feel for their differences and similarities;
- read a few letters out and discuss a few issues.

### What do people argue about?

You need to spend some time, depending on your students, acquainting them with the actual range of issues that are publicly debated and where these debates take place.

Help students understand that papers such as *The Age* and the *Australian* are organised into sections. This is not so obvious with tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun-Herald*.

The topics will spill over into international issues. This is okay, but make sure there is plenty of focus on the issues and problems within a more defined community — such as Australia, or Victoria, or even the local community.

## Student activities



### ■ Conduct surveys of public debate

List the issues raised for debate in various media.

#### In newspapers

*Include local, metropolitan, national, special interest, ethnic, overseas*

- Letters to the Editor columns
- editorials
- newspaper commentators
- paid advertisements by pressure groups
- surveys

#### On television

- current affairs programs
- documentaries
- interviews
- news programs

#### On radio

- current affairs programs
- news
- talkback shows
- documentaries
- commentators
- interviews

#### and also...

- reports of parliament
- graffiti
- banners at marches, protests and picket lines
- lyrics of popular music

### ■ Other suggestions

- 1 Compare findings. Are there any differences between the various public media, or between different newspapers?
- 2 Pool findings into a class listing.
- 3 Organise issues into groups (such as environment, industrial relations, crime).
- 4 Discuss different ways of grouping the topics.
- 5 Make a large wall chart of all the topics.
- 6 Compare with newspapers from previous years. What were people discussing and debating in 1952?
- 7 Look at the Australian ethnic press (and newspapers from other countries if students can understand other languages).
- 8 Choose an issue and assemble a folio of contributions to that debate. This folio can be used later in the course.

## Issues

### **Locating the debate**

This first group of activities is intended to familiarise students with

- the locations where public debate take place
- the issues or problems discussed and debated.

Most students do in fact know of these locations in the sense that they tend to avoid them. They know that they exist and they know that people argue about boring or silly or obtuse issues that only the 'posh people' argue about. Most students do not feel that these topics of debate are part of their lives, rather they think that these issues should be attended to by 'them' i.e. the government, or 'the people who know', or 'the people who get paid to look after these things'. The underlying intention of this course is to help students feel that they can understand what these debates are about and can have a say in them.

At this stage of the course, do not lecture the students about their moral and political responsibility to take an interest in current affairs: it will only be counterproductive and put students off.

It is better to treat the activities as neutral investigations: i.e. what as a matter of fact do people argue about in these public arenas? Treat these early activities as documentaries not as consciousness-raising.

You will find that, as the course goes on, all students will in fact engage with at least some issues; this will happen as they come to feel that they understand what people are saying and can see other ways of responding. That is, the problem for most of us is that we feel manipulated: we think 'I don't like what this person is saying but I don't really know enough to argue against them'. Or we think, 'no matter what I read I always get sucked in and believe it; when I read one view I agree with it, but then when I read an opposite view I agree with that too'.

Students, like most of us, generally feel fairly helpless and vulnerable when faced with these debates. This course is intended to provide students with the skills needed to not feel inadequate when faced with public debate.

### **Reading levels**

If students are not confident readers, it may be best to give them the letters to read but then read those letters out loud at the beginning of the next session.

If students find the task easy and you are confident that they can do it then they can compare what they have marked with a partner. Students could also copy these letters for homework.

### **How much discussion should you have?**

The point of this first session is to begin to 'workshop' some common features of letters across a range of topics so that students begin to gain a sense of the common features or patterns of letters. This won't be obvious to students at all as they read the letters; they will probably want to discuss some of the issues.

How to handle this is fairly tricky. On the one hand, the point of the session should not get lost by a passionate discussion of specific topics or issues. On the other hand a problem always involves knowing and responding to a range of specific concrete detail. How much attention is given to the issues in each letter is a matter of judgement.

### ***Why two groups of letters?***

We divide Letters to the Editor into two groups:

- **problem letters** which raise a problem
- **response letters** which respond to earlier letters

This division is simply so that we can introduce students a bit at a time into what is going on in public debate. A simple way of knowing whether a letter is a **problem letter** or a **response letter** is to read the first paragraph and see if it refers to a previous letter.

We begin the course by looking only at **problem/solution letters**. This is so that students are not introduced to too many new things all at once. It should be made clear to everyone that **problem-solution letters** are not letters that have something wrong with them — have a problem. They are letters that raise a problem — and sometimes suggest a solution.

### ***Problem-solution letters***

- initiate a debate
- do not respond to an earlier letter
- describe a particular situation, state of affairs or event as a problem needing to be addressed
- appeal to a value in describing what is wrong with the situation.
- usually indicate who needs to act to redress the situation or who needs to give an account of why they haven't done something about it already
- often suggest a solution or what should be done to get rid of the problem.

*Problem-solution letters are dealt with in Themes 1–9.*

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***“ Students, like most of us, generally feel fairly helpless and vulnerable when faced with these debates. ”***

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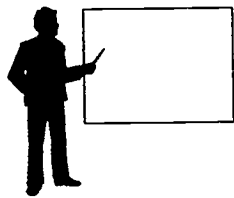
*Theme 2*

**Introducing problem-solution  
letters**

***These letters***

- ***raise problems about a range of issues or topics***
- ***sometimes offer solutions to the problems***

## Teaching notes



### Finding the problem

The letters used in the early stages of this course are carefully chosen to highlight the features we want students to notice. Reading a random selection from the daily paper will confuse students because there are too many different types of letters. So don't expect students to easily locate the features we are identifying in a random collection of letters from the newspaper.

For example, even identifying *what the problem* is can be tricky. For instance, take the letter we analysed in the Introduction:

## Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll

from M. Oxer, President of  
*Bicycle Victoria*

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age*, 30/3), is a smokescreen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magic rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm. Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma: road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

M. Oxer,  
Ivanhoe

If we asked what is the problem raised in this letter, you might say the problem is *the high road toll* or you might say the problem is *the airbag approach to road safety*

In other words, what is problematic can be:

- **the initial problem itself**  
— *the high road toll*
  - **a policy or practice addressing the problem**  
— *the airbag approach*
- or even:
- **another point of view about the problem.**

In order to help students gain a footing and be able to build on that footing we think it best not to introduce such complications at this early stage of the course, even if later on the initial hard lines drawn here prove to be much fuzzier.

### Selecting letters to study

For this reason we have carefully selected the initial set of letters to exclude letters which explicitly contain or bounce off *other points of view*. We call such letters **response letters**. We introduce these response letters later in the course.

So while we think it's fine for students to read the letters column, we would not suggest that they be given the task of identifying the problem in letters chosen at random at this stage because many of the letters they find will be response letters.

### Checking student answers

Students will often say what the problem is in their own words. That is they will not read out part of the letter even though they will probably have circled part of the letter. We don't worry about this. The main thing is that students understand that the letters raise problems.

### Using *Help for the Homeless*

Students will have trouble with this third letter. At no point is the problem summarised into a single phrase or sentence. The problem seems to be spread through the whole letter. The letter tells a story and it is through the story that the problem is raised. Students might circle the whole letter or they could just circle the first part. It doesn't matter which.

This letter also uses questions. In fact, letters often contain questions. In this letter they are a way of identifying or 'pointing the finger' at the institutions that should provide a solution to the problem.

## Student activities



### ■ Using *Passengers need to feel safe on trains*

- Show OHT 2/1 (OHT = Overhead Transparency) and ask students to look at Activity 1.
- Read the letter out loud, the students following along with you.
- Ask students to mark any words they don't know.
- Mark any unknown words on the overhead.
- Allow time for students to discuss and comment on the letter and the issues it raises.
- Mark the problem and solution for students on your OHT.
- Ask students to mark and label their copy in the same way.

### ■ Using *Why not give those brollies the boot*

- Ask students to circle the **problem** raised in the letter.
- Ask students to circle the **solution** offered in the letter
- Give your own answer on OHT explaining your reasoning. Discuss.

Don't worry if students circle different parts of the problem. Some students may circle one word, others a phrase, and others a whole paragraph. This could include reasons, things and examples.

For example in this letter students might mark *umbrellas* or *They are dangerous* or both. All this, we say, adds up to the problem.

### ■ Using *Help for the Homeless*

- Read out to the students
- This time the students work in pairs to circle and label the parts of the letter themselves.
- Check answers with the class on the OHT.



## Other possibilities

### ■ More letters

Students continue to work through **problem-solution** letters from the *Sample Letters*.

### ■ Community examples

Students could brainstorm to identify community problems they think should be addressed.

They could pick out the **problem-solution** letters from the daily paper and say what problem they are raising. Be careful to point out that sometimes writers are identifying *other people's solutions* as the problem.

## Homework

Give students three or four more letters from the *Sample Letters* to read and mark for homework.

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## Passengers need to feel safe on trains

We, as students of Sunshine West High School, are writing to express our concern regarding the vandalism and the lack of safety on trains and railway stations.

Recent examples, such as the attack on a woman at the Box Hill station and the boy who lost

his legs while committing an act of vandalism, demonstrate the need for safety on our public transport system.

Some suggestions to help solve these serious problems are the introduction of citizen-based groups to patrol the trains, an increase of police patrol and

manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers.

*Helen Butler*

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## Finding problems and solutions

## Activity

## Passengers need to feel safe on trains

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manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers.

*Helen Butler*

### Problem-solution letters

This letter could be said to be the 'archetype' of a problem-solution letter.

In the first paragraph Helen Butler *raises a problem*: vandalism and lack of safety on trains and railway stations.

She then provides some contemporary *examples of the problem* in the second paragraph.

Finally she offers some *solutions to the problem*.

### What to do:



- 1 Circle the part of the letter where the writer is raising a problem.
- 2 Circle that part of the letter where the writer is offering a solution to the problem.
- 3 Circle the part of the letter where the writer is providing reasons for the problem.
- 4 Circle the part of the letter where the writer is providing reasons for the solution.

## What is a *problem*?

- A problem is something that is **not right**
- A problem is something that is **wrong**
- A problem is something that **should be changed**
- A problem is something that **should be stopped**
- A problem is something that **should not be allowed**
- A problem is something that **you object to**
- A problem is something that **you are not happy about**
- A problem is something that is **not good for us**
- A problem is something that is **unfair**
- A problem is something that is **not working**
- A problem is something that is **stupid**
- A problem is something that is **wrecking things**
- A problem is something that is **ruining things**
- A problem is something that is **bad**
- A problem is something that is **making people unhappy**
- A problem is something that is **causing lots of suffering**



## What is a *solution*?

- A solution **deals with** a problem
- A solution **fixes** a problem
- A solution **addresses** a problem
- A solution **gets rid of** a problem
- A solution **focuses on** a problem
- A solution **solves** a problem
- A solution **tackles** a problem
- A solution **attends to** a problem
- A solution **is concerned with** a problem
- A solution **stops** a problem
- A solution **responds to** a problem
- A solution **resolves** a problem
- A solution **confronts** a problem
- A solution **contends with** a problem
- A solution **overcomes** a problem
- A solution **is directed at** a problem



## Overview: Letters which raise problems

Problem letters contain some general ideas that must appear in the letter somewhere. These ideas will usually be scattered through the letter — they won't just appear in one place.

### Summary

The overall drift of a letter raising a problem is something like this:

*To the Editor*

*Here is something that is not good for us.*

*Something must be done by someone to fix it.*

(and sometimes)

*Here is my solution*

## The problem pattern in detail

*Here is something wrong*

- **Here is something against our values**

Letter writers must show that there is a problem, something of concern, something not right, something that needs attention, that needs to be changed. They will do this by showing that the situation infringes against the values we use for judging the goodness of things.

*= it is causing harm*

it is undermining our way of life

it is unfair

it is infringing on people's freedom

it is not working

it is not cost-effective

*... that I know of*

- **Here is how I know about it**

Letter writers will usually first describe how they came across the problem. Sometimes they tell a story about something that happened to them as an illustration or proof that they know what they are talking about. Other times they just refer to something that is already fairly well known because it is in the papers or on the news.

*... and you should know too.*

- **This doesn't concern just me, it concerns us all**

Even though writers are obviously the only one writing the letter, they must somehow show that their worries are (or should be) the worries of everyone.

The way to notice this is to focus on the pronouns and the sorts of people mentioned in the letter. Even though a letter starts off with 'I' it must by the end have changed to *us, we* and *our*.

Along the way they might mention some groups who should also be concerned about the problem they are talking about, such as bush walkers or would-be travellers or parents. It is as if a letter is saying:

*This doesn't just concern me. It also affects you, and you and you. In fact, it affects us all.*

Sometimes this shift from *I* to *We /All* is done indirectly by using questions:

*Did you know that ...*

or by assuming agreement such as:

*Surely (= We would all agree that ...)*

*Something must  
be done ...*

- **Something should be done**

Just before the solution is introduced and as it is being introduced there will be signals of 'mustness' saying that it must be stopped or changed. These signals will usually be:

*must*

*need to*

*should*

*has a right to (=should have)*

But can also be:

*It is important to ...*

*It is imperative that ...*

*It is necessary that ...*

*It is crucial that ...*

*Wouldn't it be simpler to ...*

*I wonder why ... isn't used (= should be used)*

*... by someone*

- **By someone**

Usually writers will point to a group or organisation, especially the government who should be made responsible for doing something about the situation. This will often be done by directing a question to these bodies about what they are doing or why they aren't doing something.

*... to fix it.*

- **To make things right**

The writer will indicate the values that need to be satisfied for a satisfactory solution to the problem. These are the same values they used to state the problem in the first place. Notice that there can be a whole range of values used, not just one.

*Here is my solution.*

- **Here is my solution**

Not all letters put a solution — they might just raise a problem.

The statement of the solution will link all the previous meanings together into a single sentence. It will include:

**the problem; the community; must; the solution; and the values.**

The solution will be stated as reinstating the values, as righting the situation.

*Theme 3*

**Being a citizen**

***Letters to the Editor***

- ***raise problems for the whole community***
- ***speak to the whole community***



## Revision

### Check speed copying

Look at students handwriting, give them encouragement that their hand writing is okay. Students often think that their handwriting is too babyish. Ask students who are writing in upper case whether they can write in lower case.

## Student activities



### Revise the problem-solution pattern

- Check the student homework.
- Do two new letters that the students have not yet read.

### Explain the idea of citizenship

Write the word 'community' on the board, and related words such as:

common  
communism  
commerce  
commune  
communicate

Point out that the prefix **com** means *together with*.

Point out that people see themselves as members of different communities neighbourhoods, nations, the whole of humanity, Koories, Greeks, academics, sportspeople ...

(This could be an activity: students jot down as many different kinds of communities they can think of and you list them on the board.)

### Work through the workbook activities

Make sure that:

- you read the pairs of letters out loud
- students have a chance to ask about the meaning of words
- students have a chance to comment on the issues in the letters.

## Issues

### ***Personas and politics***

#### **The persona of citizen**

So far we have introduced students to

- some of the issues people write about
- a common pattern in these letter which is the pattern of problem-solution.

The point of this session is to introduce students to the idea that letter writers try to speak on behalf of the whole community. They try to represent or be a spokesperson for the whole community. We are calling this persona *being a citizen*.

A citizen is someone who cares about their community and tries to speak on behalf of it and act in the interests of the community as a whole. A citizen is someone who does not simply speak on behalf of their own self interest; she tries to speak on behalf of the interest of the whole community.

The main thing we are interested in here is setting up a distinction between personal interests and public interests or, to put it another way, between speaking on behalf of yourself and speaking on behalf of the community. This distinction will create a lot of discussion among your students because most people these days— including students— are cynical about political life.

#### **Cynicism about politics**

They will quickly tell you that 'everyone is just in it for their own chop'. Students know how to read politics as simply the ideological expression of private or selfish interests, even though they have never read Marx or Nietzsche. They have watched current affairs programs; they have seen corruption in high places exposed. They may even take pity on your naivety for taking seriously what politicians and others in public life say.

Adult students, especially, have 'been around'; they know the gap between public rhetoric and private reality. They know that public rhetoric can mask personal gain or greed and personal interest or ambition. To expect them to take the rhetoric seriously can seem like asking them to believe in the Easter Bunny again.

The denigration of public discourse is not limited to students. Three of the traditions we introduce to students in this curriculum contain strands which are suspicious of or hostile to public discourse.

#### **1 Conservative suspicion of public life**

Within the conservative tradition suspicion of democracy has been long-standing. Plato likened democracy to a ship governed by a mutinous squabbling crew ignorant of the laws of navigation.<sup>1</sup>

In modern conservative theory, apathy on the part of the citizens has been thought to be a key ingredient of a healthy democracy.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Liberal suspicion

A stance within liberal thinking argues that the good of the community will best be achieved by individuals pursuing their private interests, allowing the market to determine what happens. On this view, the good of the community is achieved not through widespread participation in public life and public decision, but through the private 'votes' of consumers in the market place.

## 3 Socialist suspicion

Within socialist thought, democratic politics often has been understood to be a mask for, or rationalisation of, particular class interests. Public statements have been understood to be simply coded expressions or rationalisations of these interests, rather than a genuine appeal to reason. In practice, this has led to a devaluation of democratic politics.

### But public discourse does matter

Yet each tradition contain strands going in the other direction. Conservatives have promoted public deliberation as a way by which a community can weigh the values that hold it together and so make judgements about particular courses of action. Aristotle for instance argued that because all individual judgements were limited a plurality of views was necessary to arrive at the best judgement.<sup>3</sup> Within liberalism, J. S. Mill argued that the 'ideally best polity' was one in which 'the whole people participate in government'.<sup>4</sup> Within the socialist tradition many have argued that the values associated with democracy are an historic achievement. So, rather than denigrating public debate and action, some socialists have argued that the spheres of public life and public decision-making should expand.

So while we are well aware that much public discourse is used 'not to persuade, but to control; not to stimulate thought, but to prevent it; not to convey information but to divert or suppress it',<sup>5</sup> there are good reasons for students to take public discourse seriously.

Particularly at this early stage of the course students must first understand why private people even bother to couch their views in terms of the larger communal purposes and common values of the community. That is, before deconstructing public discourse it is important to take it seriously — otherwise students simply reject public discourse altogether. There is a big difference between saying

- 'politics is corrupt and this corruption should be constantly exposed'  
and saying
- 'politics is corrupt so politics itself should be abolished or avoided.'

## Taking on a new persona

Notice that we do not insist that students feel committed to this new persona. Our view is that all students must be given time to feel their way into a new persona. This means that they must be given tools and techniques for imaginatively trying out this new persona, this new voice, without feeling that they must identify with it.

Sometimes it takes years for students to identify with a new stance, and taking up a stance (which means feeling responsible for what happens in the community as a whole) is not something to be taken lightly. After all, the personae of a citizen is a culturally constructed position of power and responsibility. We should not presume it is natural, and it may certainly not feel natural to students who come from marginalised and powerless social contexts. We do not presuppose that a person who has been unemployed for years, can, or will want to, immediately identify with this stance. Further, in a classroom where the cultural identity of students can vary so greatly, any specification by the teacher of what it means to be responsible for the community as a whole is unlikely to be inclusive. The available ways of 'being a citizen' may not feel right to all students.

The teacher can expose students to texts which display this figure of a citizen and students can take up the persona of someone who does. However, it is probably only when students begin to bring this figure into relation with their concerns that they feel personal commitment. To expose students to the life of a citizen as a possibility is as much as we can ask of a course like this. And our experience is that as students find their feet with this stance their outlook changes.

### Footnotes

- 1 See Held, D. *Models of Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge 1987, page 29
- 2 See Maddox, J. *Australian Democracy: in Theory and Practice*, Prentice Longman Cheshire, 1985, page 28
- 3 Ibid. page 46
- 3 Mill, J. S. *Representative Government*, Everyman Library, London
- 4 See Maddox, op. cit., page 12
- 5 Corcoran, Paul E. *Political Ideology and Rhetoric*, University of Queensland Press, 1979, page xv

## Issues

### **Competing approaches to teaching writing**

We would like to clarify the point of our approach by distinguishing it from two other approaches to teaching this kind of writing.

#### **1 Beginning with student opinions**

One common way of teaching writing is to provide students with topics or issues which the teacher believes students will feel strongly about; the assumption being that the more vehement and stronger students beliefs are, the more highly motivated, more personal, and more sincere their response will be, and as a result the better their writing will also be.

The approach to values and belief which we are adopting here differs from this. Our approach is to help students identify a range of often conflicting *values* which writers appeal to in public debate, and to note the way those values are present in the letters they read. By doing this we are encouraging students to take up the position which writers of letters normally take up — that is, as *citizens* who speak or write on behalf of a whole community. Students should learn that this is the stance conventionally adopted in public debate and in the letters column specifically.

Now in saying this we don't wish to be misunderstood. We are not suggesting that there is only one right point of view with regard to any issue — that of the *citizen* — and that students should adopt that one viewpoint. We are suggesting that whilst there will be conflicting viewpoints in public debate, what all parties to the debate have in common is that they take up a particular stance or take on a persona: they all speak or write as if they are speaking or writing for the *good of the community*.

While we have set our approach apart from the approach which encourages students simply to express their opinion we share with that approach the view that values, meaning or content are essential to writing.

#### **2 Teaching grammar or 'structure'**

The other approach to teaching writing that we wish to distinguish our approach from emphasises teaching language or text structures independently of meaning. It may seem that one can learn the patterns of writing independently of how that writing is put to use; that paragraph structure, sentence structure, punctuation can be taught as sets of discrete skills. This approach assumes that, at best, the content or meaning simply provides a 'human interest' motivation for learning these independent transferrable skills.

### 3 Our approach

#### Abstract concepts and their instances

We can put the question a different way:

*How can learning that writers of Letters to the Editor enter a particular domain of meanings help overcome writing problems (which after all appear as problems with paragraph structure, sentence structure, grammar punctuation and so on)?*

Shouldn't the teacher just address the visible problems and leave the meanings alone? Aren't we teaching social education or civics, rather than literacy?

We would like to answer this question through an example. Here is a paragraph from the letter by M. Oxeer on page 44:

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

These sentences are associated because they are two instances of the same thing: accidents being caused by irresponsible drivers. The writer is pointing out, through these instances, that in the debate over the fitting of airbags in cars a certain crucial value has been left out of consideration — human responsibility.

In terms of text structure, these sentences come together in the text as a paragraph. But the paragraph does not mark a particular time as it might in a narrative. Rather the paragraph signifies *a move in the argument*. That is, the paragraph implicitly contains the value 'human responsibility', which (the writer argues) has been left out of consideration by those who support airbags. Each sentence within the paragraph is a concrete instance of that value.

So helping students write a paragraph made up of sentences like this one involves helping students see things from a particular perspective, or — in the discourse of public debate — in terms of a range of values. It also involves acquainting students with plenty of examples of the way in which these meanings are commonly realised in writing.

The point we wish to emphasise is that understanding what a sentence is, how to form the internal shape of the sentence, as well as judgements about where to put the full stops are connected back to understanding what an *illustration* is in an argument, which in turn presupposes a capacity to forge connections between orders, between a concept from one discourse about values, and 'experiences' from everyday life.

In other words, enabling students to enter and participate in new discourses is a necessary condition for students to extend their writing capacities.

**Engaging with meanings and tools for writing.**

Now, it might be thought that we are suggesting that we simply introduce students to the values of public debate, provide opportunities for students to participate in such debate and let the writing look after itself. In other words, that we throw the students in the deep end and hope they will be creative enough to learn to swim eventually. (This is effectively, we suspect, the teaching implication of Frank Smith's current notion of 'joining the literacy club').

If this means that students should find what they are writing about meaningful, and that they have to take risks and be inventive in their writing then we *are* suggesting that.

However, accompanying this engaging with meanings should be aids, tools, ways of doing things, which students can use and adapt to articulate their positions within this realm of public debate. Students, whose writing has been mainly recounts of events are usually unfamiliar with those features of written text essential to articulate an argument in writing.

**Summary**

So the approach to teaching writing we are adopting here has two faces to it.

On the one hand we focus on values, on community, and on the idea of the citizen — that is, on the *meanings*.

On the other hand, we focus on the ways of doing things in *language* which enables the writer to realise these meanings.

Coming back from this long detour, the aim of this session is to acquaint students with the stances adopted in public debate, that is, to the notion of *a citizen writing on behalf of a community*.

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*“ Enabling students to enter and participate in new discourses is a necessary condition for students to extend their writing capacities. ”*

---

**The story so far...**

During this part of the course we are reading a variety of letters and noting some of the important features of these letters. We are doing this because the more you understand or get a feel for the point of *Letters to the Editor* at this stage, the better your writing will be later on.

We have looked at one common feature of Letters to the Editor and that is that they **raise problems** and sometimes **offer solutions**.

The feature of *Letters to the Editor* we are going to look at now is that they are usually written as if the writer has **the good of the community** in mind. Doing this means that writers assume they are involved in shaping or affecting the life of the community and that they have a responsibility to do this. Writing letters is a way of being a citizen, a way of participating in the public life of the community.

So if we ask the questions:

"Who are letter-writers writing to?"

"Who is the audience for these letters?"

the answer is not just the editor of their local newspaper. It is other citizens, the other people who keep the good of the community in mind and who share a common public life.

*Letters to the Editor* are written to be read by all the readers of that newspaper who care about the community.



**Me or us?****Example**

Here are two letters on the cost of car parking.

Read them through with the teacher.

**What is the difference between the letters?**

**Car park fee a rip off**

After my experience today I certainly can't afford to take public transport.

I took my children to the city for the day, leaving my car in the Box Hill Plaza car park. On returning six and a half hours later I was informed the cost was \$27 for the park fee.

Added to the cost of the train fares we could have travelled by taxi for the same amount.

This letter is written by someone who is writing about how the car parking fees affected her.

**Car park fee a rip off**

Drivers beware if you use car parks.

We are supposed to be encouraged to use public transport, but after my experience today I know I certainly can't afford it.

I took my three young grandchildren to the city for the day, leaving my car in the Box Hill Plaza car park. On returning six and a half hours later I was informed the cost was \$27 for the car park fee.

Added to the cost of the train fares, we could have travelled by taxi for the same amount. The public need to be fully aware of this kind of rip-off.

This letter is written by someone who is writing about car parking fees with the overall good of the community in mind.

Even though the letter writer is writing about something that affected her personally, she is not just saying what happened to her and how bad it was.

She is 'publicising' her experience as a problem for the whole community.

**Highlighting the community****Worked example**

Let's look at how we can tell the writer of the second letter is speaking with the good of the community in mind, while the writer of the first letter only cares about herself.

To do this we will highlight the bits that tell us:

- *whether the writers are just speaking for themselves or for the whole community*
- *whether they only care about themselves or care about the whole community.*

**Car park fee a rip off**

After my experience today I certainly can't afford to take public transport.

I took my children to the city for the day, leaving my car in the Box Hill Plaza car park. On returning six and a half hours later I was informed the cost was \$27 for the park fee.

Added to the cost of the train fares we could have travelled by taxi for the same amount.

Notice that the middle parts of the two letters are the same. They both tell a story about what happened to the writer. But this is all the first one talks about.

All she talks about is herself — *my, I, my, I* — and the only time she says '*we*' she means herself and her children.

**Car park fee a rip off**

Drivers beware if you use car parks.

We are supposed to be encouraged to use public transport, but after my experience today I know I certainly can't afford it.

I took my three young grandchildren to the city for the day, leaving my car in the Box Hill Plaza car park. On returning six and a half hours later I was informed the cost was \$27 for the car park fee.

Added to the cost of the train fares, we could have travelled by taxi for the same amount. The public need to be fully aware of this kind of rip-off.

The second letter tells the same story, but it begins by saying *Drivers beware*, so it is addressing the rest of the community and it ends up saying that *the public should be aware of this kind of rip-off* so that other people in the community will not lose out by taking public transport.

This letter also speaks on behalf of everybody when it says *we are supposed to be encouraged to use public transport*.

Notice that we are not saying Letters to the Editor never deal with personal matters: they do. It is the way the writer deals with these experiences that creates the writer as a citizen, that is, as someone speaking with the good of the community in mind.

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**Highlighting the community****Worked example****Passengers need to feel safe on trains**

We, as students of Sunshine West High School, are writing to express our concern regarding the vandalism and the lack of safety on trains and railway stations.

Recent examples, such as the attack on a woman at the Box Hill station and the boy who lost his legs while committing an act of vandalism, demonstrate the need for safety on our public transport system.

Some suggestions to help solve these problems are: the introduction of citizen-based groups to patrol the trains, an increase of police patrol and manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers.

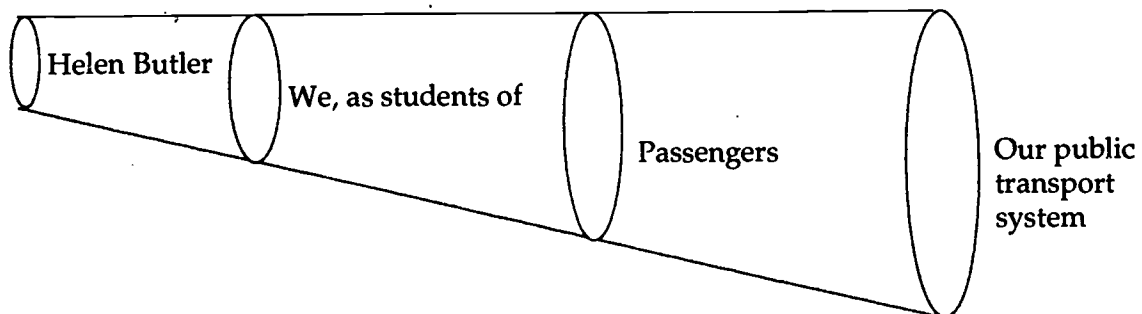
Helen Butler

Sunshine

Notice how even though Helen Butler is a student from Sunshine West High the self that is projected in her letter is that of someone who cares or takes responsibility for the community as a whole.

She projects herself as someone who cares and takes responsibility for the community — that is, as a citizen. This is marked by the shift from *we students of Sunshine West High School* to *our public transport system*. The *our* here refers to 'we, the citizens of Victoria'.

You can tell there has been a shift here because the students of Sunshine West High School do not own the public transport system. So, the *our* in *our public transport system* can't just mean the students of Sunshine West High School. It has to mean something like: the people of Melbourne or the people of Victoria.



---

## Passengers need to feel safe on trains

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manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers.

*Helen Butler*

---

**I know of something that is not good for us.**

**Something must be done by someone to fix it. Here is my solution.**

## Finding the words to say it



## Reference

*“ The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time shows that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole. ”*

*Here are some other ways of saying this:*

The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time **demonstrates** that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole.

The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time **reveals** that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole.

The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time **signals** that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole.

The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time **reflects** the fact that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole.

The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time **indicates** that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole.

The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time **implies** that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole.

The fact that she uses ‘I’ all the time **suggests** that she only cares about herself and not about the community as a whole.

### reflects

shows  
reveals  
indicates  
discloses  
means  
demonstrates  
proves  
represents  
symbolises  
embodies  
expresses  
mirrors  
exemplifies  
reflects  
shows evidence of  
manifests  
is an extension of  
is rooted in  
brings out  
gives voice to  
bears the trace of  
is an index of  
marks  
provides a clue to  
discloses  
conveys  
signifies  
designates  
refers to  
is emblematic of  
illustrates  
epitomises  
condenses  
distils  
crystallises  
encapsulates  
articulates  
evokes  
mediates  
is directly related to

### an expression of

a reflection of  
a symptom of  
a sign of  
a manifestation of  
a vehicle for  
a symbol of  
an indication of  
a focus for  
permeated by  
dominated by  
exacerbated by  
an example of

### suggests

indicates  
points to  
shows  
demonstrates  
proves  
justifies the claim that  
accounts for  
explains  
provides evidence for  
implies  
leads to  
provides grounds for  
confirms  
lends weight to  
helps answer  
sheds light on  
illuminates

## Private letters and public letters

## Activity

In the following pairs of letters we'd like you to try to work out which of the letters is written with the overall good of the community in mind and which isn't.

**To get started, pick another member of the class to work with, then follow these steps:**

### Here is what to do:



- 1 Jot down 'good of the community' underneath the letter you think is written with the good of the community in mind.
- 2 Check with your partner to see if you got the same answer.
- 3 Now mark the bits of the letter which tell you the writer cares about the community as a whole.
- 4 Finally, mark the bits of the other letter which show that the writer only cares about herself and her own.
- 5 Check your answers with your partner and the teacher to make sure you are on the right track.

### What are you looking for?

- Do they speak for the community?*
  - Look for pronouns like **I, we** and **our** which mean "everybody".
- Do they try to enlist the support of community groups?*
  - Look for **names** of groups in the community they care about.
- Do they speak to the community?*
  - Look for ways of meaning the **whole** community.
- Is the problem a community problem?*
  - Look for ways of stating the problem so it applies to **everyone**.

## Activity 1

**Family to lose land,  
heritage**

I am very upset

My husband and I have worked hard and brought up eight lovely children. We live on a farm and just because mineral sands have been discovered on our land a mining company is going to take over our land.

I don't know what we are supposed to do about it.

Mrs. J. Murphy  
Terang

**Family to lose land,  
heritage**

I am very upset:

A couple who has worked hard and brought up eight lovely children looks like losing their land to a mining giant, just because there happens to be mineral sands on their land.

Once again the hard-working families are taken over by greed.

It seems the heritage to be handed on to the children means nothing to these greedy companies.

After all, this is Australia, not some communist country.

Mrs. L. Sheldrick,  
Mordialloc.

## Activity 2



## Conductors vital to safety

There aren't any conductors on the tram I catch to go home after evening shift. Often I'm the only passenger because I get off near the terminus.

Every night I worry that some hoods are going to get on the tram and bash me up without anyone able to lift a finger to help me. If there was a conductor on board I'd feel a lot safer.

G. Simpson  
Bentleigh

## Conductors vital to safety

Trams, buses and trains should all have conductors. They could help the elderly and people with prams, and would be security against vandalism. Then people would not fear travelling at night.

G. Jackovidis  
Laverton

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## Activity 3



### Ricketts Point shows a sad step backwards

I've just come back from visiting Ricketts Point for the third time.

When I just went there when I was in prep, I looked into a rock pool and saw a crab, about five sorts of seaweed, and anemones. The pool was full of colour and life.

The second time, last year, I went there and there was not much.

This afternoon I went there and I saw two sorts of seaweed, an old paintbrush, several empty chip packets, some bleached rolled paper, one dead crab, thirty or so pollution bubbles and five dead fish.

I think that people should step up and take notice of what has happened to Ricketts Point and know it's happening — bit by bit — to the world.

Liam Lamont  
Hampton (Aged eight)

### Ricketts Point shows a sad step backwards

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The second time, last year, I went there and there was not much.

This afternoon I went there and I saw two sorts of seaweed, an old paintbrush, several empty chip packets, some bleached rolled paper, one dead crab, thirty or so pollution bubbles and five dead fish.

I love swimming in the pools there but there is no way I'm going to risk getting sick.

Nicholas Robinson  
Camberwell (Aged eight)

## Activity 4



## Anger over school policy

My younger daughter came home from school this afternoon and told me that she had a new teacher, a Japanese teacher who was teaching her to speak Japanese.

I don't care what anyone else does but I don't want any of my children learning Japanese.

A Real Aussie

## Anger over school policy

My friend's children attend Chirnside Park Primary School in suburban Melbourne.

Recently a circular sent to all parents informed them that in the near future the school intends employing two Japanese teachers, imported from Japan, to teach Japanese culture to the very predominantly Anglo-Saxon school.

My friend has already expressed to me that she doesn't want her children nipponised, that preference should be given to Australian Aboriginal culture, and that she'll take her children out of the school when the Japanese indoctrination begins.

The vast majority of everyday ordinary Australians deplore that the Queensland government is in bed with Japan, as that government is hellbent on becoming a Japanese colony.

If our people are against selling our land to the Japs, imagine their outrage when they learn that the Victorian Education Ministry intends giving the Japs our children's minds!

Danny Furlong  
Ringwood

## *Theme 4*

# **Appealing to common values**

***Letters to the Editor appeal to values to identify problems and solutions***

- ***these values are shared by everyone***
- ***there are only five main values***
- ***these values conflict with each other***

## Issues

### ***The underlying values in letters***

In the previous session we introduced students to the idea that *Letters to the Editor are written with the good of the community in mind.*

In this Session we suggest that the public discourse of a modern community is constituted by being answerable to a set of shared values. Disputes about what to do, about what is good for the community as a whole, are always framed in terms of these values. The point of this session is to familiarise students with the values that letter writers appeal to when raising problems or making proposals about how to solve these problems.

Our view is that public debate consists of a small collection of discourses and that to participate in public debate is to take up a stance within this array of discourses. So participating in public debate is not a matter of inventing completely new and authentic views or opinions but rather of adopting and adapting views and values that already exist. We do not focus on the uniqueness of opinions but rather on the way that all public opinions draw on a small set of values to justify themselves. Of course there are more and less subtle ways of mobilising these values and bringing them to bear on specific situations, but our initial emphasis is simply on students being aware that there is a small number of values providing the backdrop to what seems like a huge diversity of opinions and topics.

#### ■ **There is only a small number of values**

Rather than expecting students to immediately state a personal viewpoint, our approach is to provide students with a vocabulary for labelling the main values or principles underpinning letters. We have identified a small cluster of values — freedom, equality, fairness, life (or reducing harm), preserving a heritage or tradition, and improving things by making them more efficient. It is in terms of these values that situations are framed as problematic or not and that proposals constitute acceptable solutions or not. These values provide the criteria for deciding what is a problem and what is a good solution. It is in relation of these values that we debate and discuss whether situations constitute a problem needing action and what that action should be.

Of course, we are not claiming to have definitively mapped the values nor the relationships between the values underpinning public debate or communal life. Rather, our delineation of these values should be interpreted more as gesturing towards clusters of judgements rather than putting its finger on a precisely defined value. But if we don't at least take the gamble of trying to put some definition into the sorts of considerations that are appealed to in public debate, students would have to wait indefinitely. In fact, one thing we hope is that by taking a stab at mapping these values, other teachers will be able to build on this first attempt and modify or refine it. So let's just say that there are six clusters of considerations that can be brought to bear in judging public situations and actions. We will call these groupings *values* and so we will talk of six values.

## ■ These values conflict with each other

Of course, these values invariably conflict in specific cases. For example, smoking in public can be interpreted as either a right to personal freedom or as causing harm to others. Disputes inevitably arise about which value should be given the determining weight in interpreting or responding to a specific action or situation, and this is what makes public arguments complex. It is this pull of conflicting values that explains why we can feel torn between competing interpretations and why it is so difficult to decide exactly what our view is.

Yet despite the complexity of issues here, we think it fruitful to name these values explicitly, separated from their application to specific instances, so that students can become acquainted with the conventional principles, standards or ultimate appeals invoked by letter writers across the whole range of issues making up public debate. If students can come to 'see' these general criteria or values ranging across different issues and at the same time see how these values are present in written texts, then when they come to state their own view in writing on an issue, they can draw more explicitly on these same principles.

The importance of students being familiar with these values can be put more strongly. It is the adherence to an underlying value, while at the same time trying to take account of everything that contradicts or challenges that value, which generates the underlying motive or pressure in writing to: make distinctions, illustrate and qualify statements — thus creating a consistent text. Without adherence to a value there is no reason to avoid contradiction or inconsistency and therefore no motive to learn those aspects of language use which mediate between adherence to a value and handling the ambiguities of a particular situation.

## ■ There are six main values

### 1 Freedom

The value of freedom is mainly associated with liberalism. Freedom is the idea that people should be able to make up their own minds on things and do whatever they wish. It embodies the idea of autonomy, of being your own person, as opposed to heteronomy which means doing what others tell you. Freedom is opposed to dependence, submissiveness, slavery.

One of the main debates in 19th century liberalism was the conflict between freedom and causing harm to others. John Stuart Mill's famous work, *On Liberty*, tried to deal with this question. His solution was to claim that people should be free to think and act as they like as long as they do not cause harm to others. He distinguished between two spheres of modern life, private life and public life, and argued that people should be able to do whatever they like in their private life as this did not affect others.

Of course the obvious retort is that even in private life others can be harmed. In fact the modern women's movement has used this objection to show that there is lots of harm done in the privacy of modern families.

## 2 Safety (reducing harm)

The idea of avoiding harm — of trying to not cause pain — seems almost self evident. Even animals try to avoid pain. This principle of judging actions and situations in terms of their outcomes — the benefits or harms they do — was developed into a systematic principle by utilitarianism. Along with the idea of freedom, this principle of judging things in terms of their harmful or beneficial effects has been one of the main weapons of reformers. It has been used to change many traditional attitudes and practices. It also went hand in hand with the development of the modern social sciences which are committed to the idea of predicting things, to grasping the cause and effect sequences which make up social life.

However, although seeming to be self-evident especially when pain is involved, judging things in terms of their outcomes is not as clear-cut as it at first seems. In contemporary sport we have the slogan, 'No pain, no gain'. So, do we just avoid causing any pain or harm at all? Is it possible to avoid causing any pain or harm? When is the pain or harm worth it?

And, anyway, how do we know what the outcome of a specific situation or action will be? Can we always predict what the outcome of an action or situation will be?

## 3 Fairness (or justice)

Differentiating 'fairness' from the other values can be tricky. A simple example: a person who tries harder and achieves more may deserve a greater reward than someone who does not. In this case the person has been treated unequally but fairly. Similarly, a person who is dying may receive more time and care from nursing staff than someone who is ill but will eventually recover. Again this may be unequal but fair treatment (although of course there may be arguments about this).

## 4 Equality

The idea that people are naturally equal, or that society can and should be changed so that all people may participate equally in society has been a key idea emerging from the European Enlightenment. The notions that everyone should be equal before the law, that the same educational opportunities be extended to everyone, and that there should be anti-discrimination laws are all based on the value of equality. Historically, the extension of the value of equality has given rise to debate and conflict. Were women, non-Europeans, workers, the equal of white male property owners? Should governments discriminate in favour of some groups to equalise chances? Should people who are different from others be treated as if they are the same?

## 5 Loyalty (preserving heritage)

The main idea behind preserving our heritage or culture is that values embodied in stories, objects, occasions and institutions all shape our identity and conduct. Without this heritage we would lose touch with each other, with the past and with our sense of self. But should the old be venerated because it is old? Is this heritage 'our' heritage or is it the heritage of the powerful?

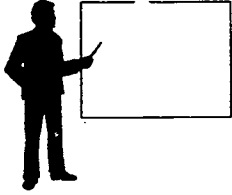
## 6 Efficiency

Another criterion for judging action, particularly the actions of organisations, is efficiency. Are goals met with the least amount of time effort and money, or could we be more efficient in the means chosen to achieve particular goals? As with other values, judging situations in terms of efficiency has given rise to argument. Does making things operate efficiently become 'an end in itself', and do we lose sight of goals in the process? Is all social action amenable to such means-end thinking? For instance, can we *know* what is the most efficient thing to do when we have not done it before?

## Revision

- give students a chance to talk about their speed copying, perhaps noting speeds at which students are copying.
- revise **problem-solution**
- revise **writing on behalf of the community**

## Teaching notes



### ■ Identifying the values used in public debate

Work through the Worksheets with the class.

Check that students discuss in pairs and that they understand what they are doing after Letter 1.

The best solutions to the worked examples are of course debatable, but we would suggest:

- 1 **Freedom** (although some might say fairness)
- 2 **Equality or fairness**
- 3 **Fairness**
- 4 **Loyalty**

Check student answers.

### ■ Another way to introduce the values

Another possible activity would be to give students a 'value clarification' activity, not so much for the purpose of actually clarifying the values they hold, but simply to introduce the concept of 'value' as a term for the criteria we bring to bear when making judgements about any course of action. This would have to be done orally. The students at this stage won't be writing.

Remember, there is a difference between students having no sense at all of the relationships they are introduced to, and being unsure or undecided about which value is being invoked. It can be tricky sorting students who don't understand at all from students who understand but make different judgements.

### ■ Homework

Hand out copies of more **Sample Letters**. The task is to tick the values or principles appealed to by each of the writers.



## Revision

- writers raise *problems* and sometimes suggest *solutions* for these problems
- letters are written as if the writer has the good of the community in mind; this is called *being a citizen*

## Writers use to values to judge things

### Appealing to principles (or *values*)

You might think Letters to the Editor are about many different things and written by people with many different opinions.

But there are not as many topics or opinions as it first seems. Topics and opinions are organised around a few central principles. People appeal to these principles when they are raising problems or suggesting solutions.

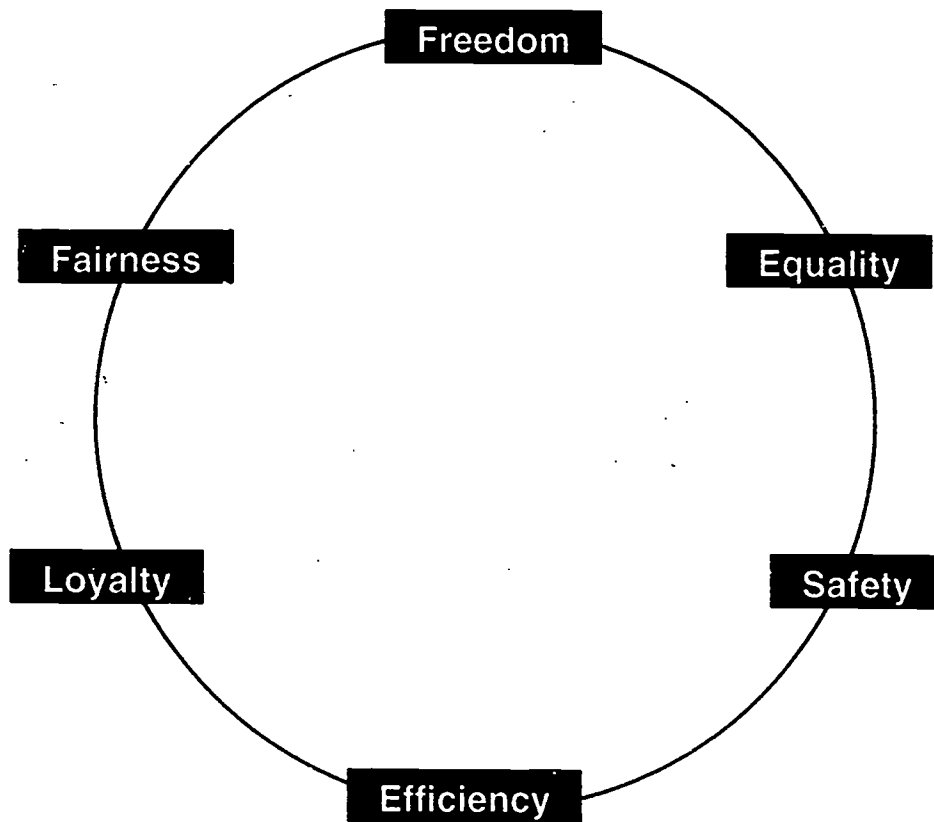
We have called these central principles **values**.

### There are only six values

You can understand most Letters to the Editor in terms of only six values. If you know writers are using these six values you will be able to see

- why they think *some situation is a problem*  
and
- why they think *their solution is a good solution*.

## The six main values:



### **Value**

### **What it means:**

**Freedom**

People should be free

**Equality**

People should be equal

**Fairness**

People should get what they deserve

**Loyalty**

People should preserve their heritage, traditions and way of life

**Safety**

People should protect others and themselves from harm

**Efficiency**

Things should work properly

**Identifying values****Activity****Activity 1**

We've made up some cases of people protesting or raising a problem.

**With your partner work out which value is at stake in each case and write the value beside the letter.**

Note: there may be different interpretations about which value is at stake in any particular case.

Value \_\_\_\_\_

**Letter 1**

I've smoked all my life at work. If I didn't smoke I don't think I'd be able to work. Now, I'm not allowed to smoke on the job. I don't believe that's right.

Value \_\_\_\_\_

**Letter 2**

I've been working in a factory for 5 years. The man next to me gets \$5 a week more than I do, even though we do exactly the same work and he's only been in the job for two years. The only difference is that he's a man and I'm a woman.

Value \_\_\_\_\_

**Letter 3**

Yesterday I walked by the local primary school during morning assembly. Over the loud speaker Madonna was blaring out and the children were wriggling around to the tune. Even the parents and the teachers were throwing their arms up and down as well. In my day we used to stand to attention and sing the national anthem everyday. Why would the children of today respect and love their country when all they have to do is wiggle about to the tune of some sex crazed Italian singer from America?

**Activity 2**

Go back over the letters you read in Sessions 2 and 3.

**Decide which value they are calling on to raise problems and suggest solutions.**

**Activity 3**

Collect some Sample Letters from your teacher.

**Tick the values appealed to by the writer in these letters.**

If you can't decide between two values tick both, and circle the one you most favour. Check with your teacher.

**Finding the words to say it****Reference**

---

*“ The writer **appeals to the value of freedom to argue that smoking should be allowed in public places.** ”*

---

*Here are some other ways of saying this:*

The writer **uses** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **employs** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **invokes** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **calls on** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **refers to** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **draws on** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **adopts** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **points to** the value of freedom to argue that ...

The writer **brings up** the value of freedom to argue that ...

## Finding words which point to values

## Worked example

## Passengers need to feel safe on trains

We, as students of Sunshine West High School, are writing to express our concern regarding the vandalism and the lack of safety on trains and railway stations.

Recent examples, such as the attack on a woman at the Box Hill station and the boy who lost his legs while committing an act of vandalism, demonstrate the need for safety on our public transport system.

Some suggestions to help solve these problems are: the introduction of citizen-based groups to patrol the trains, an increase of police patrol and manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers.

Helen Butler

Sunshine

### Values

In identifying vandalism and lack of safety on trains Helen Butler is implicitly appealing to a commonly held value — the value of reducing suffering (or protecting well-being and safety).

The vandalism and lack of safety on trains transgresses this value.

It is for the sake of this value that she writes.

### Negative wording

*vandalism*  
*lack of safety*  
*attack on a woman*  
*lost his leg*  
*committing an act of vandalism*

### Positive wording

*responsibility*  
*remove graffiti*  
*increase safety of passengers*  
*need for safety*

The main value pointed to is

**safety (reducing harm)**

## *Theme 5*

# **Finding words that show values**

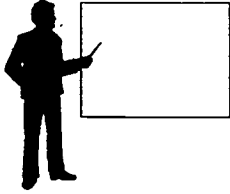
***Letters to the Editor describe things in terms of values***

- ***values are shown in the way things are described***
- ***sometimes these are called 'emotional' words***
- ***the way you describe things shows your values***

## Revision

- revise writing on behalf of the community
- revise the six values

## Teaching notes



### ■ Identifying words which point to values

Discuss the main points in the worked example *Passengers need to feel safe on trains*

### ■ Try an example

Ask students to follow the same procedure for the sample letter, *Why not give those brollies a miss.*

Ask them to compare their findings with other students.

#### *Note:*

There can be disagreements about what to select with this activity. The main thing at this stage is to get the general idea. Sometimes students might think that a word points to a value while others disagree.

Explain that they should not worry about individual words chosen, as long as they agree on most of their selections.

### ■ Select more letters

Handout more letters from the sample letters collection.

### ■ Homework

Complete the letters, or hand out another selection.

**Theme 5: Finding words that show values****Student notes****Revision**

- writers of letters appeal to central principles or *values*
- there are only six main values:  
*freedom*  
*equality*  
*fairness*  
*loyalty*  
*safety*  
*efficiency*

**Pointing to values**

Last time you were introduced to values. You had to work out which values a writer was appealing to in their letter. How did you do that?

If you did what we would have done, you probably read the letter through, then looked down the list of values and finally decided which value seemed to fit best, then jotted it down.

**Finding wording**

Now we are going to give you another way of deciding which value is being appealed to.

Instead of reading the letter and just getting an overall sense of which value is relevant, this time we want you to focus on the specific words and phrases in the letter which stand for a value. What you do this time is look for *words* and *phrases* in letters which signal (or stand for) the values.



**Finding the value**

**Worked example**

**Passengers need to feel safe on trains**

We, as students of Sunshine West High School, are writing to express our concern regarding the vandalism and the lack of safety on trains and railway stations.

Recent examples, such as the attack on a woman at the Box Hill station and the boy who lost his legs while committing an act of vandalism, demonstrate the need for safety on our public transport system.

Some suggestions to help solve these problems are: the introduction of citizen-based groups to patrol the trains, an increase of police patrol and manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers.

Helen Butler  
Sunshine

**Values**

When she identifies the problem of vandalism and lack of safety on trains, Helen Butler is implicitly appealing to a commonly held value — the value of *security*, which is about reducing suffering or harm by protecting well being and safety.

The vandalism and lack of safety on trains, she believes, goes against or 'transgresses' the value of safety.

She writes her letter to support this value.

**Negative wording**

**Positive wording**

*vandalism*  
*lack of safety*  
*attack on a woman*  
*lost his leg*  
*committing an act of vandalism*

*responsibility*  
*remove graffiti*  
*increase safety of passengers*  
*need for safety*

The main value pointed to is

**safety**

## Showing your values



## Reference

Let's look at some of the ways writers show values in their writing. We will start with a very simple and boring sentence:

*“ The cat sat on the mat. ”*

**First we can change the naming words or phrases:**

The crook sat on the mat

The murderer sat on the mat

The cat sat on the carpet

**We can then add qualifiers:**

The vicious cat sat on the mat

The cuddly cat sat on the mat

The ugly cat sat on the mat

The cowardly cat sat on the mat

**We can also describe the mat more fully with qualifiers:**

The cat sat on the blood-splattered mat

The cat sat on the expensive carpet

**We can add even more description by adding in post-qualifiers:**

The cat who was still licking his jaws sat on the mat

The cat who was feeling very pleased with himself sat on the mat

The cat who had just murdered a lovely bird sat on the mat

**Next we can change the verb to get more judgement into it:**

The cat sprawled on the mat

The cat cringed on the mat

**Now we can get some more judgement in by adding a non-finite clause:**

The cat sat on the mat, licking his chops

The cat sat on the mat, looking pleased with himself

If we add all these together we get something like:

*“ The vicious murderer who was feeling pleased with himself sprawled on the blood-splattered carpet, licking his chops. ”*

Notice how the feeling of how bad the cat is seems to be spread right through the sentence.

## *Theme 6*

### **Beginning a letter**

***There are three main ways to begin a letter***

- ***describe something that happened to you or to someone you know***
- ***express your reaction to something you've read, seen or heard***
- ***point out an inconsistency in policies or facts***

## Summary

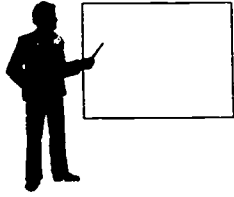
In the next three themes we will focus on different parts of writing a letter:

- In this theme (Theme 6) we draw students' attention to some of the ways writers begin letters which raise problems for the community.
- In Theme 7 we focus on how letter-writers identify problems as problems for the community as a whole.
- In Theme 8 we look at some of the ways writers offer solutions to the problems they identify.

Point out to students that they will have a chance to write their own letter later in the course, but that you want to show them how other letter writers start their letters beforehand, so that they have more choices open to them in deciding how to start their letter.

Read through the notes to students with the class.

## Teaching notes



### Activities 1–4

Students can work in pairs on these activities.

For instance, for Activity 1 each partner can make up a separate story and tell their partner before writing. Once students have completed a few of the examples they might share them with the class.

Alternatively, you can allow students to contribute to a whole class discussion. For instance, for Activity 2 they can offer their reactions to the statements to the whole class.

We have included lots of statements under each activity. Don't feel that you have to insist that students do them all. You could divide up the class into two groups and distribute half the statements to the two groups. Each group could then report back to the other group on their 'beginnings'.

You could also set some statements within each activity for homework.

### Theme 7 and 8

Repeat this approach to group work for the activities in these themes.

**Theme 6: Beginning a letter****Student notes****From reading to writing**

Until now we have concentrated on *reading* Letters to the Editor. Now we will show you how to *write* Letters to the Editor which raise problems. We will go back and look in more detail at how you do it.

To write a Letter to the Editor which raises a problem you have to describe something that goes against the values of the community as a whole.

There are three things you have to do:

- raise a problem
- describe this problem in such a way that it goes against the good of the community
- suggest a solution that furthers the good of the community.

In this session we will look at some standard ways of *beginning your letter*. We are not saying that these are the only ways of doing it, but if you have trouble thinking up how to begin a letter you can use these ways. Later on you will be able to think of other ways of doing it yourself.

**How to begin your letter**

There are three main ways you can raise a problem.

You can:

- 1 describe something that happened to you or someone you know
- 2 express your reaction to something you read or heard
- 3 point out an inconsistency

In this session you will complete some exercises to practise each of these different ways of starting a letter to the editor.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 1****The first way: telling a story**

One common way of beginning a letter is to tell about something that happened to you or someone you know that shows or illustrates that something more general is wrong and needs to be changed. Telling about something that happened to you means you have had personal experience of what you are talking about so you know what you are talking about. You are not just making it up or inventing problems. You have actually experienced it.

Here are the beginnings of some letters in the *Sample Letters*. Notice how they all begin by telling a story about something that happened to the writer.

- \* I've just come back from visiting Ricketts Point for the third time.
- \* I had a serious car accident in 1967, knocked off a push-bike. I was thrown over the top of the vehicle, landing on my head.
- \* I have just returned from Queensland and have experienced the new train service which has been introduced between Sydney and Murwillumbah and between Brisbane and Sydney, and which, I understand, is to operate between Melbourne and Sydney.
- \* In recent years I have made numerous trips into the country of the MacAlister and Wonnangatta Rivers.
- \* Last weekend I had dinner in Sydney with a group of special mates I had not seen for 20 years.
- \* My friend's children attend Chirnside Park primary school in suburban Melbourne. Recently a circular sent to all parents informed them that in the near future the school intends employing two Japanese teachers, imported from Japan, to teach Japanese culture to the very predominantly Anglo-Saxon school.

**Activity 1****Inventing stories which illustrate general problems**

In this first activity we want you to make up some stories as if they had really happened to you.

The main thing is that these stories must illustrate a more general problem.

We will give you the *general problem*.

All you have to do is:

- make up a *story* in a few sentences to show how you once experienced this problem;
- copy the sentence stating the general problem as your final sentence.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 1****Example****Problem**

The children of today have no respect for adults.

**Your made-up story:**

Last week I was shopping in the city when three youths came running around a corner and knocked me over. They made no effort to help me up or to apologise. They just swore at me and then ran off laughing. The children of today have no respect for adults.

***Make up a story for each one of these general problems.***

- 1 The children of today have no respect for adults.
- 2 There is too much violence against women these days.
- 3 Melbourne drivers are rude and dangerous.
- 4 Our hospitals are not doing their job properly.
- 5 Doctors make too much money.
- 6 There are not enough nurses to look after the patients in hospitals.
- 7 Teachers go on strike too often.
- 8 People looking for work should be treated with respect.
- 9 There should be more English classes for migrants.
- 10 The government should help small businesses more.
- 11 Unemployment benefit is not enough to live on
- 12 The streets of Melbourne are not safe.
- 13 AIDS sufferers should not be humiliated.
- 14 Australia is a racist society.
- 15 Smokers have no consideration for others.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 2****The second way: expressing a reaction to something**

The second way of beginning a letter is to express your concern for something you have heard about or even saw even though you did not personally experience it.

Here are some examples of beginnings from the *Sample Letters*. Notice how they all begin by expressing a reaction.

**Sample beginnings to letters**

- We, as students of Sunshine West High School, are writing to express our concern regarding the vandalism and the lack of safety on trains and railway stations.
- I am very concerned about what I saw in the mall at Mildura a few nights ago — two elderly men with their belongings in a shopping trolley.
- I was horrified to open the door in the dark to a child selling sweets for charity.
- I was appalled to read recently that 1 in 10 adult Australians cannot read well enough to use a street directory.
- I wish to complain about the high cinema ticket prices and how families are severely affected by the sharp increase in prices.
- I hear Myer is to stop selling what they call violent toys.
- I read with disgust of the attack on an off-duty policeman who tried to stop thugs who were harassing people on a packed train.
- It has just come to my notice, being a city person, that a big mining company wants to take over quite a few farms for mining mineral sands.
- I write this letter as a warning to would-be travellers who may in future return to Australia through Melbourne Airport.

Notice that many of these letters then go on to ask a question.

- I was horrified to open the door in the dark to a child selling sweets for charity... *Who's minding the children?*
- I was disturbed to read of a Japanese proposal to build feed lots in Australia to produce beef for their home market ... *What is the gain to Australia aside from large scale pollution?*
- I am very concerned about what I saw in the mall at Mildura a few nights ago — two elderly men with their belongings in a shopping trolley. I asked one what was wrong: 'Why don't you go home?' He replied, 'I have no home'. *Where are the charitable organisations? What do we donate money to them for? I thought it was to help people like these men. What are the good people of Mildura doing to allow this to happen?*



## Beginning a letter

## Activity 2

In these three letters the writer begins with a personal reaction to an event:

*I was horrified to ...*

*I was disturbed to ...*

*I am very concerned about ...*

and then describes an event, incident, fact or proposal. This makes up the first sentence of the letter. But why the situation is a problem is not stated in this first sentence; it is only later, usually in the next sentence or paragraph that the link is made to a particular value.

So in the letter about Japanese proposals to build feedlots in Australia, the problem is spelt out in the second paragraph:

- Apart from the cruelty which seems inherent in this type of intensive farming, *what is the gain to Australia aside from large scale pollution?*

and in the letter about the homeless in Mildura:

- I asked one what was wrong. 'Why don't you go home?' He replied, '*I have no home.*'

## Activity 2

## Expressing a reaction

You are now going to practise writing sentences which express a reaction and then add a sentence to explain why you are concerned.

For example, for the first one —*10% of the Australian workforce is unemployed* — you could write something like:

I was horrified to hear on the news last night that 10% of the Australian workforce is unemployed. When is the government going to start creating jobs in the public sector to get the economy going again?

or

I was horrified to hear on the news last night that 10% of the Australian workforce is unemployed. No wonder we have more people turning to crime.

**Here is the list of problems. Write sentences which express a reaction. Then add a sentence which explains why you are concerned.**



- 1 10% of the Australian workforce is unemployed.
- 2 Last night 3 women were attacked and raped.
- 3 A hundred homeless youth sleeping around the city were arrested last night for vagrancy.
- 4 The primary teacher's union announced an indefinite strike beginning tomorrow.
- 5 The government has slashed its refugee program in half.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 2**

- 6 You see an old man getting scraps of food out of a rubbish bin and eating it.
- 7 The pollution over Melbourne in autumn is the worst of any city in the world.
- 8 Tickets for the football have been increased by 50%.
- 9 Tram fares have been increased for the third time this year.
- 10 A Japanese firm has bought out Myer.
- 11 The government has made Japanese a compulsory school subject.
- 12 The government has closed all country railway lines.
- 13 The government has agreed to allow the USA to test its nuclear weapons in the Australian outback because testing is now banned in the USA.
- 15 The new government announces that no-one under 21 can get unemployment benefit.
- 16 The Victorian government announces that it has sold the Electricity Commission to private enterprise.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 3****The third way to begin a letter: Identifying an inconsistency**

Another way of beginning is to identify an inconsistency, which is a gap between two 'facts' which shows there is a problem.

Here are some letters which begin in this way:

- Children were made to wait outside in freezing rain until 9 am at school while teachers were inside, warm and dry, drinking tea and coffee.
- Serving on a jury I regard as an important and serious civic duty. It is disturbing, therefore, to realise that the appropriate authority appears to be taking an unfair advantage of the fact that attendance is compulsory.
- There are people who can help cancer victims die contended and comfortable, but who deny them this privilege. Our politicians, who refuse the aid that heroin can bring to the last days of cancer sufferers, are the guilty ones.
- Debt, internal and overseas is the issue these days. Skase, Bond, Herscu, Tricontinental, Estate Mortgage and Pyramid are all reeling because of high debt. All the high flyers and investors will now need to pull in their belts. But debt is even bigger in the third World. It is growing and is in excess of \$1500 billion.
- Mr. Hawke sheds tears for vets at Gallipoli. Now he accepts a pay rise of \$40 a week, more than the married pensioner lives on, and says happy days are here again.
- Traces of chemicals were found recently in food labelled 'organically grown'.
- If politicians and judges and senior public servants award themselves \$10,000 a year pay rises, why can't we all have the same?

**Activity 3****Identifying an inconsistency**

On the next page is a list of pairs of facts. The facts in each pair are inconsistent with one another. Your task is to construct the beginning of a letter where you use these two facts to raise a problem.

For example:

The government slashes the dole  
The parliament vote themselves a salary increase.

To put these two facts together to show the inconsistency you would write something like:

How can the parliament be so selfish to vote themselves a salary increase at the same time as they slash the dole to the unemployed?

**Beginning a letter****Activity 3**

**Write the start of a letter by using the two facts in each pair to state a problem:**



The government cuts the migration program for Kurds.  
Kurds are starving and being killed in their own country.

The government sends Chinese students back to China.  
The Chinese government is arresting them as they arrive.

The roads are overcrowded and getting worse.  
The government increases public transport fares.

People on unemployment benefit have to prove that they are looking for work.  
There are almost no job vacancies.

The government launches a campaign to encourage women to enter the workforce.  
The government increases the cost of child care services.

AIDS sufferers are dying.  
The government won't approve a new drug that helps them live longer.

Millions are dying of starvation in a famine in Africa.  
The City Council will not approve a 'Live Africa' concert.

Australia claims to be a multicultural society.  
Australia has never had a Governor General who is not Anglo-Celtic.

Australians are ashamed that the first European settlers poisoned and shot Aborigines.  
Today Aborigines are dying of infectious diseases.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 4****The fourth way of beginning: offering a solution**

Another way of beginning is not to identify the problem at all but rather to offer a solution to a problem which is not stated till later.

Here are some examples from the *Sample Letters*:

- Trams, buses and trains should all have conductors.
- Melbourne needs to maintain and improve its public transport system for energy savings, environmental benefits, but most of all to make the new Melbourne of the 21st century work.

**Activity 4****Suggesting a solution**

In this exercise you start with a problem and begin your letter by suggesting a solution.

For example, for the first problem (10% of the Australian workforce is unemployed) you could write something like:

- The government *must* create jobs for the 10% of the workforce which is out of work.  
*or*
- The government *must* act to reduce the current high levels of unemployment.  
*or*
- The current high levels of unemployment are unacceptable.  
*or*
- Australians *should not* put up with the present levels of unemployment.

Notice how you have to say *should* or *must* or *should not* when you are saying what to do to solve a problem.

**Write the beginning of a letter by suggesting a solution to the following problems:**



- 1 10% of the Australian workforce is unemployed.
- 2 Last night 3 women were attacked and raped.
- 3 A hundred homeless youth sleeping around the city were arrested last night for vagrancy.
- 4 The primary teacher's union announced an indefinite strike beginning tomorrow.
- 5 The government has slashed its refugee program in half.
- 6 You see an old man getting scraps of food out of a rubbish bin and eating it.
- 7 The pollution over Melbourne in autumn is the worst of any city in the world.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 4**

- 8 Tickets for the football have been increased by 50%.
- 9 Tram fares have been increased for the third time this year.
- 10 A Japanese firm has bought out Myer.
- 11 The government has made Japanese a compulsory school subject.
- 12 The government has closed all country railway lines.
- 13 The government has agreed to allow the USA test its nuclear weapons in the Australian outback because testing is now banned in the USA.
- 14 The new government announces that no-one under 21 can get unemployment benefit.
- 15 The Victorian government announces that it has sold the Electricity Commission to private enterprise.

**Beginning a letter****Activity 5****Three more ways to begin a letter**

Finally here are three more ways of starting letters which raise a problem.

**Ask a question**

- Why do football supporters persist in using umbrellas?
- When is the State Government going to have the guts to do something to eradicate the repulsive graffiti that has been splattered all over our transport system?
- How much money is the Ministry of Housing losing through tenants not paying rent?
- Is there anyone else who finds offensive this constant barrage of piped music, of inane radio commentators playing what we are led to believe is music in supermarkets, malls, from loud speakers on to the streets, in waiting rooms, over the telephone and even in car parks?

**State that now is the time to do something about ...**

- It seems it is about time to rethink Moomba.
- It is time that directors of public companies were made responsible for their management decisions.
- In the week that most children return to school it might be appropriate to reflect on the high cost of education.

**State the problem directly**

- The recent spate of bus accidents deserves our concern and the introduction of seat belts is clearly going to be a slow process leaving passengers exposed to more deaths or injuries.
- My corner in Endeavour Hills is an absolute traffic disaster.
- Alcohol and tobacco are drugs, by far our greatest killers.
- Two potentially dangerous groups of people are operating in Australia, one supposedly inside the law, the other outside the law.

**Activity 5****Using these three methods**

Go back and change some of the beginnings you have already written using these three new ways.

## *Theme 7*

# **Framing a problem as a public problem**

***To frame a problem as a public problem writers must***

- ***show that it is a general problem***
- ***speak on behalf of the whole community***
- ***show that many are affected by the problem***



## Issues

*In this session we use the idea of generalising a problem to show that it is a problem that concerns the community as a whole and is therefore a public problem.*

### **Ways of generalising**

The ways of generalising could have been subdivided into more explicit strategies but it would become too messy. However, if we alert you to some of the more detailed ways of generalising then you may be able to take them up with your class as they arise.

#### ■ Giving examples v identifying symptoms

The only way of generalising we have mentioned is 'giving more examples'. However this blurs together two different cases:

- 1 The first case is when there are lots of examples or instances of the same thing. For example, we could give lots of examples of vandalism.
- 2 The second case is where examples of apparently different things which are in fact instances of the same underlying problem.

*Imagine this situation:*

You catch the train for work every day. You go through the city and change trains.

Last week you got on your train, but had to get off and wait for another one to turn up because the train was defective. Yesterday the connecting train to the city was cancelled. According to the announcement, this was due to a breakdown in the signal system.

This morning, exactly the same thing happened. You were waiting for your connecting train when the train was cancelled. This time the announcement claimed it was due to an industrial dispute.

*Here is one way of writing about the incident:*

#### **Letter 1**

Last week the train I normally catch for work was cancelled and so I was late to work. Yesterday the same thing happened. Today the same thing happened today. I'm sick of it.

*Here is another way:*

#### **Letter 2**

Last week the train I normally catch for work was cancelled and so I was late to work. Yesterday the same thing happened. Today the same thing happened today. Our public transport system is in a mess. Trains break down. Signal systems don't work. Workers go out on strike.

This situation is intolerable to the ordinary public. We pay good money to travel on trains and should get a good service. The government must put more money into public transport so that we can have a reliable public transport system in Victoria.

The first letter simply writes up these events as a number of examples of the same thing — late trains.

The second version mentions a number of different things:

- trains breaking down
- signal systems not working
- workers going on strike

all as *manifestations or symptoms* of a more general problem — that our public transport system is in a mess.

*So different things can all be symptoms of the same systemic problem.*

### ■ Showing the range of groups

There is still one more way of generalising a problem, which is to show how several groups are affected by the problem.

The letter by McAllister is a good example of this. His letter begins by mentioning the affect of the damage done by four wheel drive vehicles on he and his bushwalking companions. But as the letter continues he brings in other groups affected. For example, even ordinary people going picnicking can be affected by four wheel drives.

We could probably see this as a strategy for enlisting the support of a range of groups to be concerned about the problem. If you can show that a range of groups will be adversely affected by the problem that gives them an incentive to take an interest and be concerned about that problem also.

### ***Using nominalisations***

Notice that in the activities we have supplied the students with a nominalisation stating the problem, such as:

*racism in our society*

or

*poor interpreter services in our medical system.*

You may find that you also need to do this in these early sessions.

Finally, a few more comments on the two letters about public transport we have just used in the notes.

### The wider problem

Notice the way the second letter commences with the words 'our public transport system'.

How does starting with the word 'our' make the writer of Letter 1 different from the writer of Letter 2?

Does Writer 1 appeal to any values? What about Writer 2?

Writer 1 doesn't suggest a solution. What solution does Writer 2 suggest?

Who is the 'we' that Writer 2 mentions in the second last line?

Whereas Writer 1 just says that the same thing has happened to her three times and she is sick of it, Writer 2 uses what has happened to her as examples of the fact that 'our public transport system is in a mess'. She then goes on to give some more examples such as signal systems breaking down and workers going on strike.

So Writer 2 begins with a description of something that has happened to her but then changes this into *an example of a wider problem* in society that can affect everyone.

She does this in three ways:

- she gives other symptoms to make it clear that this is not just something happening to her, but is of concern to everyone;
- she talks about the 'public transport system' which is the transport system for everyone, not just her own private problem;
- she also shifts from 'I' to using 'our' and 'we': she writes 'our public transport system', not 'the public transport system'.

## Showing the problem is a general problem

*In this session we will give you some exercises so that you can practise changing personal problems into public problems for the whole community.*

As we have seen in earlier sessions when you write a letter to the Editor you do not just tell people about something bad in your own life. Instead you tell people about something bad in the life of the whole community. So you are pointing out something that needs to be fixed or changed that will make things better for lots of people, not just for you.

How do you do this, especially if you start your letter by telling a story? How can you begin with a story about yourself or someone you know but end up talking about lots of people?

In this session we will show you how to do this.

### Everyone is involved

If you have described something that happened to you, you have to make clear that this is not just a personal matter — it affects (or could affect) everyone.

You can do this by:

- 1 describing it as just one example and then mentioning other examples even though you don't describe them in detail;
- 2 stating the problem generally and then giving illustrations of it to show it is a widespread or general problem.

### Example

The letter on vandalism by Helen Butler from Sunshine West High School is a good example of the second approach:

*She states the general problem ...*

*gives examples of the problem ...*

*and then suggests some solutions.*

---

We, as students of Sunshine West High School, are writing to express our concern regarding the *vandalism and the lack of safety on trains and railway stations.*

Recent examples, such as the attack on a woman at the Box Hill station and the boy who lost his legs while committing an act of vandalism, demonstrate the need for safety on our public transport system.

Some suggestions to help solve these problems are: the introduction of citizen-based groups to patrol the trains, an increase of police patrol and manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers.

Helen Butler

---

Activity 1



Here are two letters you have received.

**Rewrite these letters as Letters to the Editor using the person's story as an example of a problem facing the whole community.**

In each letter, mention some *other examples* of the same problem — you'll need to just make them up.

**Letter 1**

Use this first story as an example of the general problem of *racism in Australia*.



Dear Maria,

Last night I was walking home from work when this car of Australian men started driving alongside me. They started yelling terrible things at me like, 'Go home, wog' and other things I am too ashamed to tell you. I was really scared. I thought they might attack me. Luckily I got to a milkbar and hid in there until they went.

When they went I ran home crying. My whole body was shaking from fright. I always make sure the doors and windows are locked but even so I couldn't sleep that night. I kept thinking they might come and get me.

Sorry to tell you about such horrible things but I needed to tell someone.

Love, Antoinette

**Letter 2**

Use this second story as an example of *poor interpreter services in our medical system*.



Dear Ismael,

I have very sad news. My baby died. He got very sick so I took him to the hospital. But no-one understood my language. They did nothing and just sent us home.

My life is not worth living. I hate Australia.

Love, Anita

## Framing a public problem

## Workbook 3

## Speaking on behalf of the whole community

Another way you show that a problem is a problem for the whole community and not just a personal problem is to speak on behalf of the whole community. The main way you do this is by using the pronouns *we* and *our*.

**Example**

Let's look at the *Vandalism on trains* letter again.



We, as students of Sunshine West High School, are writing to express our concern regarding the vandalism and the lack of safety on trains and railway stations.

Recent examples, such as the attack on a woman at the Box Hill station and the boy who lost his legs while committing an act of vandalism, demonstrate the need for safety on our public transport system.

*Here she uses 'our' to speak on behalf of the whole community*

Some suggestions to help solve these problems are: the introduction of citizen-based groups to patrol the trains, an increase of police patrol and manned stations, an increase in the use of cameras in trains and complete responsibility taken by the graffiti artists to remove their graffiti.

These changes will increase the safety of passengers

Helen Butler  
Sunshine

**Activity 2**

Here are two letters written to you.

**Rewrite these letters so that you use them as examples of a more general problem.**

But this time make sure that you speak on behalf of the community as a whole by using the pronouns *we* and *our*.

**Letter 1**

Use this first story as an example of the problem of unnecessary deaths in our community.



Dear John,

Just a note to see if you can help in some way.

I live opposite a railway crossing that has no barrier. Over the last 5 years 8 people have been killed here.

I wrote a letter to the paper about it but they didn't publish it. Perhaps if you write one they might publish it.

Thanks, Tom.

## Framing a public problem

## Workbook 4

## Letter 2

Use this next story as an example of *the need to provide better facilities for our youth*.




---

Dear Sir,

We are a group of 6 kids on the dole. Most days we meet at our local milkbar to hang-out. We have never done anything to anyone, but yesterday the cops told us to move and said that the next time they see us there they will arrest us.

What are we supposed to do? We are not allowed to stay home. We have nowhere to go. And there are lots more kids like us.

We need somewhere to go during the day, like a Youth Club or something. Could you write to the paper for us. They will listen to you.

Yours faithfully, 6 desperate Footscray youths

---

## Activity 3



Here are some opening sentences for letters.

**Add another sentence to each one so that these raise an issue for the whole community.**

- 1 My son has just left school but can't find a job, so he just sits at home all day watching the television.
- 2 Last night I saw two old men sleeping on a park bench wrapped in newspapers.
- 3 Yesterday I saw a cat kill a native bird in our local park.
- 4 This morning I was on a tram when the conductor started yelling at a passenger.
- 5 Walking along the Yarra River yesterday made me feel sick because there was so much rubbish floating down it.
- 6 Last night as I drove home from work I was passed dangerously by a young P plate driver in his hotted up car speeding well above the speed limit.
- 7 I have read just about everything in my local library.
- 8 The news on TV seems to consist of one violent story after another.
- 9 Our council has just changed over to bigger rubbish bins.
- 10 My daughter is in Year 11 but she still cannot do very simple maths.

## Activity 4

**You and your mates**

Select a short letter from the *Sample Letters*.

**Then:**

- **rewrite it so the writer only cares about themselves**
- **rewrite this so the writer only cares about their particular group**

**Hint**

How do you do it? Find the bits that mean *everybody* and either change them or get rid of them.

## Activity 5

**Not just personal.**

Chose a partner.

***Both of you write a personal letter about something bad that happened to you.***

Exchange letters.

***Now rewrite your partner's personal letter as a Letter to the Editor.***



## *Theme 8*

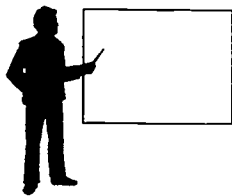
# **Suggesting a solution**

***Suggesting a solution involves***

- ***describing a change to be made***
- ***describing how things will then be better so the problem will no longer exist***

# Teaching notes

See the Summary and Teaching Notes in Theme 6, page 94.



## Different ways of suggesting a solution

Look at this sentence from a letter:

The government must put more money into public transport *so that we can have a reliable public transport system in Victoria.*

The last part of this sentence gives a reason for the government putting more money into public transport.

To suggest a solution is to *put forward a proposal that will bring about something that the community as a whole values.* Your solution is a way of bringing this situation about.

We can write

- In order to have a more reliable public transport system the government must put more money into public transport.
- By putting more money into public transport the government will create a more reliable public transport system.
- The government must put more money into public transport in order that we can have a reliable public transport system in Victoria.
- To have a more reliable public transport system the government must put more money into public transport.
- The government must put more money into public transport if we are to have a reliable public transport system in Victoria.
- If we are to have a reliable public transport system then the government must put more money into public transport.
- Putting more money into public transport is the only way we will have a more reliable public transport system in Victoria.

## Suggesting solutions

## Activity 1

## Activity 1



In the following sentences we have given you the goal and you have to make up a way of achieving the goal. In other words, we provide the general value and you have to suggest a way to bring it about.

**Write a sentence for each example, making up your own solution by completing the statement.**

**The goal or value**

To improve the safety of our streets  
 To increase the efficiency of our hospitals  
 If AIDS sufferers are to live with dignity  
 Women will only be safe from violence  
 Our children will only learn respect for the law  
 To become a genuinely multicultural society  
 We will only save our environment  
 If Australia is to become a clever country  
 The only way Australia can increase its exports

**The means or way to get it**

the government must ...  
 nurses must ...  
 Australians must ...  
 if men ...  
 if teachers ...  
 Australia must ...  
 by ...  
 everyone must ...  
 is by ...

**And now try these (notice we've switched the order):**

**Means**

... ing factories that ...

The more we ...

**Goal**

is an important element in any policy for reducing pollution levels over our city.

the more the unemployed will try to become productive members of the workforce again

**Suggesting solutions****Activity 2****Activity 2**

You are going to suggest a solution to the problem of *burglaries and break-ins by people who need money for drugs*.

Here are some possible solutions:

- chemists give addicts cheap or free drugs
- give people a tax concession for joining Neighbourhood Watch
- increase the police force
- have drug education classes in schools
- bring in the death penalty for drug pushers.

***Choose one of these solutions or invent one of your own.***

Write a single sentence saying that your solution will solve the problem of burglaries and break-ins by people who need money for drugs.

Use the sentence patterns used in Activity 1 as a guide. Here they are:

- If ...
- By ...
- ...ing ...
- To ...

## *Theme 9*

# **Writing a problem-solution letter**

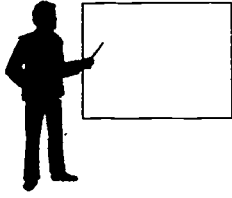
*Writing a problem solution letter includes*

- *raising a problem*
- *framing this problem as a public problem*
- *suggesting or inviting a solution*

## Revision

Run through what the course has covered so far.

## Teaching notes



In this session students will attempt to write their own letters to raise problems and suggest solutions. It may be less threatening for students if they work in pairs. Do not focus on details such as spelling, grammar or punctuation.

Concentrate on the overall letter:

- does it raise a problem?
- does it frame this problem as a public problem for the whole community?
- does it suggest a solution or invite a solution from some public organisation?

### Activity 1

Ask students to write a letter about something they think is a public problem. Don't try to get them to follow any formulas we have covered. They should just write down their meanings first.

You can then help them find better structures by reminding them of the various strategies we have covered. Certainly you can point out how what they have done intuitively tallies with what we have learnt. That is, they have used a strategy without realising that they were.

## Homework

Set at least one more letter.

## Issues

### **Asking students to write**

In this session we ask students to write one or more problem-solution letters. We should say something about how we see this session in relation to the preceding sessions and in relation to those which follow it.

### **The stages**

The pattern we are using in this curriculum to help students understand and be able to write in the public domain has a certain rhythm to it.

We

- point out some elements for *reading* letters
- point out some elements for *writing* letters
- ask students to write *intuitively*
- then get students to write again *drawing on the new elements* if they need to.

### **Pointing out structures**

In the sessions preceding this one we have tried to help students notice a few structures in the type of letter we are dealing with. For example, for problem-solution letters, we have pointed out that

- they raise problems
- these problems are framed as of public concern
- and that situations are construed as problematic by being measured against a small number of values.

Pointing out these elements and getting students to notice them is a quite abstract and analytic task. It was a set of exercises disengaged from actually engaging with public debate. Asking students to do these sorts of decontextualised exercises is something that many teachers in recent times have felt quite uncomfortable about. They have often felt them to be just meaningless exercises that make no sense to students and do not help them to really engage with the actual purposes and meanings they are dealing with.

However, we have interspersed these exercises through the curriculum so that students alternate back and forth between engaging in the 'real writing', on the one hand, and noticing particular elements of the form of writing they are engaging in, on the other. We believe that this assists students who are not 'at home' in public discourse to come to grips with it more easily.

### **Writing for themselves**

So this session is where the curriculum moves away from pointing out elements of Letters to the Editor and asks students to write one or more themselves.



Notice that they are asked to do this without much guidance. That is, another pattern we use in this curriculum is not to point out any actual features of writing until **after** students have had a go on their own. This means that when we do later point out a linguistic feature that students could use in their writing, they can see its point and can imagine where and why to use it, because they had trouble doing it intuitively.

### **Procedures as reminders, not recipes**

Another reason we ask students to write relatively intuitively before pointing to structures that could help their writing is because we do not think that writing is simply a matter of following a procedure or enacting a set of elements.

We think of these elements or procedures as pointers or reminders of the sorts of meanings that have to be made to write a successful Letter to the Editor and suggestions for some ways of going about this.

### **Starting to write letters**

This session is where we ask students to 'write intuitively'. It is important to realise that this is still a very early stage in the cycle, so it is not to be treated as a test of what students can do. It is more a test of where they are at.

So don't hassle about the results. Our view is that everyone should be taken as succeeding at this task if they can even gesture — despite problems with grammar, spelling, wording, etc. — at the three central meanings they have to make in a problem-solution letter.

Of course some students will already be better writers than others. But this should be interpreted as them being *ahead* of where the curriculum is up to at this point, not that they have succeeded while others have failed. This is why we said not to focus on spelling, punctuation and so. Many students will botch these aspects of the writing but that does not matter at this point.

If they ask for some help on these matters just give them the answer — do not try to draw it out of them or turn it into a lesson on spelling, punctuation or grammar. These matters will be attended to later when you focus in more closely on what is happening between and inside sentences.

For now we just want the overall pattern of a problem-solution letter.

**Writing a problem-solution letter****Activity 1****Activity 1**

Now it is your turn.

***Pick something that you think is a problem for the whole community and write a whole letter to the editor about it.***

*Hints:*

- Don't worry too much about trying to apply what you have learnt so far in this course. Just write it.
- Don't worry if it is still a bit mixed up. After you have written down roughly what you want to say you can think about how to organise it, using the approach we have been learning.
- Ask your teacher to help check your letter to make sure you are on the right track.

*Good luck.*

*Themes 10–12*

## Letters as arguments

10	Introducing letters that argue	131
11	Writing response letters	147
12	Making concessions to the other position	155

## *Theme 10*

# Introducing letters that argue

*Letters to the Editor which argue usually include*

- *a statement of the other position*
- *discrepancies identified in this other position*
- *a statement of the writer's position*
- *(sometimes) concessions to the other position*

## Summary

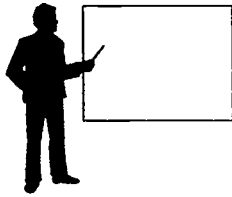
This lesson shifts students away from letters which just raise a problem and offer a solution, to letters that respond to another point of view.

We teach this in the same way we taught problem-solution.

- Read through some sample letters
- Point out the rhetorical structure of one letter in the same way that students marked the problem and solution in the earlier letters.
- Allow students to mark and name those elements on other letters.

## Teaching notes

The first letter just raises the issue and is a problem-solution letter.



### ■ Activity 1

Read the letters and check that students understand the main thread.

Some students might now like to volunteer to read the letters out loud themselves.

Remember that after each letter has been read out loud, allow students to read the letter silently to themselves and to mark and then ask about any words they're not sure of.

Check whether students have grasped the main idea of the letter. Ask them to jot down, after reading each letter, the writer's solution.

### Notes

Point out to students that these letters are different from the letters they have so far read and written.

Explain that when people write letters they do so to give support or to disagree with the views of others. But that they also try to persuade the community to share their view. So they try to incorporate other views in their own writing and show through their writing that their view is the best.

Explain to students that you want to draw their attention to the different ways writers include other views in their writing and how they try to show that their views are better than those other views.

On overhead put up the a list of 'the things that writers do when they are arguing':

- stating the other position
- identifying things wrong with the other position
- making proposals, offering solutions , making recommendations.
- acknowledging or conceding problems with their proposals or recommendations.

Explain to the students that

- they will be moving onto writing letters where they will be arguing against other views and trying to show that their view is the best;
- but first they'll mark some response letters to note how other writers commonly argue;
- and write some practice letters to get the hang of it.

### ■ Activity 2

- Students circle the different rhetorical elements in a letter following the example and label these elements in the margin.
- Help students who are having trouble.
- Students compare their analysis with a partner.
- On an overhead of the letter, with students' help, mark and label elements of the letter.

### ■ Activity 3

- Introduce metacommentary.
- Explain to students role of metacomments i.e. special signals to the reader
- Students go back and mark the metacomments in the letters.
- Point out metacomments list to students.

### ■ Activity 4

- Work through two or three letters from the *Sample Letters*.
- Students mark and label rhetorical structures.
- Mark meta commentary.

## Issues

### **What is argument?**

So far, students have been introduced to the idea of community, citizen and values, to enable them to begin to make sense of the stances adopted on letters. However, this is really a very limited picture of what occurs in the letters column. What has been left out up to now is that letters are usually arguments.

This session introduces students to the letters column not just as a place where problems for the community are raised and suggestions for their solution offered, but as a realm where solutions, problems and values are in dispute, where writers write to show that their view or proposal is the best way of thinking or acting in relation to a particular issue.

Students can misunderstand why there is discussion and debate in public discourse. It is easy for them to assume that public discourse is merely a collection of silly self-opinionated people big-noting themselves by indulging in stupid and aggressive arguments. Even though public discourse is often vigorous and aggressive it is important that students realise that despite — or even because of — this antagonistic surface, public discourse is in fact a positive and democratic force.

### **Arguments in family life**

One reason why students can misread the intentions of public discourse is because they interpret public debate and argument as serving the same ends as argument in private life. In our everyday personal lives, especially in family life, we have what are commonly called *arguments*. Children learn very early what an argument is and how to argue. Usually it is a dispute over ownership. Two children both want the same thing and each insists: 'it's not yours, it's mine'.

Everybody in our society learns to be a party to such disputes; and everybody calls them '*arguments*'. For example, children can argue over who should sit by the window in the car, using reasons that appeal to such things as: who sat there last time; who was promised they could; who asked first; who got into the car first; who is feeling sick; and so on. Parents can spend quite a lot of time shouting at kids to 'stop arguing'. So, students naturally think that public argument must be the same as an argument between people in everyday life and arises out of the same motives as personal argument.

### **Current affairs in the media**

This sense that an argument is a dispute, is reinforced by the confrontational style of current affairs reporting in the media. Current affairs on radio or TV typically involves an interviewer asking someone aggressive questions in an attempt to catch them out. Similarly, the most public aspects of our political system — election campaigns and question time in Parliament — both seem to consist of invective, claim and counter-claim.

## The liberal view of public debate

This everyday sense of the meaning of argument is reinforced by the liberal view of public argument which is that a community consists of different individuals each with their own privately defined interests, wants, desires, goals, values, beliefs. Public argument, on this liberal view, is the idea that the private interests or goals of private citizens clash and they then argue with one another to see who will get their way. In these disputes the only concern of those involved is to get their own way. However, they do have to conform to the rules of fairness. On this view, these disputes were originally settled by violence, by force, so that 'might was right'. However, instituting a liberal state means that private individuals hand over to the state their capacity for violence and agree to use peaceful means to settle disputes.

The trouble with this liberal view of public dispute is that it is unclear where the reasoning comes from that is being appealed to in public debate. The only values which exist in a pure liberal state are *individual autonomy* and *enforcement of contracts*. This is a very thin collection of forms of reasoning. In fact, public dispute in contemporary life includes a much wider range of reasoning and values than these. Similarly the courts include a wider range of reasoning and values as criteria to settle or arbitrate disputes.

So, even though this liberal model of public dispute is the one that is most similar to the private family disputes we have in the family, and is also the one that seems to be dominant in contemporary self-understandings of public debate, in fact it cannot account fully for the sorts of arguing that actually go on.

## Public reasons as ideology

Another view of public debate is that it should not be taken at face value — it is just a dominant group or class enforcing and conning the other groups.

In this view, the community is not really a community at all. The dominant group insists that there is a unified community and it is in their interests to insist that there is a single unified community with common forms of reason and common values to arbitrate disagreements.

This 'rigged game' view insists that a society really consists of (at least) two completely different communities: a ruling group and oppressed groups. The oppressed groups have a completely different culture, a completely different set of values and reasons from those that are imposed by the dominant group. What this means is that public debate is fraudulent: oppressed groups can only appeal to the values of the ruling class but the rules are rigged so that the ruling class always wins any dispute and the oppressed remain oppressed.

If the oppressed appeal to any of their *own* values these will not be acknowledged as valid or relevant forms of reasoning.



In this view the reasons appealed to in public debate are the values of the ruling class. Public debate itself is rigged and infected with the interests of only one group. The community is not really a unified community; it is only held together by economic necessity and a hegemonic dominant culture, not by common beliefs or values. The only thing that holds the oppressed groups in the community is violence, need or brainwashing. What seems to be common public debate is really fraudulent.

### **Our view of the public realm**

Rather than initiating students into one story, theory or account, our approach is to introduce students to rival traditions so that they can make sense of the debates as well as develop their own position in relation to these traditions.

The view of public debate that we are deploying depends on viewing a community as based on standard ways of reasoning about values and goals. That is, this view does not view public debate as simply the expression of private interests. Public debate is not just class or private warfare. The public domain is envisaged as possessing its own specificity and its own forms of reasoning distinct from those operating in other domains of life.

### **Reason as ideology**

However, as students have grasped the notion of the public realm as a *domain of reasoning*, they can be encouraged to examine disputes and identify who mobilises which forms of reasoning and thus examine the relationship between interests and reasoning.

In this way they can be introduced to the idea that reason can serve as a mask for interest. They can begin to read against the grain of public argument and uncover the way that 'reasons' are used to mask or disguise *interests*.

---

“ Our approach is to introduce students to rival traditions so that they can make sense of the debates as well as develop their own position in relation to these traditions. ”

## Revision

***So far we have read letters that identify problems for the community and perhaps suggest solutions to those problems.***

You have also had a chance to write some letters, raising problems and offering solutions.

### **Main points covered so far**

We have pointed out three things:

- people who engage in public debate raise problems and sometimes suggest solutions to problems.
- they see the problems they identify as problems for the whole community.
- letter writers draw on a fairly small range of values in their writing.

We start with a revision exercise to refresh your memory of these three main features of problem-solution letters.

### **Agreeing and disagreeing**

You have probably noticed that many letters don't raise problems and offer solutions.

Some letters do more than just raise problems though: they also *argue against other writers*.

- Some letter writers write to agree with other writers views about a particular issue.
- Other writers write to argue against other people's views on a particular issue.

***Your workbook activities will look at some examples of these letters, letters which present an argument.***

**Problem-solution letters****Revision****Revision exercise.**

*Here is a fictitious letter on the problem of the road toll*

Identify the problem in this letter.

Identify the solution.

What value the writer is calling on?

## **Airbags should be standard equipment**

Every night on television we see dramatised versions of car accidents. These are shocking to watch and do remind us of the possible horror that can strike any time if we are involved in an accident. Road accidents are terrible not only because of the deaths they cause but also because of the life long suffering that those injured on the road have to live with.

One way of reducing this dreadful carnage on the road is the compulsory fitting of airbags in the front compartment. These airbags instantly inflate on impact and prevent the driver and the front seat passengers from hitting the steering wheel or dashboard. In Europe and the United States these airbags are now standard equipment. They should be standard equipment on cars driven in Australia as well.

*Safety Conscious.*

**Problem?**

**Solution?**

**What value(s)?**

## Letters as arguments

## Example

## Fitting cars with airbags avoids the real cause of the road toll

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age*, 30/3), is a smokescreen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up on confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magical rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm. Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma, road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

*M. Oxe  
Ivanhoe*

*President of Bicycle Victoria*

### Here is another letter on fitting airbags to cars

In this letter the writer is arguing against a particular way of solving the problem of the road toll. He argues that this is not a good solution.

### Notice these points:

- The writer presents the solution proposed in the first letter as a position or point of view with which he disagrees
- He identifies certain things wrong with this position
- He offers his own point of view
- He also acknowledges or concedes certain value to the other position

This is a very common structure of many written arguments:

- **a statement of the other position**
- **a list of the discrepancies in this other position.**
- **a statement of the writer's position** and sometimes
- **a concession to the other position.**

**Presenting an argument****Example**

Now look at the second letter, *Fitting cars with airbags avoids the real cause of the road toll, on page 141 (opposite).*

This writer disagrees with the writer of the first letter.

He believes the solution offered by Writer 1 to the problem won't work. He gives reasons why the solution won't work, and suggests a different solution.

This letter is an example of an *argument*..

The writer is showing that another writer's view is not the best way of thinking about a particular problem and suggests a different way of thinking about things.

He does this to convince other citizens that the good of the community is best served by his proposal rather than the other one.

**How does he do this?**

- 1 First he introduces the first writer's viewpoint.  
We call this the **other position**.
- 2 He then says what's wrong with that other view point.  
We call this **discrepancy**.  
A discrepancy is anything that is wrong with the other position.
- 3 Finally, he presents **his own position**.

**The view, not the person**

So a letter which is an argument is not usually an attack on the person presenting another view point.

An argument tries to show that one **point of view** is better than another.

---

*“ So a letter which is an argument is not usually an attack on the person presenting another view point. ”*

---

### Fitting cars with airbags is certain to reduce road toll

The fitting of airbags to motor cars is dismissed by M. Ozer, of Bicycle Victoria (3/4), as a trite countermeasure and the opinion expressed that the major issue is to improve human behaviour.

The Road Trauma Committee rejects this restrictive and negative view. The most successful road safety countermeasures have been obtained by technical improvements rather than through attempts to change human behaviour.

The reduction in the road toll from 8.1 deaths per 10,000 registered vehicles in 1970 to 3.0 last year was achieved largely by the introduction of technical improvements, e.g. seat belts, safety helmets, better vehicle and roadside design. This is not to deny some success in changing human behaviour, e.g. by compliance with seat belt-wearing legislation and the reduction in drink driving.

Further reduction in the road toll will be obtained only by the progressive introduction of scientifically based practical countermeasures.

Such countermeasures will of necessity pertain to roadway and vehicle design as well as human behaviour.

The safety airbag is an important countermeasure not available, even as an option, to the Australian motorist. Airbags are available in the US and Europe and long overdue here. They considerably increase driver safety and are complementary to seat belts. In particular, airbags appreciably dissipate impact forces and reduce the risk of fatal or serious head and chest injuries.

The airbag is the only measure available to protect drivers who fail to wear a seat belt. While only about 10 per cent of drivers do not wear seat belts the proportion not wearing seat belts in fatal crashes is as high as one in three. A significant reduction in such unbelted fatalities will be achieved by airbag fitting.

Airbag fitting will unquestionably lead to a new major fall in the road toll.

*Frank T. McDermott  
College of Surgeons Gardens  
Spring Street  
Melbourne.*

#### Activity 1



Here is another letter on the airbags issue.

**Mark these parts of the letter:**

- *the other position*
- *the discrepancy*
- *the writer's position*

Check with your partner and with the teacher.

#### Activity 2

Complete more examples from Section 3 of the *Sample Letters*.

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**Metacommentary****Student notes****Giving signals to the reader**

If a writer were to argue the following:

---

Police should not carry guns. Research indicates that armed crime is on the increase. More automatic weapons are used in bank robberies than in the past. Some police abuse their authority.

These are isolated incidents. The public would be at risk if police were to be disarmed.

---

we would probably think this a fairly strange or contradictory argument.

It is, of course, unlikely that you would ever read a letter like that. It might look something more like this:

---

**It is sometimes argued** police should not carry guns. **However**, research indicates that armed crime is on the increase. **For instance**, more automatic weapons are used in bank robberies than in the past. **It is true that** some police abuse their authority.

**But** these are **more than likely** to be isolated incidents. **In fact** the public would be at risk if police were to be disarmed.

---

**Metacomments**

The words in bold we call *metacomments*. They signal to the reader how the commentary should be taken, how to interpret each part.

Even though the ideas in the first argument are fine, they seem muddled because the writer hasn't signalled to the reader their meaning in the argument.

<b>It is sometimes argued</b>	signals to the reader that the writer is stating another point of view
<b>For instance</b>	signals to the reader that the writer is about to give an example
<b>It is true ... but</b>	signals to the reader the writer is making a concession.
<b>... more than likely...</b>	tones down or qualifies a statement
<b>In fact ...</b>	emphasises the writer's view.

**Writers use these kinds of words when writing arguments very frequently. Once you start noticing them you will be surprised how many there are!**

**Metacommentary****Worked example****Too much health cash is spent on technology**

There is always a lot of publicity and media hype following successful transplant surgery, such as the liver transplants at the Austin Hospital last year and, more recently the double-heart transplant. While I understand the importance of prolonging a life, particularly a young life, by such modern surgery, I am concerned that too much emphasis is oriented at the high technology end of the health care scale.

There seems to be a false assumption in Western society that a high quality health care system is one that offers an abundance of 'state of the art' equipment.

During recent years there has certainly been a rapid development in that direction, with increased health costs to match. Unfortunately, overall health care does not seem to have improved at a similar rate for the majority of consumers. In fact, in some areas the reverse is true.

Hospitals cry poor, complaining that there is not enough money in the budget for them to function at their full capacity, resulting in long waiting lists of people requiring elective surgery, with even more urgent cases not being guaranteed admission. However, one must wonder if the current situation at some of our hospitals is due, in part, to an increasing percentage of their overall budget being channelled from the needy general area into the highly expensive specialised and high-tech area.

While there have been some exciting new developments as a result of such technology, this growth industry should not be allowed to dominate the purse-strings of the health care budget. After all, the only true indicator of a high quality health system is a healthier society: one in which fewer people are getting sick.

*Jenny Knox  
Doncaster*

*The metacommentary has been highlighted in this letter.*

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**The language of the 'other position'****Reference*****Ways to introduce the other position:***

It might be argued that ...

Some might argue that ...

It might be said that ...

Some may claim that ...

A view that is often put forward is that ...

It is sometimes said that ...

It is sometimes suggested that ...

It has been suggested that ...

## The language of discrepancy



## Reference

### *Ways to introduce a discrepancy:*

However/but

in fact, ...  
 what this leaves out is the fact that  
 in practice, ...  
 more important is the fact that ...  
 more central is the fact that ...  
 more to the point is the fact that ...  
 what needs to be noted is the fact that ...  
 this contradicts the fact that ...  
 this neglects the fact that ...  
 this would only be true if ...  
 all this amounts to is the claim that ...  
 it should not be concluded from this that ...  
 this line of argument leads to ...  
 this would imply that ...  
 this obscures the importance of ...  
 this underestimates the importance of ...  
 this underestimates the significance of ...  
 this would create more problems than it solves ...  
 this must be counterbalanced by the fact that ...  
 this does not mean that ...  
 the assumption underlying this is that ...  
 the consequence of this would be that ...  
 this implies that ...  
 if we turn our attention to the ...  
 if we take into account the fact that ...  
 underlying this is the more important issue of ...  
 this is an unusual case. A more typical case would be ...  
 this is too vague. It would be more accurate to say ...  
  
**that ...**  
 this contradicts the fact **that ...**  
 this ignores the crucial fact **that ...**  
 this presupposes **that ...**

## The language of judgement



## Reference

## positive

## negative

**central**

crucial  
key  
genuine  
positive  
suitable  
neutral  
necessary  
essential  
unique  
distinctive  
indispensable  
representative  
primary  
major  
preeminent  
decisive  
fundamental  
basic  
critical pivotal  
seminal  
dominant  
important  
decisive  
distinctive  
characteristic  
vital  
prominent  
marked  
significant  
salient  
core  
outstanding  
notable  
predominant  
dramatic  
deep rooted  
serious  
chief  
substantive  
underlying  
pervasive  
enduring  
determining  
integral  
prime  
significant

**valid**

reasonable  
compelling  
legitimate  
insightful  
coherent  
accurate  
convincing  
comprehensive  
constructive  
fruitful  
successful  
persuasive  
systematic  
logical  
substantive  
profound  
sophisticated  
elegant  
systematic  
careful  
pertinent  
relevant

**unimportant**

less important  
superficial  
secondary  
subsidiary  
trivial  
cosmetic  
minor  
marginal  
peripheral  
accidental  
surface  
residual  
subjective  
borderline case  
artificial  
insignificant  
remote

**dubious**

worthless  
inadequate  
has no weight  
deluded  
distorted  
misleading  
biased  
crude  
vague  
unsupported  
erroneous  
meaningless  
biased  
vague  
unsupported  
erroneous  
meaningless  
unworkable  
nominally  
obsolete  
arbitrary  
fruitless

subjective  
obsessive  
illogical  
ill-conceived  
trivial  
irrational  
wrong  
inadequate  
controversial  
one-sided  
plausible  
unsubstantiated  
shallow  
unclear  
eccentric  
unsystematic  
sterile  
false  
unscientific  
unreliable  
unwarranted  
dogmatic  
obscure  
extremist  
peripheral  
unimportant  
unsatisfactory  
untenable  
invalid  
doubtful  
contentious  
ambiguous  
partial  
exaggerated  
muddled  
far-fetched  
purely rhetorical  
facile  
has shortcomings

## *Theme 11*

# Writing response letters

### *Response letters*

- *summarise the other position*
- *make evaluative comments about that position*
- *have several common formats*

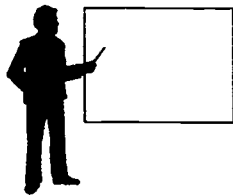
## Summary

This lesson shifts students away from letters which just raise a problem and offer a solution, to letters that respond to another point of view.

We teach this in the same way we taught problem-solution.

- Read through some sample letters
- Point out the rhetorical structure of one letter in the same way that students marked the problem and solution in the earlier letters.
- Allow students to mark and name those elements on other letters.

## Teaching notes



### Starting response letters

Tell students that these ways of starting a letter of response are typical of the ways letters commence but they are not the only way letters commence.

The main thing to get across is the fact that early in a letter a writer picks up the position that he or she is responding to. How she does that varies, and although those variations aren't infinite they are greater than we have represented here. The point is that giving students some categories to classify patterns in a letter will help them notice the variety that does exist.

- Students can mark the beginning of some letters for homework.
- You could discuss with students the significance of different ways of starting a letter.
- After students have written their response to the fictitious letters, compare the beginnings.
- Students make up 'silly' problem-solution letters and swap.

### ■ Activity 1

Read the four short letters and check that students understand the main thread.

Some students might now like to volunteer to read the letters out loud themselves.

After each letter has been read out loud, allow students to read the letter silently to themselves, mark any words they're not sure of and then ask about them.

Check whether students have grasped the main idea of the letter. Ask them to jot down, after reading each letter, the writer's solution.

By all means add your own, current examples. Students could make up some themselves and swap them for the exercise.

## Hints for writing response letters

### ■ Starting a response letter

Just as there are many different ways of starting a letter where you raise a problem for the community, so there are different ways of starting a letter where you respond to another view.

Here is one way of starting:

---

**The claim** that married women should go back into the home to reduce the country's unemployment problem is quite extraordinary.

### ■ Summarising the other position

The thing to notice here is that in the first part of the sentence the writer of the letter has *summarised* the other position:

---

**The claim that married women should go back into the home to reduce the country's unemployment problem** is quite extraordinary.

We'll leave aside the question of whether this statement is a good summary of the 'other position'. Later in the course we'll look at the way writers summarise other positions and we'll look at the reasons they do so.

### ■ Making evaluative comments within a sentence

In the last part of the sentence the writer makes an *evaluative comment* about this 'other position'.

---

The claim that married women should go back into the home to reduce the country's unemployment problem **is quite extraordinary**.

So in the same sentence we have both the other position *summarised* and the writer's *evaluation* of that other position stated as well. Here is another example:

---

**The air bag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind.**

*The air bag approach to road safety* is the other position. *More like a bag of wind* is what the writer thinks of that other position.

## Writing response letters

## Examples

### ■ Making evaluative comments in a separate sentence

Another way of starting is just to summarise the other position in a separate sentence. Then, in another sentence, make a comment or raise a problem about this view.

---

The fitting of air bags to motor cars is dismissed by M. Oxeer, of Bicycle Victoria (3/4) as a trite countermeasure and the opinion expressed that the major issue is to improve human behaviour. **The Road Trauma Committee rejects this restrictive and negative view.**

Here is another example:

---

In your editorial about shop trading hours you said that the public, unions and retailers should have a say about any changes that may be made. This seems to imply that everyone concerned should be considered. However, in one vital sense the public discussion of this issue has been inadequate: it **fails to consider the needs of all people** — even retailers consumers and unionists — in anything other than narrow economic terms.

And another:

---

Comments by Robert Haupt (*The Age* 17/3) and more recently by Senator Peter Walsh claim that Australia must choose between economic development and environmental protection. Such views reveal a **remarkable lack of understanding** of the principles of sustainable development, despite the amount of discussion that has occurred over the past few years.

### ■ Evaluating first

Sometimes writers can indicate their attitude toward another position *before* stating that other position.

---

**A dangerous suggestion** underlies the article by Suzy Freeman-Greene on the paint ball controversy (*The Age* 22/6). It is expressed in her remark that a large part of the community 'do not want people to play war games'.

Example:

---

Kieran Ryan trots out all the **tired old assertions** in trying to justify a huge increase in population for Australia.

**Writing response letters****Examples**

In the following example the writer first *signals her attitude* toward the opponents of fingerprinting then gives an indication of her view before going on to present the *other position*.

I am **saddened** by the attitude of some towards fingerprinting. Fingerprinting is one of the few positive means of identification available to mankind, yet we as a society treat it as though it is a tool of the police used solely for the purposes of identification in criminal investigations.

Here is another letter where the writer states a view before referring to another position:

---

**Bicycle paths are useful** to encourage bicycle use but have very limited value for commuting purposes, contrary to the opinion of Elizabeth Wilson (18/6).



**Writing response letters****Worked example****Responding to proposals.**

Here is a worked example of letters written in response to the proposals in an original letter.

**Original Letter**

The number of guns in our community is getting out of hand. The government should stop the production of all firearms in Australia.

*G Smith*

**Response Letter, Sample 1**

I fully support G. Smith's aim of wanting to reduce the number of guns in Australia. However, just stopping the production of guns made in Australia as G. Smith proposes won't reduce the number of guns available to criminals and mad men.

As it stands at the moment most guns used in Australia are imported from overseas. Cutting back the guns produced in Australia will only mean more guns will be imported from other countries. As well as banning the production of guns in Australia their importation from overseas producers must be stopped as well.

**Response Letter, Sample 2**

The proposal put forward by G. Smith that gun production in Australia should be stopped is absurd.

There are many legitimate reasons why people have guns. Shooting is an accepted sport. People hunt all sorts of animals, from ducks to wild pigs. Police need guns to protect members of the public from criminals. And even ordinary people sometimes feel the need to have a gun to defend themselves against possible assault. The real solution is not banning all guns but making sure that guns do not get into the wrong hands.

**Response Letter, Sample 3**

G Smith proposes that we should stop all gun production in Australia because they 'are getting out of hand'.

I have a further suggestion. Why not ban the production of all cars and skate boards? After all without cars there wouldn't be car accidents and skateboard riders are known to fall off and hurt themselves.

**Writing response letters****Activity****Activity 1**

Here are four fictitious letters where the writer identifies a problem and suggests a solution.

**Write a short opposing response letter to each of these proposals.**

In other words, you have to write a response letter criticising the solution proposed in the letters.

**Letters**

- 1 The unemployment rate in Australia is now so high that all immigration to Australia should be stopped immediately.
- 2 Children no longer seem to respect authority. The strap should be reintroduced in schools.
- 3 Alcohol is the cause of road deaths and violence in the home. Other dangerous drugs are banned. Why not alcohol as well?
- 4 Everyone seems to be worried about the harm that adult programs do to children. If children were in bed by 7:30 as I was as a child there would be no need for more regulation of television programs.

**Writing response letters****Activity****Activity 2**

**Begin a letter in response to each of the statements below.**

Make sure you

- present the other position
- evaluate the other position
- try each of the different ways of beginning at least once.

Read this sample to see what to do.

**Sample letter**


---

Dogs should always be kept on a leash in public places. *H. Wurth*

**Sample beginnings of a response letter**


---

H. Wurth's proposal to keep dogs on a leash in public places is cruel and unnecessary.

or

I feel sorry for all the poor dogs in our community. They won't be allowed off the leash if cruel people like H. Wurth have their way.

**Letters**

- 1 Police should not carry guns. *F. Mario*
- 2 Smoking in public places should be banned. *P. Nguyen*
- 3 The laws against marijuana use turns ordinary citizens into criminals. *F. Zappa*
- 4 The sooner Australia becomes a republic the better. *P. Adams*
- 5 Australia needs only immigrants who can speak English on arrival. *R. Manning*
- 6 It's time for Fitzroy Football Club to call it a day. *D. Shaw*

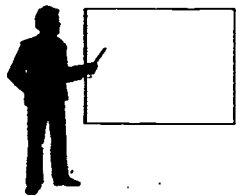
## *Theme 12*

# **Making concessions to the other position**

### ***Concessions***

- ***anticipate possible criticisms***
- ***show the writer is aware of conflicting values***
- ***are usually signalled by particular metacomments***

## Teaching notes



Throughout this curriculum we have tried to avoid two traps:

- We don't want to set students up for failure by giving them tasks which are too difficult
- nor do we want to bore them to death with exercises which are meaningless to them.

So we've tried to mix reading and writing whole texts with reading and writing specific bits of text. The whole texts or letters give students a chance to write intuitively and incorporate things they've learnt from earlier classes. The focus on particular elements of the letters is meant to acquaint students with writing from particular standpoints and give them practice.

But we cannot tell if the mix is right for any particular group of students. You might find that doing two or three examples in Theme 6 (rather than all 15) is plenty, or you might find that it's better to give students a chance to write a response letter (Theme 13) before looking at concessions (Theme 12). Don't feel you have to follow the book rigidly.

## Making concessions

## Student notes

When people argue for a particular policy or proposal against others they sometimes anticipate the criticisms that others will make of their proposals. We call this part of an argument a *concession*.

Here is an example:

### Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age* 30/3), is a smoke-screen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety – human behavior.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up on confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magical rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm.

Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma, road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

M. Oxe  
Ivanhoe

President of Bicycle Victoria

#### *the concession to the other position*

In this letter M. Oxe argues against the technological solutions being put forward to reduce the road toll. He cites bike helmets and air bags in cars as examples of such technological solutions and argues that these technological solutions won't solve the problem of the road toll.

When he was writing his letter M. Oxe realised that someone might reject his argument by saying:

*Hang on a minute!*

*Bike helmets do reduce head injuries for bicyclists.*

So, anticipating this criticism, he includes it in his letter and then comments on it in a way that will help advance his viewpoint.

Notice the two parts begin with metacommentary:

Sure, ...

but ...

Concessions are a common feature of all kinds of writing which involve argument, from letters of response to essays and editorials.

**Concession****Activity****Activity 1**

Read the letters on pages 10, 58, 59, 66 and 70 of the *Sample Letters*

**For each letter,**

- **underline the other position**
- **mark in discrepancies**
- **circle concessions,**

Also mark the metacommentary words which signal that a concession is being made.

**Activity 2**

Rewrite this letter by adding concessions to anticipate the criticism listed after the letter.

**Fair go for kids**

Children were made to wait outside in freezing rain until 9 am at school while teachers were inside, warm and dry, drinking tea and coffee.

On wet cold days like this, school doors should be open at 8.30 am and the children be kept inside and not allowed outside playing on soggy ground getting muddy and being expected to sit in damp clothes all day.

Poor kids can't protest about such things (only to be told to shut up), they have feelings like adults. Such selfishness of teachers appals me.

**Criticism:** Teachers need time before class to prepare for the day.

**Activity 3**

Rewrite this letter by adding concessions to anticipate the criticism listed after the letter.

**Conductors vital for safe travel**

Trams, buses and trains should all have conductors. They could help the elderly and people with prams, and would be security against vandalism. Then people would not fear travelling at night.

**Criticism:** Conductors cost the taxpayer a lot.

**Activity 3**

Working in pairs, make up a 'criticism' for two letters like the ones in Activity 2. Write it down, and swap it with your partner's 'criticism.' Rewrite the letter to anticipate your partner's criticism.

Repeat with three letters.

**The language of concession****Reference****Making a concession*****Introduce the concession:***

Of course ...

Admittedly ...

It is true that ...

Certainly ...

Undoubtedly ...

There is no doubt that ...

No-one would disagree with the view that ...

No-one would quarrel with the view that ...

No-one would contradict the view that ...

It is beyond dispute that ...

Although ...

Even though ...

***Then reaffirm your position:***

But ...

However ...

Nevertheless ...

Yet ...

Even so ...



*Themes 13–21*

## Traditions in public debate

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18	Applying the traditions to issues	199
19	Applying the traditions to letters	203
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## *Theme 13*

### **Introducing traditions for debating public issues**

***Letters to the Editor rely on traditions to provide***

- ***ways of applying values***
- ***ways of responding to situations***
- ***ways of arguing against other traditions***
- ***ways of dealing with life***

## Issues

### **What is a tradition?**

#### **Statements**

By traditions we mean *clusters of statements*. We don't want to suggest that they are theories in the sense of fully elaborated conceptual systems. Certainly they may be added to, things taken away, or challenged.

#### **Usefulness for students**

We think they are important because they introduce students to the idea that there are separable orders, principles, regularities which lead to particular conclusions over a range of seemingly different topics or issues. For example, someone who opposes police being given special powers is also likely to oppose conscription into the armed forces. This is because that person is likely to see both actions as instances of the government encroaching on an individual's liberty.

The other aspect of introducing students to these traditions is that students are *not* introduced to what some *individual* believes. Ideas are introduced to students not as attributes of people but rather as views which many people carry.

What we emphasise here is that although someone may consciously understand themselves to be a conservative or a liberal, most people will mix aspects of each tradition. These traditions also reach back in time: they have origins, histories which can be traced.

#### **Usefulness for learning**

We recognise that we are raising a problem for ourselves.

The problem is that if it is true that people do not themselves demarcate between what we are calling distinct traditions, then what grounds are there for grouping ideas together and calling them 'a tradition', giving them the names *conservatism*, *liberalism*, *socialism* and so on.

All we can really say in response to this possible objection is that teaching and learning can be enhanced by clustering ideas into a relatively orderly collection of principles and then naming these clusters.

We should, however, point out that we are not doing social philosophy with student. We are not presenting these traditions, in the first instance, to be explored, analysed and criticised. We are trying to give students a feel for these background traditions, a sense which will enable them to locate a perspective or particular view on an issue, to get to its main idea, to know how to summarise and to criticise it.

To be able to summarise or get to the main point is not separable from being able to locate a letter or article within a larger perspective or tradition.

### **The value of contrasting the traditions**

Another remark: each tradition becomes clearer as we compare and contrast it with other competing traditions. It is really the conflicts and tensions between different traditions, and the way events are understood differently by each of the traditions which sharpens the meaning of each tradition as a whole.

Finally, we would hope that introducing students to the letters column of the newspaper in this way, that is as a forum where different traditions clash over issues that are controversial precisely because of these clashes of interpretation can provide a fruitful entry point for student to enter into the humanities.

If this approach has any merit it is that it enables students to begin to ask:

- why do people think this?
- how did it come about?
- do I have to think this or is it possible to think about it differently?

It also becomes possible see a relevance to history not as something that is in the past and finished but as constitutive of the discourses which both enable and delimit our imaginations in the present.

### **Understanding and everyday experience**

For us 'understanding a tradition' means being able to notice its presence in events, public monuments, in everyday life.

It does not mean being able to write an essay about it or being able to do a multiple choice reading exercise. Nor does it mean being able to restate the connections that we have drawn to construct these traditions as a consistent and coherent text. Nor does it mean that students have to express a view or opinion about the traditions. (Often a students are asked to give their view of some issue and the way in which they state that view is taken as a test of their understanding of the issue).

In other words, understanding a tradition is be acquainted with its presence in everyday life. It is for students to begin to notice and discuss conservative interpretations of events, on public monuments, in the media, and in everyday life. This is what we mean be glossing concepts onto 'facts'.

## ***How are concepts learnt?***

### **Abstracting from (or glossing onto) experience**

One fairly popular view of concept formation is that students should be immersed in lots of facts and then somehow they will begin to sense an underlying pattern in these facts and thereby invent or recreate the underlying concepts or traditions that make sense of all these facts. This is a case of moving upwards from facts to concepts.

The approach we adopt is the opposite. We have adopted the downward approach of presenting students with the concepts — in this case the traditions — and then providing them with occasions to notice them in the facts. We introduce students to traditions as clusters of public statements which provide the stances or perspectives from which issues or topic are conventionally interpreted.

### **Thinking for themselves**

However, it may be objected that by becoming acquainted with these interpretations, students are simply being required to apply these interpretations as a ready-made formula to whatever is at issue. That is, that students are not required to 'think for themselves'.

We can say two things about this.

First, what we are trying to do in a very schematic way is to make explicit the traditions which are implicitly brought to bear in reading and writing texts that make up public debate. So rather than provide a formula to be applied, we are trying to foreground the kinds of values, logics and criteria that are commonly the implicit background to public debate.

Second, students are introduced to *four* competing traditions, not one, so what they should think about any issue is not by any means clear-cut. On the contrary, because students are confronted with four intelligible ways of thinking about an issue rather than one, they have to think more carefully and make clearer or finer distinctions than they perhaps otherwise would.

Certainly we are not trying to provide students with a correct interpretation for issues of public controversy.

---

*“ Understanding a tradition is be acquainted with its presence in everyday life. It is for students to begin to notice and discuss ... interpretations of events, on public monuments, in the media, and in everyday life. ”*

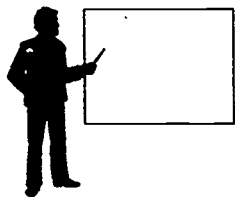
## *Theme 14*

### **Introducing conservatism**

***Conservatism is a tradition which emphasises***

- ***preserving the heritage***
- ***not trying to plan the future***
- ***the value of traditional relationships***

## Teaching notes



These sessions could be used to introduce students to note taking.

### Teacher presentation on the traditions

Tell students how you will order your talk. For instance, that you will

- put subheadings on overhead
- write down a few key ideas
- give students the scope to add examples as they see fit.

You could give the students the set of notes in this curriculum but we tend to make up the talk about each tradition anew, more or less, each time we give it so that we can incorporate events of the day to illustrate the tradition.

You can make up a chart of the subheadings for each tradition and students have to fill in the chart as they listen to you talk.

You could also collect some paintings, cartoons, photos of monuments, banners and posters to represent different elements of these traditions and refer to them as you are talking. As you can imagine students like the break from the pressure of having to listen to a single voice and taking notes.

Explain to students that they will use the notes they take to select and label letters and articles as examples of each tradition.

### Note

Take care with the delivery of your talk. Consider:

- how much to write on overhead, how much to leave to students to note themselves
- when to pause to give them a chance to ask a question, or give an example from their experience
- when to ask a student to keep their question till later
- when to give another example because you can see that some students have lost track
- when to leave an idea unexplained because you know that it will later become clearer to students through a later comparison with an example from another tradition
- when to leave something out so that you can get onto the next main idea in the time available
- when to stop because students are finally overwhelmed and tired.

Having to attend to the students in these ways while at the same time hanging onto the ideas yourself can be tricky. But, if done well, it is what makes *teaching* more effective than turning on a video of a talking head.

Finally, our experience is that you will have a variety of responses to conservatism: some students will identify the tradition with authoritarianism, old fuddy-duddies, and they are likely to be unsettled as some of the ideas you outline tally with their values commitments and practices. It is worth reiterating to students that you are not describing a group of people but a group of ideas, and that most people draw on bits of different traditions.

### **After teacher presentation**

Students compare their notes with a partner.

Photocopy a student set of notes and distribute to the class.

Students compare others' notes with their own and add additional notes to their own.

### **Note on Activity 2**

This exercise gives students a chance to sift through newspapers, place a text within a tradition, and speak on behalf of that tradition in a fairly unthreatening small group.

Students collect letters or short articles which represent elements of conservative tradition. Mark the elements of the text which show it to be conservative.

In small groups students briefly describe the article and explain why they think it conservative. Other students in each group should have the chance to ask questions and make comments.

Some students will be unconfident so circulate amongst the groups giving help and encouragement. You'll also receive indirect feedback on what students have made of your talk.

One student from each group might like to repeat their presentation for the whole class.

### **Extension activities**

Identify:

- particular writers who might think of themselves as conservative e.g. John Carroll, Bob Santamaria, and Robert Manne. Point out that these writers appear regularly as newspaper columnists.
- particular conservative journals e.g. *Quadrant*
- talkback radio announcers.



# Conservatism

## Culture

Conservatism believes that we all live as part of a moral community. This means that all members of a community share common values, and it is because we share these values that we can say that we belong to a particular community. We publicly celebrate these values, and sometimes even lose ourselves in these celebrations. These values make up the community, and our identity (who we are) comes from our participation in the community. The community is larger or more important than ourselves as individuals.

We have a duty and responsibility to the community and in a well-ordered community we will feel this responsibility as reverence, commitment, and we will be prepared to make personal sacrifices, even the sacrifice of our lives, for the sake of the community we are part of. We can think here of soldiers who die for their country, mothers who are prepared to send their children to fight for the good of the nation, cultural heroes like Socrates who was prepared to die than be banished from his community, even pop cultural heroes like Rambo who loves America.

The community might be a nation, or it could be a particular city, religious group, or party. Martyrs, for instance, are people who identify with a particular faith or church as their community and sacrifice themselves for it.

## Cultural leaders

Along with the idea of common values goes the need for cultural leaders — elders, priests, judges, teachers — who are in close touch with these values, promote adherence to them and protect them and us from corruption, or dilution. In different communities they might encourage prayer, make speeches at funerals, weddings and to the troops before battle; they might listen to confession, or coach the football/netball team. They might censor literature thought to be obscene. Think also of the Pope making pronouncements on birth control, or tribal elders restating the law of the tribe and punishing offenders.

## Authority for leadership

These leaders may be thought special either because they are old and wise, or because they have some special relationship to God, or because they study and understand sacred writings where the communities values were first encoded.

## Attitude to change

Conservatives tend not to like change. The values and standards of the community were best lived out in the past. The past might be thought of as a Garden of Eden, a golden age, the time when gods or goddesses walked the earth. We should try to hang on to that past; to give up on the past is to give up on the values which make us what we are.

How we act, the way we do things, has grown up over a long period of time, organically, so that everything fits with everything else. To try to change our life will only make things worse. We will head toward anarchy or totalitarianism or both. Change damages our delicate way of life and threatens to unleash the animal passions that our civilisation holds in check.

### **Stewardship**

Because we are part of a larger community the things we value are not ours to give or take or destroy. Our family home, the land, nature possess us rather than we possess them. Our responsibility (which, as we mature, we come to recognise) is to care for them, to pass them on to the next generation as they have been passed on to us. Even our good name, the family name, is to be upheld and cared for like all else of value for which we are responsible. In that way the community, of which we are a part, will be sustained through time.

As members of a community people are a link in a 'chain of being' stretching from the distant past into the future

### **Attitude to the less fortunate**

For conservatives, social inequalities cannot be eliminated. But despite differences in wealth or cultural quality the poor or disadvantaged are part of the community. Although there are different 'stations' in life, everyone makes a contribution (though in different ways) to sustaining the community. The underprivileged should respect authority; the privileged should be just in their exercise of power, serve the community and be charitable in times of need. To allow the poor to become too poor, to allow them to 'fall into depravity' will cut them off from the values which make us one community.

### **Symbols of the unity of the community**

The values of the community are expressed or embodied in publicly accessible institutions, activities and events. There may be special places where the community began, sacred sites, where stories can be told, to where pilgrimages can be made. Think of Bethlehem, Mecca, the Bastille — even Sunset Boulevard. There may be special buildings which inspire awe (Westminster Cathedral, the new Parliament House, special ceremonies or festivals) where we re-enact the things we value most — Easter, bullfights, baptisms, Moomba, New Years Eve, Rhamadan, the Mardi Gras, the Bicentennial, the First Settlement.

Conservatives will value the classics in the Arts — Shakespeare, Mozart, Rembrandt, Confucius — and look back to past art works against which present works will be judged and more than likely found wanting. The values of the community, then, don't exist just as commandments on a cold, distant monument which only special people have access to; they exist and are revived through all the public exchanges which compose the cultural life of the community.

## **Relations between people**

For conservatism relations between people are not cold, calculating or heartless. They are relations based on maintaining one's honour, on habit, on traditional ways of doing things. It is important to publicly acknowledge respect for others, and this is often expressed in the formal ways we address others. Older people won't be called by their first name. Those in authority will have that authority signalled. We should say 'Uncle Joe' and not just 'Joe'. If people who live according to such traditions were asked, 'Why do you do things this way?', they might reply: 'Because that's the way we've always done it'

## **Self**

Conservatives don't accept that we should just try to 'be ourselves' — we should try to be what we are supposed to be. The idea that a natural self be given free rein is foreign to conservatism. Children are formed as individuals through being initiated into the standards and conduct of the community. They are told stories of heroes and of the origins of the community, so that they come to appreciate, share in, and so be part of the community. The self is something to be formed through staged participation in the life of the community. There is a sense of what children should know and what they shouldn't, of what they are allowed to do and what they shouldn't, so that as adults they will want to take responsibility for the community and make their contribution.

## **Formality**

For conservatives, the way we display ourselves in public life says much about ourselves. We shouldn't wear jeans to a wedding, or blow our nose at the dinner table, particularly when visiting. We should act appropriately for the occasion and we should know from habit what is appropriate. Good taste and good style matter. When to be formal and when to be informal also matter.

## **Punishment**

For conservatives, punishment serves to remind us of the values of the community we have strayed from or breached. The most important punishment is shame. We don't want to be caught out by others, exposed. Our honour is at stake and doing wrong dishonours us.

## **Relations between men and women**

Conservatives generally believe that women are different from men. Men are taken, by nature, to be active or even aggressive. If they are good men they are able to subordinate their impulses for the good of the community (including their family), act with constancy and with reason, and so be able to take the lead in public affairs. Women are by nature in tune with their own and others' emotions and so are fitted to a nurturing role. If they are good women they will be good mothers, making sure that children receive the love and security they need to develop as decent persons themselves.

For conservatives, men's nature and women's nature complement each other and when united form a harmonious whole.

### **Family**

Perhaps the most important institution for conservatives is the family. Marriage creates the home and hearth for raising children. We learn to love in a family and that becomes the basis for our commitments to the whole community. We feel an emotional bond to others within the community, bonds that are deeper than we can understand. (Think of migrants who look to their own in the new country, or Australians who mix with each other on holidays in Britain).

### **The state**

The state or government represents and protects the good of the community. Leaders should be wise and in touch with the feelings of the community. They should look after its members, providing moral guidance as well as protecting the community from coming to harm. It may make laws on moral issues but these laws will complement the customs of the community. (Think here of censorship or drug laws, of laws to do with genetic engineering, abortion, homosexuality or prostitution). The government follows the customs and common moral standards of the community and stops people from straying away from those standards.

### **The nation**

Conservatives support the idea of the nation as possessing a common identity. This includes a common language, and a common culture. Conservatives are likely to be against the idea of a multicultural nation, as this would appear to them to be a contradiction in terms.

### **Dangers to the community**

As already mentioned conservatism understands the values of the community to be embodied in the ordinary way of life of the community. This way of life is understood to be built up over a long period of time, and without it we wouldn't be human beings. Our civilisation is what distinguishes us from animals or 'savages'. So conservatives fear or oppose threats to this way of life, to the customs, habits, traditions and institutions which make up civilisation. So they may oppose the introduction of new technology which disrupts a settled way of life. Or they may oppose money-making for money-making's sake because this leads to treating people inhumanly. Conservatism worries that civilisation is on the decline and it fears that without its protection more base animal passions will be unleashed, and people will become depraved and barbaric. (Think here of the world of the Mad Max series).

Because conservatism values a sense of belonging to the community as a whole it opposes groups or 'factions' which put their separate interests over and above the good of the community. They are against groups

which 'hold the community to ransom' or which 'put their interests above the interests of all Australians'.

### **Attitude to inequalities**

Conservatism tends to support a social hierarchy, sometimes an aristocracy of 'blue blood' families who have ruled since time immemorial and should continue to do so as part of the customary way of things. While everyone in the community shares common values there is also authority, beginning with the monarch, over all the community down to the aristocracy over particular regions, and within families, to fathers. Each protects the moral order. This hierarchy not only exercises power but also moral leadership. The king should not only be the most powerful person but also the bravest and wisest to set an example for the rest of us. These leaders of the community have to uphold standards beyond those expected of ordinary people.

### **Attitudes to science, knowledge**

Conservatism's faith in customs, in the importance of 'the way we've always done things' makes it suspicious of science. The important things of life, the values which hold the community together are difficult for mere mortals to know; they are mysteries, things which are dangerous to enquire into and may be should even be taboo. So conservatives tend to accept mystery and don't make knowledge a prime value.

### **The economy**

Conservatism understands economic activity to be part of the life of the community, and should be guided by the values which all members of the community share. So for instance the government, on behalf of the community, should make sure that members of the community charge a fair price for goods. Or the government should support family businesses, including of course family farms. Conservatives do not accept that all economic decisions should be left to individuals in the market, to the laws of supply and demand. Where the values of the community and the institutions which uphold those values come into conflict with commercial considerations, conservative policy-makers are likely to support the community interests.

**Activity 1**

Here is a letter about the government's proposal to reduce unemployment benefits to young unemployed people living at home.

*Read the letter, then complete the tasks below.*

## Why should our young people lose unemployment benefits?

The hollowness of the Labor Party's commitment to young people has been highlighted by their proposal to reduce unemployment benefits to those aged between 18 and 20 who are living at home.

If self-determination is to be encouraged and dependency discouraged, then how can reliance on parents to support their sons and daughters when unemployed, go towards developing independence and confidence in youth?

All the rhetoric over recent years about 'priority one', empowerment, retraining programs and increased retention

rates in schools which were all supposedly aimed at improving the life chances, confidence and self-image of young people, is empty when their rights are taken away without a second thought.

Moreover, it is a direct incentive for youth to leave home in order to get the full benefits, but at the same time join the increasing number of homeless unemployed young people.

Why have these people been singled out for special treatment? Why are they not fully recognised as adults?

The proposal once again reflects a 'blame-the-victim mentality' which has typified many of the political approaches since 1975. It is very

difficult for young people, particularly early school leavers, to secure employment. There are not the jobs available.

Why are these people and their families who have to bear the financial and emotional burden, singled out to satisfy the Hawke Government's desire to demonstrate its toughness with so called 'dole bludgers'?

If the proposal was to diminish the unemployment entitlements of any other group on the grounds of age, gender or race, there would surely be a public outcry?

*Judith Bessant*



**1 On the letter, mark in**

- the other position
- a discrepancy
- any concessions
- the writer's position

**2 Note here the values that are being appealed to in this letter.**

**3 Write down the wording which points to these values.**

## Identifying values

## Activity

## Activity 2

Here is another letter on unemployment benefits which we've made up to respond to Judith Besant's letter in Activity 1.

*Again, read the letter, then complete the tasks below*

## The young should not learn to rely on the government

Rather than attacked, the government is to be praised for its proposal to reduce unemployment benefits to young people living at home.

Young people living at home, particularly unemployed youth, do not have to pay rent. Nor are they likely to pay for their meals or fuel bills. The full unemployment

benefit is therefore available to them to enjoy as they see fit, to spend at discos, on clothes and on their friends. What they learn in life is not independence but total dependence on a distant, anonymous benefactor.

Many seem to have the attitude that 'the government' is like a rich uncle, always there to run to, when something goes wrong. Clearly, the prime

responsibility for any family is to look after its own members, particularly its youth.

The government is to be commended for recognising that principle in its proposal.



**1 On the letter, mark in**

- the other position
- a discrepancy
- any concessions
- the writer's position

**2 Note here the values that are being appealed to in this letter.**

**3 Write down the wording which points to these values.**

## Different kinds of reasoning

What we'd like to focus on in this session is the kinds of reasons letter writers give for rejecting other viewpoints, or for showing that their viewpoint is better than 'the other position'.

In the first letter (on page 175) the writer criticises the government for reducing unemployment benefits to young people. The reason the writer gives for criticising the government's policy of reducing unemployment benefits is that *young people will remain dependent on their families*.

In the second letter (on page 176, opposite) the writer supports the government policy of reducing unemployment benefits. The reason the second writer gives is that *family members should depend on each other and not on the government*.

In these letters opposite views or opinions are held about a government policy and different reasons are given for these views.

## Calling on traditions

In public debate citizens provide (or try to provide) good reasons as to why their view is better than another view.

*How do citizens come up with these good reasons?*

*Where do they come from?*

The kind of conflicting reasons that letter writers provide don't just come out of the blue. Nor are these reasons just the personal opinions of citizens.

What we'll see in the next few themes in this course is that citizens share beliefs, viewpoints, ways of understanding events, out of which their reasons arise. We call these beliefs **traditions**.

The course will introduce you to some of these traditions. We want to do that for two reasons:

- 1 to help you make sense of the letters and articles you read
- 2 to expand the kinds of reasons you can provide in your writing.

*You can think of these traditions as mines — you dig down into them for reasons and then use them in your writing.*



**Drawing on traditions****Example****Examples of traditions in the two letters**

*Let's take the two letters on pages 175 and 176 to clarify what we mean by these traditions.*

**First letter**

In the first letter the writer believes that individuals as they reach adulthood should not be dependent on their families, but should be able to make their own decisions, set their own course in life, take responsibility for their own lives.

This emphasis on the prime significance of the **individual** is part of the *liberal tradition*.

**Second letter**

In the second letter the idea that individuals are members of families and that family members should look after each other is an instance of a *conservative tradition*.

Because these two writers' background *ideas* or traditions differ, that they come up with opposing views towards unemployment benefits.

**Introduce you to the main traditions,**

In this course we will introduce you to four of the most important traditions:

- conservatism
- liberalism
- socialism
- scientific management

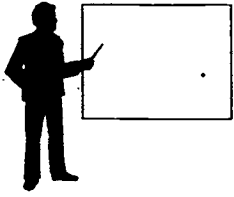
## *Theme 15*

## **Introducing liberalism**

***Liberalism is a tradition which emphasises***

- ***the right of individuals to decide their own lives***
- ***their right to decide what they believe***
- ***small government***

## Teaching notes



### Revision

Revise the key ideas of Conservatism, such as:

- the idea of shared values in the community
- the notion that a person is formed through participating in the life of the community.

You can use the word 'liberalism' as a point of entry into the key ideas of the tradition, the value of freedom of the individual. Note its different forms 'liberal', 'liberty'. Since most students know of the term in relation to the Liberal Party point out to students that you are not using the term 'liberal' and liberalism just to refer to the Liberal Party.

When outlining liberalism its crucial to explain this tradition by way of contrast with conservatism. We often start sentences with:

*Whereas conservatism believes ...liberalism takes up the opposite view.*

*In contrast to conservatism which holds that ...liberals believe ...*

This comparative approach helps students understand a tradition as a tradition and not just a description of the way the world really is. Of course it also enables students to appreciate that the differences between traditions are sources of argument over a range of issues.

### After teacher presentation

#### Activity 1

Students compare their notes with a partner.

Photocopy a student set of notes and distribute to the class.

Students compare others notes with their own and add additional notes to their own.

#### Activity 2

Students collect letters or short articles which represent elements of liberal tradition. Mark the elements of the text which show it to be liberal.

In small groups students briefly describe the letter or article and explain why they think it conservative. Other students in each group should have the chance to ask questions and make comments.

Some students will lack confidence so circulate amongst the groups giving help and encouragement. You'll also receive indirect feedback on what students have made of your talk.

One student from each group might like to repeat their presentation for the whole class.

## Extension activities

Identify

- particular writers who might think of themselves as liberals e.g. Terry Lane, Beatrice Faust, John Hyde. Point out that these writers appear regularly as newspaper columnists.
- particular liberal magazines or journals e.g. *The Age*, *Cleo*
- talkback radio presenters.

## Homework

Students to look up liberalism in encyclopaedias.

Provide a number of short liberal texts to read, or give students a list of names of writers who think of themselves as liberals, or poems by liberal poets.

*Who?*

Burke, McAuley, Hope, John Carol on the football.

## Liberalism

### Based on the individual

For liberals we live in a world made up of isolated individuals unconnected to each other except for the fact that we each have our individual goals interests and passions, that drives our actions. We are all Robinson Crusoes, but unlike Robinson Crusoe who has his own island, at least for part of our life, we have to live with each other.

Individuals do not just act unthinkingly though; they only act if it is in their interests to do so. So individuals are constantly calculating their interests, weighing up the costs and benefit to them of any action. So individuals are rational in the sense that they are always trying to work out the best way to satisfy their interests.

Compare this with conservatism which understands persons to be part of the community sharing common values, customs and institutions which form the person.

### Relations between people

For liberals, individuals are 'born free' with no limits to their wants or their desires. These isolated individuals when pursuing their interest come into contact with each other, in the same way that billiard balls come into contact with each other on a pool table. Where conservatism thinks persons have a natural station in life, liberalism understands individuals to have limitless desires so they are bound to come into conflict with each other.

The problem that arises for liberalism then is how is social order possible? How is it possible for egocentric individuals, that is who only care about themselves, to live with each other?

Liberalism's answer to this question has been the idea of a social contract, where individuals calculate that it is in their interest to contract with each other and surrender some of their power to one body — the government.

### The state

For Liberalism the government shouldn't do very much at all. Its main role is to be an umpire, to make sure that people can do their own thing without interference from others. Liberalism understands that government should just enforce the ground rules so that people can go about their business without interference. Its main role is to provide a backup for the contracts that people make between each other. The government is not supposed to interfere in peoples lives; for instance, it is not its business to look after sick, nor the elderly, nor even to build schools. One of its few functions is to defend individuals from external aggression.

So whereas conservatism understands the government as providing moral leadership including the responsibility to ensure the community lives up to its values, for liberalism the government only exists to enable people to go about their private business free from interference.

## Checking government power

One problem that arises for liberalism is that if the government is to have the power to make sure that everyone is free to go about their private affairs then what will prevent the government from itself becoming too powerful, or even dictatorial?

The solution to this problem exists not just as an idea but also the way liberalism understands the institutions of government that make up Western liberal democracies:

### *Rights*

The first part of the solution has been to make up a set of laws, a constitution, which spells out what a government can do and what it can't do. The best example is the US constitution and the Bill of Rights in particular.

### *Checks and balances*

The second part of the solution is to split up government into different parts and make sure that each can check on the other.

### *Elections*

The third part of the solution is to have periodic elections to make sure that government is answerable to individuals.

## The economy

Liberalism believes that the economy, the production and distribution of goods and services, should be left to individuals involved in economic activity. This is because liberalism believes that individuals know what is best for themselves and can calculate the most effective way of achieving their goals. So if economic activity is controlled by individuals with a stake in economic activity the best economic decisions will be made.

For liberals the market is the sum of all the rational decisions of people involved in economic activity, so allowing 'market forces' to determine what happens, in the long term, will lead to the best results for everybody. Liberalism therefore favours 'free enterprise' allowing individuals to trade freely without unnecessary government restrictions, such as tariffs and subsidies.

Liberalism also supports 'private enterprise'. Individuals, by virtue of being responsible for their own success or failures, have the incentive to achieve the best results. If enterprises are run by governments, this incentive is seen to be absent and so the enterprise is likely to be less efficient. So liberalism is likely to support 'privatisation' of government enterprises.

In fact, liberalism generally is in favour of 'small government'. Rather than tax individuals to provide the resources to run government services, liberalism supports low taxes so that individuals who know what best to do with their money have the resources to decide which services they want. Rather than governments regulating the relationships between employers and employees liberals favour leaving these relationships to the individuals concerned to sort out. So liberalism supports enterprise bargaining without 'outside interference.'

## The idea of self

For liberalism, people are in charge of their own lives. Each person is their own person. An individual is not answerable to communal values or traditions. An individual does and should do their own thing. They shouldn't be dependent on others either for their livelihood or their ideas. In a sense, individuals own themselves.

This idea of self also governs the relation between persons. Liberalism favours the idea of personal and private relationships not determined by established habits or customs. So individuals who set their own goals in life, negotiate through their life with others. We can't choose our parents (which is often something liberalism laments) but we should be able to choose just about everything else; what music we like, what work we do, where we go on holidays, whether we marry or don't marry, who we marry, whether we have children or not. The world is an array of choices from which we take the path that suits us, a path which we think of as our unique life.

## The idea of privacy and toleration

Because everyone is their own person, individuals shouldn't interfere in other peoples lives. Whereas conservatism believes that we share a common life and common values and so we share each others 'business', liberalism believes we should mind our own business.

The other side of this idea that we are each in charge of our lives is that we should accept that others can live differently from us. So liberalism includes tolerance for others who live and act differently from ourselves. Liberalism believes we have no right to impose our views and values on others. From this perhaps comes the idea that we should not argue about politics and religion because these are personal matters, matters of faith not open to rational discussion. Everyone must make up their 'own' minds. So liberalism (unlike conservatism) supports the idea of multiculturalism, and supports the 'rights' of all individuals to choose their way of life, whether they be women, homosexuals, people with different ethnic backgrounds, or whatever.

## Politics

Because everyone has their own opinions, politics is not a matter of reaching public agreements. Politics is more about registering the various interests at stake and achieving a compromise which will best balance those particular interest. Those interests need not even be made public, because more powerful interests can overpower the weak. Hence the idea of secret ballots, of not talking about politics and religion because these are personal subjective matters not amenable to rational discussion.

## Relations between men and women

For liberals, whether someone happens to be a man and someone else happens to be a woman should not be important. Beneath these biological differences everyone is an individual and therefore should be free to make their own decisions.

Liberal feminists believe that women should have equal opportunities to express their freedom, to not be stuck at home, but to live their life as they choose. They should have equal rights to property, to education, to employment and to control over their bodies as do men. Men should be equally prepared to give up the social roles that traditions have 'conditioned' them to accept as natural; that is, that they should run public affairs and that their domestic life should be looked after by women. Men should also be free to do the dishes, pay the bills, and wipe babies' bums.

### Relationship to children

For liberalism the most cherished values are something each individual possesses by nature. The values of life and liberty are something which precede our participation in social life, which social life only compromises. The best we can do is make sure society is so arranged that compromise is not too great. For liberalism, children are particularly important because social life has yet to damage those natural endowments and it is important to protect and not quash those endowments.

Whereas conservatism emphasises *training* of children into the customs and ways of doing things in the life of the community, Liberalism encourages childhood *curiosity, expression* and *creativity*. In education, liberalism has led to goal setting, negotiation off the curriculum, individualised programs and parent effectiveness training, where the presumption is the parent has the problem if the child does something the parent doesn't like.

This is very different from conservatism which emphasises the wisdom and authority of parents, teachers and leaders.

### The idea of personal growth

Another illustration of the way liberalism is part of everyday life is in the idea of counselling.

The idea that an individual is in charge of their life means that when a person feels they are not on top of themselves yet believes they should be, they can be helped to 'find themselves'. Whereas conservatism tends to guide, or force people to do what is right, liberalism doesn't believe in imposing values. So liberalism spawns the idea of helping people find themselves, of becoming themselves.

Whereas conservatism produces priests and judges, liberalism produces counsellors and therapists.

### Change

Liberalism believes that people, through their actions, can create a better world. Again this possibility stems from the view that individuals are creative and rational, and can therefore come up with inventive ways to achieve their goals. If individuals are given a free reign to invent then this will benefit everybody.

So liberalism believes in progress, that the world can be a better place if obstacles to progress are removed.



## Knowledge

The idea that each individual can be in charge of their life includes the idea that each person can know reality for themselves. This is because each individual is endowed with senses through they can discover what reality is.

What stands in the way of individuals knowing reality are customs, habits and old wives tales which confuse people and prevent them from seeing things as they are. So old customs, habits, religious rituals and authorities are really just rubbish which must be cleared away so that people can see things clearly.

Individuals whose minds are cleared of superstition can begin to work out the abstract laws that govern the things which they perceive. Having worked out how nature works, they can turn that knowledge into technology to change nature to suit their goals. The application of science and technology to conjure from nature the goods that individuals want, is one key to human happiness.

Unlike conservatism, which believes that civilisation is on the decline (and can only be shored up by appeal to standards and values whose origins are in the past), liberalism believes that the application of abstract reason will overcome everything which stands in the way of individuals achieving their desires and will lead to a better world in the future.

*Conservatism is pessimistic; liberalism is optimistic.*

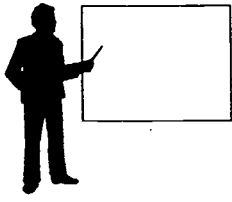
## *Theme 16*

### **Introducing socialism**

***Socialism is a tradition which emphasises***

- ***the co-operation of workers***
- ***assisting the poor***
- ***government or public support and services***

## Teaching notes



Revise the key ideas of Conservatism and Liberalism.

For conservatism:

- the idea of shared values in the community
- the notion that a person is formed through participating in the life of the community.
- the idea that government looks after the good of the community

For liberalism:

- that individuals are naturally free and equal
- government exists to protect individual freedom

Outline socialist ideas in contrast to both Conservatism and Liberalism. Again collect and use visual representations of socialist ideas to accompany your talk. We use cartoons, photographs of trade union banners, paintings and posters from China, the former Soviet Union and so on.

### After teacher presentation

#### Activity 1

Students compare their notes with a partner.

Photocopy a student set of notes and distribute to the class.

Students compare others notes with their own and add additional notes to their own.

#### Activity 2

Students collect letters or short articles which represent elements of liberal tradition. Mark the elements of the text which show it to be socialist/social democratic.

In small groups students briefly describe the letter or article and explain why they think it socialist. Other students in each group should have the chance to ask questions and make comments.

Again circulate amongst the groups giving help, clarification and encouragement. One student from each group might like to repeat their presentation for the whole class.

### Extension activities

Identify:

- particular writers who might think of themselves as socialists or social democrats e.g. Humphrey McQueen. Point out that these writers appear regularly as newspaper columnists.
- Particular socialist/ social democratic magazines or journals e.g.. *New Statesman*, *Frontline*, *Green Left*, *Arena*
- Some programs on ABC, e.g. commentators on *Late Night Live*, Community Radio programs

## Socialism

Although there may be some common features which could be called the socialist tradition, there are many different streams, each of which might be thought of as a tradition by itself. What the different strands perhaps share is a commitment to the ideals of *freedom* and *equality*, to the ideal of individuals freely and equally cooperating in the planning and conduct of the whole of social life. Socialists also share the view that existing society comes short of these ideals, particularly because it is divided into different classes of people, and must be changed so that everyone will in future become a free and equal participant in society.

So if we can say these ideas are common to all socialists, they can be distinguished from liberalism because they hold the view that social life is something which compromises natural freedoms but is itself natural to human beings. For socialists, then, we aren't really Robinson Crusoes who are unfortunately stuck with each other; we are at home in social life and will be even more at home if we are free and equal participants in that social life. Maybe socialism can be thought of as taking from conservatism the idea of community and from liberalism the idea of freedom and equality.

Socialists differ among themselves, however, on what the terms *society*, *freedom* and *equality* mean, and particularly on the path that should be taken to change existing society into a socialist society.

### Society

Some socialists see themselves as scientific socialists. What this means is that they believe that they can analyse existing society and discover in existing society something which would enable it to change into a socialist society. They believe that other socialists just imagined a socialist society, but couldn't describe how that society could come into being. Marx thought he discovered the 'tendencies' in existing society which would really enable a socialist society to come about.

### Capitalism

Socialists have understood present society to be a capitalist society. This means everything that is produced is produced for sale on the market, What is produced, and how that production is distributed isn't planned by the people who do the work. Decisions are made by factory owners as to what to make, but these decisions are controlled by 'the market', by whether it is possible to make a profit.

Everybody works in with everybody else (production is 'socialised') but no-one directs what happens overall. Furthermore, profits are related to wages; the less the capitalist pays the workers the higher the profits the capitalist can make. So capitalists try to keep wages down to a minimum. The way they do that is by maintaining a pool of unemployed people who will accept lower wage rates than those in work.

So socialists see inequality and exploitation as a permanent feature of capitalist society.

## **Classes and class struggle**

For socialists, the only way that people who work for wages can maintain their wages and conditions is to stop competing with each other for jobs and to cooperate to defend wages and conditions, against the capitalists. Strikes, blackbans, go slows, are seen by socialists to be examples of working class action. Socialists understand capitalist society to be in a permanent state of class conflict, that is in a state of permanent conflict between the capitalist class and the working class.

## **The state**

Although there are many different views amongst socialists about the role of the state, or government, socialists would probably agree that the state is somehow caught up in the capitalist system. Some socialists see the state as a tool of the capitalist class. For these socialists, the state helps capitalists make as much profit as possible and uses all its powers to keep wages to a minimum.

Other socialists see any government as a prisoner of the capitalist system. Whatever the good intentions of those who become politicians they inevitably find themselves having to make capitalism work better. Yet other socialists see the state as a 'vehicle' for social change, either to improve the lives of working people within the capitalist system or to change capitalist society into a socialist society.

## **Change**

### **Revolutionaries**

For revolutionary socialists the only way class conflict can stop is if society changes from being a capitalist society and becomes a socialist society (or, for some, a communist society). How can that occur? Revolutionary socialists understand the cooperation of workers to defend themselves against the capitalist class as the beginning point for changing capitalist society into a socialist society. They believe that the working class will take control of all industry and of government and so everyone will be equally able to plan what goods will be made and distributed.

However, revolutionary socialists also believe that taking control of industry and government is unlikely to be achieved peacefully; the government is likely to protect private property, and so taking over industry may involve violent conflict.

### **Gradualists**

This view of how capitalist society can change into a socialist society is not shared by all socialists. Some socialists see a sudden violent change to society as unjustifiable because the 'means cannot justify the ends', and that in any case what is likely to result is not greater freedom and equality but the concentration of power in the hands of the few who control the government.

In order to avoid this pitfall they believe that change must be gradual. They put forward the idea of a new socialist society growing 'in the womb of the old', so that capitalist society could eventually turn into a

socialist society. Ideas of industrial democracy, that workers should be involved in decision making at work, work place education and training, are some practices which are influenced by this tradition. Socialists have also supported national industries owned by 'the people', such as Australian Airlines or the Commonwealth Bank, or Telecom.

### **Social Democrats**

A set of ideas closely related to socialism is the concept of social democracy. Social democrats place importance not so much on bringing about a socialist society but attempt to make capitalist society more equal and more just. They emphasise the role of government in making sure that everyone has equal rights to education, health, employment opportunities, child care, pensions and so on. They believe that people are equal but that society has created inequalities.

Social democrats believe it is government's responsibility, through the services it provides, to rectify the disadvantage that people have suffered. So, through government intervention, society can progress toward greater equality. The government may help schools in disadvantaged areas, or make laws which do not permit discrimination, or provide community health services in disadvantaged areas.

Whereas liberals believe the law should not interfere in people's private domain, social democrats believe the law should be used to bring about a more equal and just society. So social democrats will favour courts of law like the industrial relations tribunal to set wages to make sure that workers are fairly treated. They will support affirmative action, or equal opportunity legislation which will give individuals who come from groups who have been traditionally discriminated against a better chance to get jobs which they haven't been allowed to do in the past.

### **Progress**

Like liberals, socialists believe in the idea of human progress, but whereas liberals see progress being made through the actions of individuals, socialists think that the structures of society have to change and that can only occur through collective action.

### **Relations between men and women**

For socialists, women throughout history have been subordinate to men. Women have been men's property either as daughters or as wives. According to socialists only a socialist society can truly bring about the emancipation of women because only then will women become full and equal participants in the workforce.

Socialist feminists argue that women are under a double oppression: their work within the family is unrecognised as 'productive labour' and if women have paid work then they also have domestic work as well. Socialist feminists argue that only if these domestic roles, particularly the rearing of children are 'socialised' can women free themselves from ancient ties of domination within the family. Child care centres, and kibbutzes are seen to be examples of the way in which this work of women can be made the responsibility of society as a whole.

## **The nation**

Socialists have also differed amongst themselves about the significance of the nation. Some socialists have opposed nationalism arguing that the working class within a nation does not share the same values or interests as the capitalist class. They have argued that workers should feel 'solidarity' with other workers throughout the world and have an 'internationalist' rather than nationalist outlook. Others have argued that some nationalist traditions which emphasise or make reference to working class experience are valuable expressions of collective identity and should be promoted.

## *Theme 17*

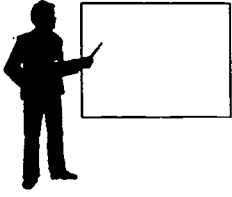
# **Introducing scientific management**

***Scientific management is a tradition which emphasises***

- ***seeking happiness (or the absence of harm)***
- ***reduction of risks through government controls***
- ***careful planning based on data***



## Teaching notes



Revise the key ideas of Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism.

For conservatism:

- the idea of shared values in the community
- the notion that a person is formed through participating in the life of the community.
- the idea that government looks after the good of the community

For liberalism:

- that individuals are naturally free and equal
- government exists to protect individual freedom.

Outline Scientific Management in contrast to the other traditions. Again, if possible collect and use visual representations to accompany your talk. You could use some of the TAC advertisements, Life Be In It ads and so on.

### After teacher presentation

#### Activity 1

Students compare their notes with a partner.

Photocopy a student set of notes and distribute to the class.

Students compare others notes with their own and add additional notes to their own.

#### Activity 2

Students collect letters or short articles which represent elements of scientific management. Mark the elements of the text which show it to be scientific management.

In small groups students briefly describe the letter or article and explain why they think it so. Other students in each group should have the chance to ask questions and make comments.

Again circulate amongst the groups giving help, clarification and encouragement. One student from each group might like to repeat their presentation for the whole class.

### Extension activities

Identify

- particular writers who might fit into this tradition
- particular magazines or journals.

Students look up 'scientific' and 'management' in encyclopaedias.

Look for examples in newspaper stories.

## Scientific management

The tradition we've called scientific management is a cluster of varied ideas.

While liberalism emphasises the idea of freedom conservatism service to the community, socialism equality freedom and community, scientific management emphasises values like *reducing suffering, creating order and security*. For scientific management the emphasis is upon minimising risks, removing danger, avoiding or at least managing events or situations which might cause upset harm and suffering.

But since all action involves risk — we can be run over crossing the road, get lost on a bushwalk, or cause misery by having a love affair — scientific management is about risk assessment; it involves calculating the potential benefits against possible costs. It is about managing the possible bad consequences so that they don't occur, or so that their impact is lessened. We take a risk driving a car but we can reduce the risk of injury by wearing a seat belt. We don't know what will happen at the party; we avoid risk by putting a condom in our pocket or hand bag.

*As individuals we try to stay safe.*

### The role of government

Although scientific management might be an ethos which influences individual judgements its main significance is its use by modern governments. Indeed scientific management sees individuals as part of an interdependent social whole which needs to be managed as a whole. Whereas liberalism will argue that individual freedoms cannot be intruded upon by government scientific management would argue that these 'rights' can be over-ridden if they threaten the security or stability of society as a whole.

### Managing individuals

We are not allowed to drink and drive because we might be a danger to others. We are not allowed to smoke in many public places because we endanger others health. We have to wear seat belts in cars and bike helmets riding bikes because we might injure ourselves and be an expensive liability to others.

The government makes rules up about how things should be manufactured and built so that the public is protected. Cars have to be built according to safety standards. Workplaces have occupational health and safety rules.

Electrical work and plumbing is controlled by inspectors to ensure it is safe. Announcements are made about when you can light fires and when you can't.

### Managing systems

Not only are the risky actions of individuals restricted because of the potential damage to other individuals, but whole *systems* become the focus of government attention so that order and stability can be created.

For instance, the size of a population may have to be kept in check so birth rates might be controlled. Migration rates might have to be tuned to employment levels in an economy. The effects of demographic changes, for instance in age, may have to be calculated and adjusted for so that an economy can afford welfare benefits. The use made of a particular natural environment may have to be monitored, controlled and evaluated to maintain it over the long term.

Once the focus is on the management of large systems new concepts or classifications have to be made up. In economics there are 'standards of living', Gross National Products and 'poverty lines'. In war there is 'collateral damage'. In education there are 'literacy levels', and even 'intelligence'. In the law there is 'child abuse', 'sexual harassment' and 'racial vilification'. Each new concept has to have measures of success or failure. Standards of living are measured by the number of TV sets or doctors per square kilometre, literacy levels by the proportion of the population that can read the labels on medicine bottles, and military success by 'body counts'.

But not only does government make up *rules* to protect the public it also tries to shape or modify people's behaviour so that *they won't want to cause harm*. Governments sponsor 'Quit' logos on football heroes so young people won't want to smoke. Welfare agencies build up clients' 'self esteem' so that they do not want to do violence to themselves or others. Government ads on TV are made to scare people from driving fast, or from having unsafe sex.

### **Relations between people**

In the same way people are managed for their own good. In schools, playgrounds are often divided up into areas for small children and areas for larger children so the smaller ones won't be hurt. In hospitals the infectious patients are quarantined. In wartime, immigrants from the enemy nation are quarantined because they might be spies or saboteurs.

In old peoples' homes, games, exercises and excursions are organised to keep the patients 'alert'. In child care centres, children are given coloured blocks, nutritious food, and eye-to-eye contact to 'develop'.

### **The role of science and technology**

But how can the consequences of our actions be known anticipated or adjusted for? How much can we drink without becoming a danger on the road? How many hours a day can we work before we start making costly mistakes? How much lead can go into the atmosphere before it causes brain damage to children?

Conservatives believe we must rely on old habits and custom to guide our conduct. For liberalism believes the individual knows best. Scientific management relies on science for answers to these question. Scientists study the effects of alcohol on drivers' response times, and that information can be used in setting limits on how much people should drink. Psychologists study stress levels to see how long people can work safely. Pathologists study lead levels in children's blood. Educationalists study the influence of parents' reading to children for

levels of children's literacy. Economists study the effect of population growth, including immigration, to determine whether population increases are of economic benefit or harm.

But what of issues which pose greater difficulties? For instance, can we afford to remove lead from petrol even if children's health is being impaired by lead? How do we balance the harm to children against the harm to the thousands of motorists who will have to convert their cars to unleaded fuel? What about nuclear reactors? As they age they become more dangerous, but to shut them down would mean reducing electricity supplies. Should we take the risk they'll be okay or should they be closed down now? How do we weigh up the harm to some against the harm to others or the possible devastating harm which may not even occur against the present benefits?

For conservatives these issues place in relief the basic values of the community. For liberals they are matters of individual choice for those directly concerned. For scientific management they are matters of scientific calculation.

### **Knowing and managing ourselves**

Out of this knowledge new rules or norms are established for everyone. No one can have blood levels higher than 0.5 and drive. Classes sizes should not be more than twenty-five. People operating word processors have to take a break every hour.

These rules are also ways of training people into thinking of themselves as part of these systems. We know who we are in terms of our literacy levels, cholesterol levels, stress levels and insurance levels.

So for scientific management, decisions about any action rest on a rational assessment of the costs and benefits of that action. Decisions which will promote wellbeing and reduce harm are possible because the consequences of that action can be predicted before its undertaken. Management can plan ahead.

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*“ For scientific management the emphasis is upon minimising risks, removing danger, avoiding or at least managing events or situations which might cause upset harm and suffering. ”*

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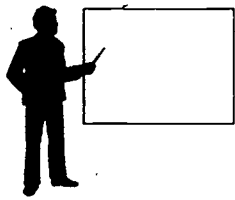
## *Theme 18*

# **Applying the traditions to issues**

***Traditions have fairly predictable responses:***

- ***conservatives favour traditional arrangements***
- ***liberals favour freedom and economic growth***
- ***socialists favour the poor***
- ***scientific management favours clear rules and regulations***

## Teaching notes



In this session students work out the views of the different traditions in relation to a range of issues.

These views were selected from the Age newspaper over the period of a month.

### Activity 1

Students fill in the chart in the Worksheet.

### Activity 2

Ask students have to give a reason why conservatives would support or oppose particular propositions.

### Activity 3

Repeat Activity 2 for liberalism.

## Understanding the traditions

### Activity 1

Here are some questions to test your understanding of the different traditions.

*How do you think each tradition would respond to these questions?  
Would they agree or disagree?*

*If you think they would agree write YES in the box.  
If you think they would disagree, write NO.*

**Should unrestricted shopping hours be permitted?**

conservatives	liberals	socialists	scientific management

**Should we have a multicultural Australia?**

conservatives	liberals	socialists	scientific management

**Should people be allowed to burn the Australian flag?**

conservatives	liberals	socialists	scientific management

**Should there be more childcare places available?**

conservatives	liberals	socialists	scientific management

**Should people have relationships outside marriage?**

conservatives	liberals	socialists	scientific management

**Should Australia become a republic?**

conservatives	liberals	socialists	scientific management

**Understanding the traditions****Activity 1 continued...****Should advertising be allowed on footballers' sportswear?**

<b>conservatives</b>	<b>liberals</b>	<b>socialists</b>	<b>scientific management</b>

**Should aboriginals have land rights?**

<b>conservatives</b>	<b>liberals</b>	<b>socialists</b>	<b>scientific management</b>

**Should tariffs be removed from imported goods?**

<b>conservatives</b>	<b>liberals</b>	<b>socialists</b>	<b>scientific management</b>

**Should there be logging occur in wilderness areas?**

<b>conservatives</b>	<b>liberals</b>	<b>socialists</b>	<b>scientific management</b>

**Should workers pay more tax to support the unemployed?**

<b>conservatives</b>	<b>liberals</b>	<b>socialists</b>	<b>scientific management</b>

**Should the SEC and Gas & Fuel Corporation be privatised?**

<b>conservatives</b>	<b>liberals</b>	<b>socialists</b>	<b>scientific management</b>



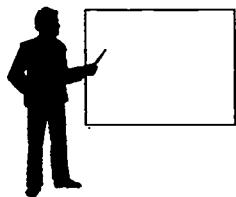
## *Theme 19*

# **Applying the traditions to letters**

***Letters and editorials draw on the traditions to***

- ***present arguments***
- ***respond to other positions***

## Teaching notes



### Aim

The aim of this session is

- to help students notice the traditions that are being drawn on in public debate.
- to give students an opportunity to do some guided but independent research
- to give students an opportunity to give a small oral presentation of their research to the class.

Explain to students that when it comes to presenting an argument it is important that the writer know what values and traditions are being drawn on in the debate and this activity is to help them be able to do that independent from the teacher.

### Resources

Students will need access to a few weeks newspapers so that they can follow find an article and follow up response letters. It is a good idea to start with the letters and go back to the original article or editorial.

### Procedure

The theme will have to go over a few classes.

Go over the examples with the students first.

Ask for volunteers to read the texts out loud.

Do the first activity in pairs and then as a whole class discussion. Put the wording that illustrates the traditions on the board or overhead for students to check against their wording.

## Activity 2

You may need to show students two newspapers.

Mark the article and the response letters in the second paper. Point out the fact that the letter will probably appear three or four days after the article.

Perhaps suggest to students that they select a short article and letter that interest them, rather than a long article which will be difficult to deal with.

You'll need to judge how much time to give students to browse through the papers. If a library containing past copies of newspapers is easily accessible start students on this activity and let them find an article for homework. They can then bring that to the next class and you can help them on their different texts in the next class.

When students are presenting their research put on overhead a format that they can use to sequence their talk.

e.g.

**The Article that I picked is about ...**

**The writer argues that ...**

**The traditions she draws on seem to be ...**

**The response letter was written by ...**

**S/he argues that ...**

**She seems to be drawing on ...**

If the class is large and you think too much time will be taken up in class presentations, or if you think that students will be too scared to speak to the whole class, the class could be divided into small groups of four or five and the students do their presentations to the smaller group simultaneously. The more confident could be selected from each group to re-present to the class as a whole.

### **Extension:**

A variation of this activity is to video a television current affairs program and using the interviewee as the text to be analysed.

**What's the problem?****Student notes****The same only different**

In the last session you looked at a number of issues from the standpoint of different traditions. The aim of the exercise was for you to notice that the **same** issue *will be conceived quite differently from the standpoint of these different traditions.*

More often than not each tradition will differ about:

- what the problem is
- the reasons for the problem, and
- the solution to the problem.

**What's the problem?*****Let's take the issue of Sunday shopping***

What is the problem with allowing shops to open on Sundays?

**For conservatism**

The problem with Sunday trading may be that it changes our way of life.

Sunday is special because its a chance to go to church or at least a chance for family and friends to get together. Allowing shops to open makes Sunday no different from other days of the week. It just becomes a business day.

So thinking about the issue from a conservative viewpoint, the **problem** is that Sunday trading *undermines a traditional way of life.*

**For liberalism**

The problem with Sunday trading is that it has been banned by government regulation.

Liberalism is for freedom and against government regulation. So if people wish to trade on Sunday they should be free to do so.

For Liberalism, the **problem** is that *the ban on Sunday trading infringes our freedom.*

**For socialism**

The problem with Sunday trading is that it increases the exploitation of workers in the industry.

Workers in the retail trade are being deprived of a day off work.

So for socialists the **problem** is that *workers are being treated unjustly.*

**Different traditions, different problem**

**Student notes**

*For conservatism*  
**It undermines our  
traditional way of life**

*For liberalism*  
**It infringes  
on our freedom**

**Issue: Sunday trading**

*For socialism*  
**It is unjust to workers**

**Traditions in response letters****Worked example**

Here is an *Age* editorial on the issue of Sunday Trading and a letter in response by Paul Tankard.

**Age Editorial****Sunday Trading is now on the Agenda**

Since December 1987, when the laws in Saturday trading were extended, Melbourne people have been free to do their weekend shopping in a relaxed and civilised manner. Instead of rushing to the local shopping centre to complete their weekend shopping by midday, they now have afternoon trading. Not all shops stay open until 5 pm but many do including supermarkets, which are now as busy on Saturday afternoon as they are in the morning. But while the battle for Saturday trading has been fought and won, Sunday trading is still a matter for dispute. So far, the government has been too cautious. Retailers who break ranks and open their doors on Sundays have been told that they risk legal action. Despite this, an increasing number of stores, including supermarkets, are choosing to open on Sunday. Many more would be tempted to follow suit, if it were not for high weekend penalty rates for staff.

In principle there is no reason why shops should not be free to open for business on Sundays. Not every shopper would want to take advantage of the service but, in the central business district at least, many probably would if they were given the opportunity as they are in Sydney and Brisbane. What is required is a change of heart on the part of the government and the unions. It was therefore encouraging to find the new minister of consumer affairs, Mr. Mier, sounding a note of optimism at the weekend. His view is that the time is ripe for extended trading hours, and that the opportunity could be within award restructuring. Employers and unions should be able to negotiate a deal that meets both parties but also takes into account the community's needs and wishes.

What Mr. Mier has done with these comments, in effect, is to put seven day trading back on the political agenda. This is a welcome change from the past negativism of some of his government colleagues. If the government doubts that there is a demand for Sunday trading, particularly in the central city, it should carry out a survey. In making any changes, though, the prime consideration should be the public and their right to greater choice and greater flexibility of shopping hours. If these goals can be achieved in cooperation with unions and retailers, so much the better.

*The Age*

**Comments**

Notice that the *Age* Editorial tries to take into account two of the above traditions with the concern for both **individual freedom** and **justice for the workers**.

## Traditions in response letters

## Worked example

## Response letter



### Sunday shopping could have serious social consequences

In your editorial about shop trading hours you said that the public, unions and retailers should have a say about any changes that may be made. This seems to imply everyone concerned should be considered. However, in one vital sense the public discussion of this issue has been inadequate; it fails to consider the needs of all people — even retailers, consumers and unionists — in anything other than narrow economic terms.

Your editorial implies that the only aspects of human life to be affected by such changes would be our commercial relationships. The possibility is not considered that to further 'deregulate' shopping hours may have tremendous and seriously detrimental social effects.

Buying and selling are not all there is to human life. We need one day a week when we are constrained to acknowledge that the purpose of people living together in society is not simply to consume or make money out of each other.

The social consequences of unbridled consumerism need to be seriously investigated by the government. So far, the State Government has only expressed economic arguments against Sunday trading — that is, that it will cost small retailers too much. But what about the other costs for all of us?

It is not a matter of 'choice' either: economic reality dictates that being allowed to open on Sundays, leads to being constrained to open on Sundays — or else be out competed by the mega retailers.

We should consider why there have traditionally been legal restriction on shop trading hours, it may be more humane to put more legislative limits on the greed and consumerism that drive the wheels of our society and contribute so much to feelings of social alienation and personal inadequacy.

Paul Tankard

### Comments

Paul Tankard, in his response letter, points out that *The Age* has ignored the significance of removing restrictions on Sunday trading for 'all of us living in society'.

He argues that the *Age* has left out of consideration the crucial value, our traditional way of life. In arguing against Sunday Trading, he reminds readers of this value and in turn hopes that this will persuade them to oppose Sunday trading.

We can read Paul Tankard's response as a conservative response to the *Age* editorial. It is conservatism that provides Paul Tankard with the values, and the 'ways of seeing' the *Age* editorial to criticise it.

**Traditions in response letters****Worked example****Words which show the tradition**

The conservative tradition is positively realised through the following wording:

**the needs of all people**  
**aspects of human life**  
**tremendously serious and detrimental social effects**  
**the purpose of people living together in society**  
**social consequences of ...**  
**human life**  
**all of us living together in society**  
**more humane**  
**our society**  
**feelings of social alienation and personal inadequacy**

**Words which show the other position**

The 'other position' is projected as

**our commercial relationships**  
**buying and selling**  
**consume or make money out of each other**  
**unbridled consumerism**  
**the greed and consumerism**



**Airbags Issue****Example**

This example includes a letter to the Editor, and another letter which responds to it.

**Letter to the Editor**


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**Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll**

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age*, 30/3), is a smoke-screen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up on confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magical rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm. Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma, road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

M. Oxe  
Ivanhoe  
President of Bicycle Victoria

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**Airbags issue****Example****Response letter****Fitting cars with airbags is certain to reduce road toll**

The fitting of airbags to motor cars is dismissed by M. Oxeer, of Bicycle Victoria (3/4), as a trite countermeasure and the opinion expressed that the major issue is to improve human behaviour.

The Road Trauma Committee rejects this restrictive and negative view. The most successful road safety countermeasures have been obtained by technical improvements rather than through attempts to change human behaviour.

The reduction in the road toll from 8.1 deaths per 10,000 registered vehicles in 1970 to 3.0 last year was achieved largely by the introduction of technical improvements, e.g. seat belts, safety helmets, better vehicle and roadside design. This is not to deny some success in changing human behaviour, e.g. by compliance with seat belt-wearing legislation and the reduction in drink driving.

Further reduction in the road toll will be obtained only by the progressive introduction of scientifically based practical countermeasures. Such countermeasures will of necessity pertain to roadway and vehicle design as well as human behaviour.

The safety airbag is an important countermeasure not available, even as an option, to the Australian motorist. Airbags are available in the US and Europe and long overdue here. They considerably increase driver safety and are complementary to seat belts. In particular, airbags appreciably dissipate impact forces and reduce the risk of fatal or serious head and chest injuries.

The airbag is the only measure available to protect drivers who fail to wear a seat belt. While only about 10 per cent of drivers do not wear seat belts the proportion not wearing seat belts in fatal crashes is as high as one in three. A significant reduction in such unbelted fatalities will be achieved by airbag fitting.

Airbag fitting will unquestionably lead to a new major fall in the road toll.

Frank T. McDermott  
College of Surgeons' Gardens,  
Spring Street, Melbourne.

## Using the traditions

## Activity

## Activity 1

Here is a letter criticising the way in which the Gallipoli landing has been represented by government and the Australian media.



### Australia's war role is being rewritten

The Government and media fanfare surrounding the 75th anniversary of the Gallipoli landing highlights the states' and media's rewriting of Australian history. If we believe the media hype surrounding the Gallipoli celebrations we could be forgiven for thinking that all Australians supported Australia's participation in the First World War.

Australia was a divided country during the First World War. A majority of Australians did not support Australia's involvement in World War 1. Australians rejected conscription in two separate referendums during the First World War.

The Catholic Church, the trade union movement, women's groups, as well as Industrial Workers of the World (a forerunner to today's Australian anarchist groups) were all united in their opposition to conscription and Australia's involvement in World War 1.

Thousands of Australians owe their lives to the anti-conscription movement because without such a powerful people's movement their grandfathers and great-grandfathers would have been conscripted to fight and die in a war that was fought for money, trade and the benefit of local business and the European ruling classes. Millions of soldiers, including tens of thousands of Australians, died for the economic benefit of the world's ruling classes.

The tendency of the Australian Government and media to rewrite Australian history to suit the present is not some new virus we have inherited from the Chinese Communist Party. This tendency to rewrite history is an integral component of Australian folklore that has its origins in the lie that the British colonised a vast uninhabited land, not that the Australian nation was built on the blood and bones of tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Joseph Toscano  
Malvern spokesman, Anarchist Media Institute



- 1 *Which tradition is the writer drawing on to make his criticisms?*
- 2 *Mark the wording which shows the writer is drawing on this tradition.*
- 3 *Write down words which describe the 'other position'.*

*Repeat Steps 1–3 for the letter opposite (p.212) on airbags.*

**Using the traditions****Activity****Activity 2**

- 1 With a partner find a newspaper article, or newspaper editorial and a response letter to the article.**
- 2 Summarise both the article and the response letter in terms of the tradition or traditions that are being drawn on by the writers.**
- 3 Present your findings to the class.**

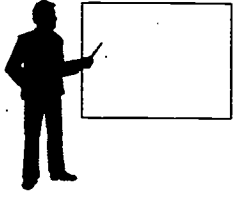
*Theme 20*

## **Stating and criticising the other position**

*A common way of criticising a view is to*

- *sum up the view*
- *link that view to a particular tradition*
- *reinterpret the view in terms of a different tradition*

## Teaching notes



The ideas in this theme are fairly difficult to explain because they involve some linguistic concepts, but you will find that they are not too difficult for students to perform once they get the hang of what is required.

The key idea is that in order to criticise a view you have to be able to *sum that view up in a single phrase* so that it can be interpreted as and informed by one of the traditions.

This means you can then re-frame that view by calling on one of the other traditions so that it now has a different meaning. What was a good idea according to the first tradition has now been reglossed so that it is a bad idea.

### Glossing and reglossing

In this second letter used in this session, the Sheldon Davis view is criticized from a conservative perspective.

If students are to learn to criticise views they must

- learn to locate the perspective or tradition from which that particular view of an issue derives
- learn to see that issue from another perspective.

They also must learn some grammatical and rhetorical structures to compose criticisms like the one above. Here we focus on some grammatical and rhetorical structures through which one view may be represented and reinterpreted (reglossed) by another.

We have termed these moves

- glossing
- reglossing.

### Example

The idea that children should not have to give up their seats too adults on public transport is typical of the current notion that children should have identical rights to adults.

In this sentence two ideas are linked together. An idea from the letter is shown to be typical of another idea which is from the liberal tradition. A particular view or fact is taken to instance a larger tradition.

### 'Topicalising' a view

How is this done? If we are simply telling someone about something that has happened then we don't have to use the kind of grammar that is required to write a sentence like the one above.

However, if we want to interpret, or gloss a particular view or fact then we have to find a way of *both* stating the view *and* relating it to its interpretation.

In this case we have:

The view that                      is typical of the current notion that

There are two linguistic features in sentences like this that are the focus of this session.

The first is the phrase *the view that* and *the current notion that*.

These are both ways of topicalising a view itself (rather than dealing with the *holders* of that view). They are ways of summing up a view in a single phrase so that it can figure as the subject of a sentence. This in turn means that the rest of the sentence can *comment* on this view.

A less efficient way to do this would be in two sentences — and this is how we would normally do it when talking, not writing.

Some people think that  
They just believe this because  
...they also believe

Notice how if you do it this way it is almost inevitable that you talk about the *people* who hold the view rather than the view itself. So we end up talking about how people hold both views rather than stating the relationship between the views themselves.

To focus on the views themselves and their relationships to one another we have to use a particular grammatical structure that Halliday calls *relational sentences*.

Relational sentences or clauses consist of (in this case) two nominalisations connected with a relational verb.

<i>nominalisation</i>	+	<i>relational verb</i>	+	<i>nominalisation</i>
the idea that		<b>illustrates</b>		the view that ...
the belief that		<b>shows</b>		the view that ...
the notion that		<b>reveals</b>		
the view that		<b>indicates</b>		
the statement that		<b>points to</b>		
the suggestion that		<b>highlights</b>		
the claim that		<b>demonstrates</b>		
the position that		<b>means</b>		
the theory that		<b>represents</b>		
the argument that		<b>expresses</b>		
the attitude that		<b>exemplifies</b>		
the proposition that		<b>reflects</b>		
the proposal that				
the thesis that				
the concept that				
the assumption that				

**Identifying traditions****Revision activity****The other position**

In this session you'll have another chance at arguing a point of view in writing. However, this time you can take into account the traditions which writers draw on in public debate.

Here are two letters about giving up seats on public transport. (By the way, we made up the second one!)

**First letter****Children have a right to respect as well**

from S. Davis, aged 17 years

I am writing because I am concerned about the general public's increasing disrespect for school children on the public transport system. The travelling public seem to think that they have the right to order young people around, forcing them to compromise their situation, while they provide no leeway themselves.

It is incorrect for people to expect students to give up their seats so that they may read the paper on their way to work. If they wish to sit down on public transport, they should politely ask a young member of the public or a student if they may have the use of the seat. They should not order them to get up, as they do more often than not.

Overweight people seem to think that they have more right to sit down, but these people are not disabled or elderly.

School bags do often get in the way. The ignorant, selfish commuter walks over them, crushing everything inside and then wonders why his own bag gets kicked around. It would not hurt to ask that they be moved, but the level of common sense that these people have is minimal. Piling bags up is no answer — the contents still get damaged.

Students travel concession but this is because they have no income. There are many people with an income who still travel at half price, and many others who evade fares. The concession rate should have no bearing on who is able to sit or stand. Aged pensioners travel on concession. They are given a seat on almost every form of transport. They are the ones who need a seat, not the arrogant desk-jockey who sits down all day.

Many of the general public have a low respect for students. Unfortunately, both of these groups of travellers have to use the same forms of transport but, if a bit more respect was given by both parties, life could become a little bit easier.

Sheldon Davis  
Glen Iris



## Identifying traditions

## Revision activity

## Second letter



### Children should show respect to adults on public transport

The view put forward by Sheldon Davis that children should not have to give up their seats to adults represents the now commonly held notion that children should have identical rights to adults.

However, this conception of children is misguided. In reality, the fact that children do not give up their seats to adults has more to do with a breakdown of moral authority in our community.

Mr. Davis claims that an adult should ask a child to give up his or her seat if that adult wishes to sit down. As children we were brought up to immediately get up and offer our seat to an adult. The fact that adults now have to 'order' children to get up really tells us that children have not been brought up to act politely as a matter of second nature. They have to be forced to do so by adults exasperated by children's ill manners.

Mr. Davis is quite right to state that the concession should have no bearing on who is able to stand or sit. It is not a question of who pays more has the right to a seat. The real issue is that children, when they are on public transport, should show their respect to adults by offering adults their seat. If they learnt to do that from an early age, the present 'low respect' that adults have for young travellers would vanish.

M. Muggeridge

## Activity 1



## Revision

- 1 **On the first letter, mark in**
  - *the other position*
  - *the discrepancy*
  - *the writer's position.*
- 2 **Do the same with the second letter.**
- 3 **With a partner, identify the traditions each writer has draw on.**
- 4 **Mark the wording which shows these traditions.**

**Glossing and reglossing****Notes****Arguing against another writer**

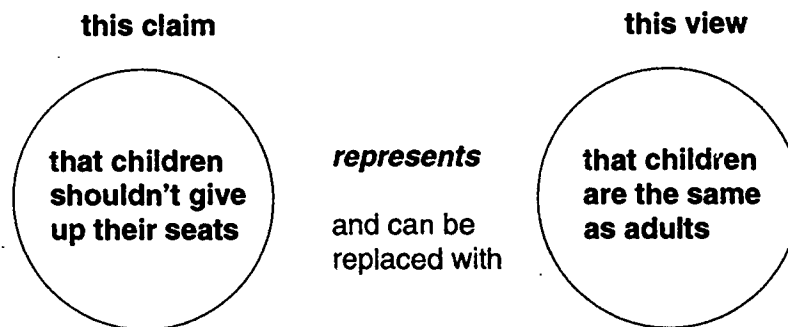
Before going on to argue your own point of view in relation to this issue, we want you to notice *how* the second writer goes about arguing against the first writer.

Here is the first sentence of the second letter.

The view put forward by Sheldon Davis that children should not have to give up their seats to adults represents the now commonly held notion that children should have identical rights to adults.

**Glossing**

Notice that the writer *presents* Sheldon Davis' view, and in the same sentence *interprets* or *reinterprets* that view. When writers argue against another point of view, they often state that point of view in the terms of a larger tradition:



We call this way of stating the other position **glossing**.

Here are some ways to present the writer's view:

The writer ...

theorises that  
 contends that  
 asserts that  
 maintains that  
 espouses the notion that  
 wants to suggest that  
 is committed to the view that  
 takes the view that  
 takes a stand  
 affirms that  
 insists that  
 puts forward the view that  
 postulates that  
 upholds the view that  
 recommends that  
 supports the view that  
 backs the view that

takes seriously the view that  
 is a proponent of the view that  
 adopts the view that  
 makes the point that  
 proposes the view that  
 concurs with A's view that  
 endorses A's view that  
 follows A's view that  
 reiterates A's view that  
 holds that  
 is obsessed with  
 is preoccupied with  
 tries to make a case for  
 tries to persuade us that  
 attempts to establish that  
 attempts to show that

**Glossing and reglossing****Notes****Reglossing**

Writers often then replace the particular interpretation or glossing with another.

*Example:*

---

**The fact that** children don't get up for adults on public transport is **not because** children really have identical rights to adults, and so should be treated equally; **rather it is because** there has been a breakdown of moral authority in our society.

In this sentence one interpretation or glossing of a particular event is rejected for another.

So we have:

The fact that ...	<b>the view stated</b>
is not because ...	<b>the liberal gloss of that view</b>
rather because ...	<b>the conservative regloss</b>

Here is another example of a reglossing:

---

The view put forward by Sheldon Davis that children should not have to give up their seats to adults represents the now commonly held notion that children should have identical rights to adults.

However, this conception of children is misguided.

In reality, the fact that children do not give up their seats to adults has more to do with the breakdown of moral authority in our community.

*Notice that —*

- In the first paragraph, Sheldon Davis's view is stated and then glossed in terms of the liberal view.
- In the next paragraph, a judgement is stated about that view.
- Finally, that view is reglossed (i.e. a different reason or explanation is given) in terms of the conservative tradition.

The view put forward by Sheldon Davis that ...	<b>view</b>
represents the commonly held view that ...	<b>liberal gloss</b>
However,	<b>summary of view</b> is misguided
In reality,	<b>conservative gloss</b>

**Presenting your view****Activity****Activity 2**

***Join in the debate about giving up seats on trains.***

Try to **gloss** the view you are criticising in terms of one of the traditions we have discussed, and **regloss** from the standpoint of another tradition.

**Extension activity**

***Write a letter in response to the issue you presented to the class previously.***

- gloss the other position in terms of one of the traditions
- criticise that view.

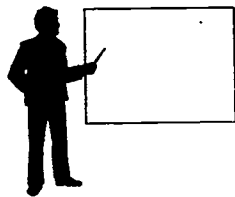
## *Theme 21*

# **Persuading readers**

***Writers can try to persuade readers who disagree with their position by***

- ***finding common ground***
- ***making concessions***

## Teaching notes



This concluding theme revisits the figure of 'the citizen' and 'the community' introduced in Theme 2.

Since Theme 2 students have assembled ways by which a writer develops a distinctive stance as a citizen involved in public debate. In other words, we have been focusing on the ways that the figure of a citizen is individuated in written text.

### Community

In this theme we point out that despite differentiating themselves through argument, writers also establish and maintain community.

We focus student attention on two things:

- the way writers bring values and traditions into play to establish and maintain common ground with readers;
- the text structures through which common ground is achieved.

We have also included letters where writers have left out of consideration rival values and traditions, or have denigrated others who have adopted standpoints that oppose their own. These are, of course, the kinds of arguments with which students will be most familiar from listening to media bites of politicians' invective towards each other. Indeed, you might like to view a session of parliament to alert students to this type of argument.

While we object to the kind of argument where a 'them' is constructed in order to create an 'us' — that is, where conflicting values are suppressed or where a 'demon other' is constructed around which 'we' can unite — it is important that as critical readers students have a sense of how this occurs.

So the last section of the student notes in this theme gestures towards this issue.

### Lesson plan

Much of the detailed analysis in this theme is in the students notes. Make sure you read and get the gist of the principles before going to class. The theme will probably go over a couple of lessons.

Explain to students that they have learnt to argue against other standpoints. Now they are to look at ways of retaining a sense of community or common ground with people with whom they disagree on particular issues.

- Read through the first three letters with students.
- Discuss with the class the differences between the first and the last to letters.

Students will note that they are about completely different topics. So focus their attention on the likely reaction to the different letters.

- Raise the question, 'How has letter two and three managed to avoid 'putting readers off'?

Gives students help with the Activity 1 and 2. Students might like to rewrite the letter used as Example 1.

After Activity 2 give students a chance to present their letters to the class or two a smaller group. Students can swap letters and identify the parts where the writer has tried to establish common ground with readers.

### **Note**

While doing this activity students might raise questions about the sincerity of writers. Are writers incorporating different traditions and values just as a rhetorical strategy to gain support for their position, or do they do so to not be misunderstood or misjudged by readers?

## Establishing common ground

## Examples

As a citizen trying to shape the way the community should think or act you try to show that your view is better than the other views presented about a particular issue.

This has involved *criticising other views*. To criticise we have introduced you to a number of traditions which writers draw on when they argue.

Theme 20 introduced some of the ways criticism occurs — by **glossing** and **reglossing** points of view.

## The writer and the reader

There is another important dimension to participating in public debate. Letters and articles may establish common ground between the writer /citizen and some readers, or alternatively create division between the writer and some readers.

A letter or article can:

- make a reader feel that they are on the same wavelength as the writer or
- 'put off' the reader.

### Example 1

Here is a letter about teaching children Japanese in schools:



### Anger over school policy

My friend's children attend Chirnside Park Primary School in suburban Melbourne.

Recently a circular sent to all parents informed them that in the near future the school intends employing two Japanese teachers, imported from Japan, to teach Japanese culture to the very predominantly Anglo-Saxon school.

My friend has already expressed to me that she doesn't want her children nipponised, that preference should be given to Australian Aboriginal culture, and that she'll take her children out of the school when the Japanese indoctrination begins.

The vast majority of everyday ordinary Australians deplore that the Queensland government is in bed with Japan, as that government is hellbent on becoming a Japanese colony.

If our people are against selling our land to the Japs, imagine their outrage when they learn that the Victorian Education Ministry intends giving the Japs our children's minds!

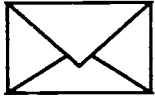
Danny Furlong

Readers who feel themselves part of an ethnically and culturally pure 'Australia' — that is, who draw on parts of a conservative tradition — may share the writer's view that Japanese culture should not be taught to children. Other readers, who do not see the world divided between 'them and us', may be 'put off' by the letter.



**Establishing common ground****Examples****Example 2**

Here is letter about the way in which money is being spent in hospitals. The writer argues that too much hospitals' finances are being directed to high-tech medical purchases and too little to 'the general needy area':

**Too much health cash is spent on technology**

There is always a lot of publicity and media hype following successful transplant surgery, such as the liver transplants at the Austin Hospital last year and, more recently the double-heart transplant. While I understand the importance of prolonging a life, particularly a young life, by such modern surgery, I am concerned that too much emphasis is oriented at the high technology end of the health care scale.

There seems to be a false assumption in Western society that a high quality health care system is one that offers an abundance of 'state of the art' equipment and technology.

During recent years there has certainly been a rapid development in that direction, with increased health costs to match. Unfortunately, overall health care does not seem to have improved at a similar rate for the majority of consumers. In fact, in some areas the reverse is true.

Hospitals cry poor, complaining that there is not enough money in the budget for them to function at their full capacity, resulting in long waiting lists of people requiring elective surgery, with even more urgent cases not being guaranteed admission. However, one must wonder if the current situation at some of our hospitals is due, in part, to an increasing percentage of their overall budget being channelled from the needy general area into the highly expensive specialised and high-tech area.

While there have been some exciting new developments as a result of such technology, this growth industry should not be allowed to dominate the purse-strings of the health care budget. After all, the only true indicator of a high quality health system is a healthier society: one in which fewer people are getting sick.

From Jenny Knox  
Doncaster

**Making concessions**

Notice that, unlike the letter about teaching Japanese culture to children, this writer acknowledges and concedes to other positions:

*While I understand the importance of prolonging life ...*

*While there have been some exciting new developments ...*

By doing so she incorporates other values and possible positions and doesn't 'put off' a reader who may accept those other values. She shows that she identifies with those values and with possible readers who espouse these values.

## Establishing common ground

## Examples

**Example 3**

Here is a letter which establishes common ground between the writer and readers who may otherwise oppose the writers view:

**Are violent and bloody scenes necessary on TV news?**

Recently I have noticed an apparent increase in the amount of explicitly violent scenes in television news reports. For example, the screening of the injuries sustained by the man who was shot in the face in a recent 'mistaken identity' police raid in New South Wales, was both graphic and disturbing.

While not doubting that this event itself constitutes news, is it necessary to show such violent scenes in television news, which is shown when children are still awake and often watching TV?

Film of bullet-ridden bodies in Beirut or crushed bodies in earthquake disasters, is, while relevant, seriously disturbing to many adult viewers, let alone children. Such frequent images of horrific events, which include graphic shots of bloody injuries or corpses, make death seem commonplace and reduce the very real impact of these tragic occurrences.

Surely the persistency of such bloody reports is not only disturbing but also desensitises people to death and destruction. The time of most news bulletins is 6 pm, the period when many families will be eating their evening meal and watching the news at the same time. Thus, children are exposed to the graphic reports which are so common in television news.

Although not advocating censorship, I would suggest that there should be two news bulletins: an early edition at 6 pm, in which scenes of graphic violence were absent but the reports informative, and a later bulletin, perhaps after 8 pm, containing the supposedly 'necessary' shots of violence and bloodshed. By screening two different news bulletins each night, the stations could show the obligatory 'blood and guts' stories, while families and children could see an informative edition with no overtly disturbing scenes.

While it is important to be informative, a news bulletin need not show scenes of violence to be comprehensive and convey the basic facts. If the television networks feel compelled to include disturbing images in their reports, then screening two different news bulletins may indeed provide a solution.

Fiona Anderson

Here the writer is concerned about the violence on the news at times when children are still watching television. Note the concessions:

*While not doubting that this event constitutes news*

*Although not advocating censorship ...*

*While it is important to be informative ...*

*If the television networks feel compelled to include disturbing images ...*

## Establishing common ground

## Activity

The writer is saying something like:

'Just because you believe in freedom of expression or that news should tell the truth — indeed I believe that too — we can still agree that violence should not be on the news when children are watching.'

So again the letter establishes common ground between the writer and readers whose values may otherwise lead them away from accepting the particular proposal the writer is putting forward.

In this way a writer can have *some* control over how a reader may take the view they are putting forward by acknowledging conflicting traditions and incorporating these in their letters.

We can also see that is through a **concession** that a writer acknowledges competing values and traditions and so establishes common ground with resistant readers.

## Activity 1



Here's an example of a letter rewritten with a concession to provide common ground between the writer and the reader:

**Example****Give brollies the boot (1)**

Why do football supporters persist in using umbrellas? They are dangerous in a crowd and block the views of others. The answer is parkas or raincoats with hoods or plastic hats. Unfashionable maybe but good for seeing the footy.

**Give brollies the boot (2)**

Why do footballers supporters persist in using umbrellas? **While people should be able to do as they please**, they don't have the right to disturb others. Umbrellas are dangerous in a crowd and block the view of others ...

**Rewrite letters**

Rewrite these examples from the *Sample Letters* so that the writer shares common ground with readers who have conflicting values:

- **Inside or outside the law** page 21
- **Mining fear for farmers** page 23
- **Helmet would have helped** page 27
- **Paintball opponents attack our freedom** page 97

## Activity 2



Rewrite the letter you wrote in Theme 20 so that your letter shares some common ground with readers who have conflicting values.

**Establishing common ground****Examples****Letters with no common ground**

On the other hand some writers make no attempt to establish common ground with readers who may have opposing views.

For example, in this letter the writer advocates that everyone in Australia should be fingerprinted and the record put on a national computer:

**Keep national record of everyone's fingerprints**

I am saddened by the attitude of some towards fingerprinting. Fingerprinting is one of the few positive means of identification available to mankind, yet we, as a society, treat it as though it is a tool of the police used solely for the purposes of identification in criminal investigation.

Recent publicity about fingerprinting leads us to believe it is a sinister act likely to have a detrimental effect on our society, with connotations of 'establishment' overseeing the activities of individuals.

I observe this sinister image is embellished by those with a vested interest such as civil libertarians and some within the legal profession. The real truth is, the act of fingerprinting is quick, simple, painless and it leaves no lasting physical or mental damage to the subject.

I argue that every individual in our society, in the best interests of society and when reaching a certain age or stage in life, should be fingerprinted and the prints recorded in the national computer.

We live in a world where major disasters, natural or mankind induced are commonplace. Identification of the victims of disasters are of paramount importance. In fact, on each occasion a death occurs, some form of identification of the deceased is undertaken before the body is finally laid to rest.

This writer makes no concession to the view that this may be an infringement on civil liberties, but rather claims that civil libertarians have 'vested interests'. This letter does not establish common ground between the writer and readers whose position is shaped by a different tradition.

However, by denigrating proponents of civil liberties, the letter perhaps establishes common ground between the writer and readers who share animosity toward civil libertarians.

**'Them' and 'us'**

So a letter which may put off some readers, for that same reason, may establish common ground between a writer and other readers. Creating a 'them' helps create an 'us'.

**Establishing common ground****Examples**

Here are two letters on the same issue. The first letter establishes common ground between users of four-wheel drive vehicles and readers who may be conservationists:




---

**Four-wheel drives help many to enjoy the bush**

I wish to correct some items in the report Four-Wheel-Drive Clubs Reject Alpine Park Plan (*The Age*, 9/4).

There are no records of the number of 4WD vehicles in Victoria. The current estimate by the Victoria Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs is 80,000 vehicles. Of these it is estimated that 60 per cent are in commercial or rural use (e.g. plumbers and farmers). This means there are about 30,000 vehicles for recreation use with the association membership at about 10,000.

Four-wheel-drive touring allows a wide range of people to enjoy the bush including small children, older and disabled people. Many children develop a lifetime interest in and respect for the bush from this early contact.

The statement that 85 per cent of the 2000 kilometres of tracks will be available for four-wheel-driving is incorrect. The Government's four proposed management plans show that only 72.6 per cent of the total length of vehicle routes will be available for public access.

All user groups must continue to promote and encourage responsible behaviour on public lands.

Neville Lester  
Melbourne

---

However, in the response letter, when the writer reports the other position she describes the first writer's argument as a 'quibble', makes no concession, and does not acknowledge the values appealed to by the first writer:




---

**Four-wheel drives damage national parks**

Neville Lester, president of the Association of 4WD Clubs, quibbles unnecessarily over the percentage of roads recommended to remain open in the Alpine National Park (24/4). It is immaterial whether it is 72.6 per cent as he claims or 83 per cent as was stated by the Department of Conservation and the Environment. The fact remains that the major part of the park will remain open to four-wheel drive users.

Documented evidence shows the severe impact of four-wheel driving on the natural environment. This includes the introduction of exotic plant and animal species, soil erosion, impact on water quality of streams and bisection and disturbance of the habitat of native animals.

The accumulated effects of four-wheel driving are deleterious to the natural environment and are therefore in direct conflict with the primary objective of national parks which is to preserve and protect the natural environment.

**Establishing common ground****Activity**

It is therefore entirely inappropriate for any interest group, including four-wheel drive users, to claim that they are being hard done by when the Government decides to close a very small number of roads and tracks in a move to maintain nature conservation as the priority of our national parks.

Georgia Stewart  
Melbourne  
for The Wilderness Society

**Summary**

In Theme 10 we noted that there were various ways of stating the other position.

The way in which the other position is represented can put off readers who may share that other position.

On the other hand, it can also signal to other readers the values the writer supports. Clearly, the second letter does not try to establish common ground between the writer and four-wheel drive users.

**Other examples**

Look at these letters in the *Sample Letters*.

- **Australia's war role is being rewritten** (page 76)  
This writer reports the other position as 'media fanfare', 'media hype', and 'rewriting Australian History'.
- **Children have a right to respect as well** (page 93)  
This letter reports the other position as 'the public's increasing disrespect' and 'the right to order young people around'.

**Activity 3**

**Write a letter either opposing or supporting one of the following**

- smoking in public
- Sunday shopping
- decriminalising marijuana
- logging in state forests

Your aim is to strengthen support (or opposition) to these policies. Try to share common ground with those who draw on traditions which are in conflict with the policy you propose.

# Public Literacy

## A Curriculum for Adult Basic Education

### Part 3

# Sample Letters

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## Sample Letters

### *Section 1*

# Letters which raise problems



## Help for the homeless

I am very concerned about what I saw in the mall at Mildura a few nights ago — two elderly men with their belongings in a shopping trolley.

I asked one what was wrong. 'Why don't you go home?'

He replied, 'I have no home.'

Where are all the charitable organisations? What do we donate money to them for? I thought it was to help people like these men.

What are the good people of Mildura doing to allow this to happen?

Jane Westerly  
Dennilquin



### Your notes

Note the problem and the solution:		Check the values:					
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## Fair go for kids

Children were made to wait outside in freezing rain until 9 am at school while teachers were inside, warm and dry, drinking tea and coffee.

On wet cold days like this, school doors should be open at 8.30 am and the children be kept inside and not allowed outside playing on soggy ground getting muddy and being

expected to sit in damp clothes all day.

Poor kids can't protest about such things (only to be told to shut up), they have feelings like adults. Such selfishness of teachers appals me.

*Concerned  
Noble Park*



### Your notes

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## Reverse bus seats to speed up safety

The recent spate of bus accidents deserves our concern and the introduction of seat belts is clearly going to be a slow process leaving passengers exposed to more deaths or injuries.

A quick solution is simple. Reverse the seats. Train passengers have been travelling with their backs to the engine for years.

*Russell S. Smith  
Glen Iris*



### Your notes

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## Family to lose land, heritage

I am very upset.

A couple who has worked hard and brought up eight lovely children looks like losing their land to a mining giant, just because there happens to be mineral sands on their land.

Once again the hard-working families are taken over by greed.

It seems the heritage to be handed on to the children means nothing to these greedy companies.

After all, this is Australia, not some communist country.

*Mrs. L. Sheldrick  
Mordialloc*



### Your notes

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# Conductors vital for safe travel

Trams, buses and trains should all have conductors. They could help the elderly and people with prams, and would be security against vandalism. Then people would not fear travelling at night.

G. Jackovidis  
Laverton



## Your notes

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## Who's minding the children?

I was horrified to open the door in the dark to a child selling sweets for charity. Once it was 'sick' people hanging around schools enticing children with lollies.

Now both sweets and children seem home delivered. Whose minding the children?

*Nanna  
Boronia*



### Your notes

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## Car park fee a rip-off

Drivers beware if you use car parks. We are supposed to be encouraged to use public transport, but after my experience today I certainly can't afford it.

I took my three grandchildren to the city for the day, leaving my car in the Box Hill Plaza car park. On

returning six and a half hours later I was informed the cost was \$27 for the car park fee.

Added to the cost of the train fares, we could have travelled by taxi for the same amount. The public need to be fully aware of this kind of rip-off.

Margaret



### Your notes

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## Time to better literacy

I was appalled to read recently that 1 in 10 adult Australians cannot read well enough to use a street directory. As our literacy standards continue to fall, a generation of non-literate adults is emerging. These adults will be unable to help their children in learning to read, so that a far greater burden is about to descend on our primary schools in the form of large numbers of children who arrive with

no prior knowledge of books or reading.

It is time the whole literacy curriculum was revised to cater for those who will learn only at school. We can no longer rely on help from home or the frightening prospect of ever-increasing numbers of illiterate people will become a reality.

Susan Perry  
Creswick



### Your notes

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## Price of cinema tickets is too high

I wish to complain about the high cinema ticket prices and how families are severely affected by the sharp increase in prices.

Recently I went to the cinema with a friend, only to discover that a ticket now costs \$10.50 per person. This is simply outrageous. The cinema has always been a great place for a family outing, however, it is becoming far too expensive. It now seems to be the

venue for courting couples who fill the cinemas in place of families. Cinemas could soon be in trouble. People can rent a latest release video overnight for as little as \$5 and it entertains the whole family.

Although the cinemas offer half price tickets on Tuesday nights, it is unacceptable for most families. Weeknights are taken up by homework, after-school activities

and small children have to go to bed early, to be fresh for school the next day.

With the booming video industry, it is a surprise that the cinema companies have not looked into more alternative ways of attracting larger numbers of cinema patrons.

Veronica Axton  
Burwood



### Your notes

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## Intersection a traffic disaster

My corner in Endeavour Hills is an absolute traffic disaster.

I have lived here for two years, at the intersection where traffic turns on and off the South Eastern Arterial (formerly Mulgrave Freeway) at the Heatherton Rd. overpass.

In my two years I have seen at least 15 bad accidents here. There have

been many others that I have not seen. How many more will occur before traffic lights are installed?

I certainly hope I do not become one of the victims of this abysmally planned intersection before that is done.

*Mark Harris  
Endeavour Hills*



### Your notes

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# Our pockets bulge with too many coins

Since the introduction of one and two dollar coins there are now a total of eight coins in circulation. Having just arrived from New Zealand where there are four coins in use, I am staggered by the unnecessary weight and confusion caused by so many coins.

What possible use is served by the one and two cent copper coins? They increase the size and weight of our wallets and in themselves are worthless currency.

It is high time, like New Zealand, that we abolish the one and two cent coins. The public could unload the coins by depositing them in a collection box to help support a worthwhile charity.

The prices could easily be adjusted to the nearest five cents and at the same time stop the ridiculous practice of pricing things at \$1.99.

Let's stop the jingle-jangle and make our money mean more.

*Catherine Putt  
Black Rock*



## Your notes

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# Let's get together and cause trouble

It seems it is about time to rethink Moomba.

Is it only an excuse for hoods and vandals to come to the city to get drunk, to wreck our trains, the Yarra river bank and gardens, and clutter up the streets with endless cars and rubbish?

Living in South Yarra during Moomba is a 10-day nightmare. One can scarcely venture out.

If we are a Christian community why is Moomba held during Lent, a time for reflection not noise and nuisance.

*Caroline Moss  
South Yarra*



## Your notes

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# Stand up to coward thugs

I read with disgust of the attack on an off-duty policeman who tried to stop thugs who were harassing people on a packed train (Sun. July 13).

There must have been five to ten able-bodied men around who could have helped him. Five thugs to one man is a cowardly act, but they are not the only cowards in this situation.

The other passengers should hang their heads in shame. I can guess their excuse: 'If I help I could get hurt or even killed.'

Because they failed to help they are already dead — inside. Human beings should help others in times of trouble.

You don't have to be a karate expert or a body-builder to help. The difference in this situation is the weight of numbers. If others had

joined in to help, the cowardly thugs would have soon departed.

The violence in our society is not the only problem. We the people are the problem. Unless we stand together against this wave of violence we will soon be consumed by it.

Remember, we are just as guilty for the crimes we allow as for the crimes we commit.

*T. Manning  
Melton South*



## Your notes

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## Inside or outside the law

Two potentially dangerous groups of people are operating in Australia, one supposedly inside the law, the other outside the law.

One, a squad of police breaking down your door in the early hours of the morning, on sometimes false tip-offs.

Two, another group of men breaking down your door to rob you.

Why are a lot of police raids done in the early hours of the morning?

It's time the public should know what groups of police are operating in the force, and are they outside the law.

T.C.  
Footscray



### Your notes

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## Deduct rent from tenants' pay

How much money is the Ministry of Housing losing through tenants not paying rent?

Many people who live in these homes take it for granted that they won't be thrown on the street, so don't care.

My solution is that anyone who fails to pay their rent has payments deducted from either wages or

pensions, thus giving them no choice, and if they don't like it they can move and give genuine needy families a go.

If these people lived in private accommodation they wouldn't last one week. I hope the government does cut the age limit for single parent recipients to 12.

*Robert Maclean  
Lalor*



### Your notes

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# Mining fear for farmers

It has just come to my notice, being a city person, that a big mining company wants to take over quite a few farms for mining mineral sands.

In places like Lah Arum, Toolondo, Clear Lake and other Wimmera districts, the owners' families have been on their lands for generations. They have no rights against the big mining companies.

Over the years they have gradually improved their land and property. It

is not done overnight. It means starting all over again.

The State Government does not want to know anything about it — only a handful of little country people, who cannot compete against the might of the big mining companies.

The Victorian Farmers' Federation is wanting landowners' rights recognised.

Unless this serious issue is brought to the attention of all Victorians,

landowners do not stand a chance against the mining companies.

It is happening in Rupanyup too, where they have prime Wimmera blacksoil for cropping, and so landowners alone face a doubtful future.

*Concerned*



## Your notes

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## Anger over school policy

My friend's children attend Chirnside Park primary school in suburban Melbourne.

Recently a circular sent to all parents informed them that in the near future the school intends employing two Japanese teachers, imported from Japan, to teach Japanese culture to the very predominantly Anglo-Saxon school.

My friend has already expressed to me that she doesn't want her children nipponised, that preference should be given to Australian Aboriginal culture, and that she'll take her children out of the school

when the Japanese indoctrination begins.

The vast majority of everyday ordinary Australians deplore that the Queensland government is in bed with Japan, as that government is hellbent on becoming a Japanese colony.

If our people are against selling our land to the Japs, imagine their outrage when they learn that the Victorian Education Ministry intends giving the Japs our children's minds!

Danny Furlong  
Kilsyth



### Your notes

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# Musical barrage is noise pollution

Is there anyone else who finds offensive this constant barrage of piped music, of inane radio commentators playing what we are led to believe is music in supermarkets, malls, from loud speakers on to the streets, in waiting rooms, over the telephone and even in car parks?

Do the promoters of these music systems sell them to retailers who

believe it will act as some sort of opiate to brainwash shoppers into buying unthinkingly, or have these same retailers been fast-talked into installing them because they are told they have to keep up with other stores?

People are jumping up and down about pollution, what about noise pollution? What about civil rights? I have this constant noise forced on me. Is this just another example of

paying lip-service to consideration of the disabled? Deaf people have great difficulty with this background noise.

I find shopping in these stores distressing. It should be relief from traffic noise to walk into a quiet store or sit in a quiet waiting room.

On occasions I have complained and have been told: 'This is what people want.' Do they?

*P. Gross  
Boronia*



## Your notes

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## New trains do not suit elderly

I have just returned from Queensland and have experienced the new train service which has been introduced between Sydney and Murwillumbah and between Brisbane and Sydney, and which, I understand, is to operate between Melbourne and Sydney.

The old Brisbane Limited, which provided for sitting and sleeping passengers, has been replaced by XPT trains which have neither sleeping nor dining cars. Passengers who travel between Sydney and Murwillumbah are required to sit up for 13 hours and those travelling between Brisbane and Sydney for 14 hours.

No provision is made for elderly passengers, many of whom must rest on account of some form of arthritis or back trouble. All passengers are required to obtain their meals from cramped facilities at the buffet bar and to carry their food packages through the moving train to their seats, a feat almost beyond the capacity of many of the elderly passengers.

Luggage is also a problem. Some rack accommodation is provided at the end of each carriage and above the seats, but intending passengers

are warned that the space for 'book-through' luggage is limited.

The XPT trains are fast, attractive and comfortable and the buffet meals are good but they do not cater for elderly citizens travelling interstate.

As a frequent traveller between Melbourne and Brisbane, who has always patronised and enjoyed the trains, I am now compelled to consider other means of transport.

*William E. Chamberlin  
Glen Iris*



### Your notes

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# Heroin for the dying

There are people who can help cancer victims die contented and comfortable, but who deny them this privilege.

Our politicians, who refuse the aid that heroin can bring to the last days of cancer sufferers, are the guilty ones.

Morphine which is available, is a painkiller but often the recipient goes into a semi coma and becomes incommunicado to the distress of the family. Heroin is a pain suppressant and gives the taker an uplift, puts him on a high.

A doctor told me the government cannot stop the misuse of heroin but when it can be used to benefit humanity, they ban it.

If the patient becomes addicted, so what? The addiction dies with the patient.

In England the use of heroin to help cancer sufferers is legal, so are politicians there more intelligent, more compassionate?

I think not, but I blame apathy and lack of understanding for our politicians lack of action.

*Bernard Burke  
Sunshine*



## Your notes

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## Keep four-wheel drives out of national parks

In recent years I have made numerous trips into the country of the Macalister and Wonnangatta Rivers. As a bushwalker I love and respect the country I walk through. Yet I, and many others who walk in the high plains, have become increasingly distraught at the continual and harmful use of all-terrain vehicles in that country.

Over the past decade there have been public rallies about cattle grazing in the high plains, supported even by those who have never visited the country. However, without doubt man-made machines cause by far the greater damage. Four-wheel-drive use can change a once good walking

track chronically: the track is irreparably bulldozed on either side, and after rain becomes a quagmire, while all the time the track widens through attempts to avoid what has been created.

I know that this damage occurs not only in the high plains but in many areas; other readers should voice their examples and concerns. While picnicking in Lerderberg Gorge near Bacchus Marsh this summer, we were compelled to move our belongings as a lurid red 4WD vehicle proceeded through our site.

Soon afterwards a Department of Conservation Forests and Lands officer informed us that she could not

stop the vehicle because there were no warning signs, even though it was technically not allowed to proceed. Public support is desperately needed to prompt the Government into passing obviously necessary stricter laws. It is imperative that our last wilderness survive the ravage of man.

All-terrain vehicles must be strictly banned from state and national parks for our country's sake. What little forestation remains must be protected and not pulverised.

C.M. Archibald  
Toorak



### Your notes

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# Humiliating search at Melbourne airport

I write this letter as a warning to would-be travellers who may in future return to Australia through Melbourne airport.

Did you know that you may be selected at random by Customs officials and strip-searched like a common criminal? I certainly did not, and neither did my brother Steven, who returned to Melbourne last Thursday from his first overseas holiday.

He had been to Holland to visit friends and saw a little of Europe. Steven was away five weeks and had a wonderful holiday until his encounter with Customs.

In the Customs hall he was asked to accompany Customs officers to an anteroom where, he was told, he would be frisked and his shoes would be inspected. He went willingly, having high regard for the officers doing their duty.

But when alone in this room with these two men, not only did they frisk him and inspect everything else in minute detail, but then asked him to face the wall and remove his trousers and underpants. At this point he became very frightened, humiliated and degraded. He in no way resisted because at this stage he was very tired and just wanted to go home.

My main concern is just how easily a person could be 'set up' in these

circumstances. Surely a person has the right to have an independent witness viewing these proceedings.

Another concern is just how are people selected for these searches. Was Steven selected because he was a single guy travelling alone, has visited Amsterdam, was travelling back-pack style or looked a little unkempt after several hours in the air?

I wonder how many brief case-carrying business people have been searched in such a manner? None that I know of.

Lyn Van Dullemen  
Melton



## Your notes

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# Tears don't pay the rent, Mr. Hawke

Mr. Hawke sheds tears for vets at Gallipoli, now he accepts a pay rise of \$40 a week, more than the married pensioner lives on, and says happy days are here again. How much cynical heartlessness can we accept?

J. L.H  
Finley



## Your notes

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## Scholarship fund helps pay education costs

In the week that most children return to school it might be appropriate to reflect on the high cost of education.

The AST Scholarship Fund estimates that the cost of education is rising at between 12 and 15 per cent a year.

Parents with a child attending a college or university face annual costs of around \$5000 to \$9000 and that is excluding the Higher Education Contribution which this year has been increased to about \$1900. This is a substantial amount for many families, particularly those with several children in education.

Karen Cooper in Business Age Money Extra (5/2) correctly pointed out that many parents consider the decision to save now for their children's education to avoid financial headaches 10 years on is crucial.

Since 1974 the IPS Friendly Society has been offering parents a way of saving to avoid these headaches through its AST Scholarship Fund, a tax-free benefit which offers a monthly bursary to children who undertake a full-time, post-secondary diploma or degree course (not just university courses).

The scheme also returns all the parents their contributions to the fund, on maturity.

At a time when the job market is contracting and the competition for positions is intensifying, the importance of qualifications is even greater. Meeting the costs of education to get our young people the necessary qualifications is becoming increasingly beyond the means of most ordinary Australian families.

*Arnold Bonnet  
East Malvern  
for the IPSV Friendly Society*



### Your notes

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## Let's get together to tackle graffiti

When is the State Government going to have the guts to do something to eradicate the repulsive graffiti that has been splattered all over our transport system?

As regular commuters on trains and trams we are fed up with having to sit or stand among this most offensive and ugly swag of so-called 'art' that has been daubed over every reachable square centimetre of every station and all the walls and fences between each station.

Why hasn't the Government done anything yet? Simple answer: those with the power do not use the public transport system (apart from the odd phoney rides accompanied by media

cameras and reporters). We dare the Minister for Transport to catch trains to and from work for a week and experience the depressing sights of our stations and not be affected by what he sees. It is easily forgettable when you occasionally use the public transport system, but you cannot when you use it day by day, week by week and year in year out.

It is going to cost time, labour and the money we haven't got — we all know where our money has been going lately. How about schools, scouts/girl guides, and other interested community groups

volunteering to take on the job of cleaning up these abominations.

The Government could provide paint, brushes and cleansers. In true Churchillian style, 'give us the tools and we will finish the job'!

Why can't the Ministry of Transport organise a special 'anti-graffiti day' when it coordinates these interested groups into action.

We have allowed graffiti to exist for too long and in doing so we have condoned it. Surely if New York can clean up so can we.

Glen and Lesley Foster  
Balwyn



### Your notes

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# Sample Letters

## *Section 2*

# **Letters which respond to a policy**

## Community 'concern' on migration

The current direction of Australia's immigration policy has been correctly identified by Senator Peter Walsh and recent opinion polls as being a matter of community concern.

Such concern is not confined to whether about 140,000 migrants a year are too many. The most important aspect of the Saulwick Age Poll published on 14 May was the solid 62 per cent of respondents who said they wanted those who possess skills Australia needs.

However, 1988-89 statistics provided by the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA) show that only 30 per cent of the 145,316 migrants arriving were issued visas on the grounds of skill.

In addition, the Federal Government has vastly understated the dimensions of our illegal immigration problem, claiming last January that Australia had only 60,000 illegal immigrants.

It should be noted that the department only counts as overstayers or illegals, those who remain in Australia for three months longer than their visa allows.

I have been told that the department's unofficial, unpublished and real figure for overstayers, illegal immigrants, is an alarming 119,900.

Dividing this figure into Australia's population of 16.5 million, results in one in every 138 persons being in Australia illegally.

Also vulnerable to abuse, despite some minor improvements, are the

Government's English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) scheme and the Business Migration Program (BMP).

Other rorts include shady consultants purporting to obtain permanent residence status for a fee for their clients, persons being sponsored to provide sheap labor, the systematic organisation of sham marriages and the skilled production of false passports.

Not only must there be an administrative shake-up of the department to end the rorts, but our future immigration policy must be based on taking the people with the skills that Australia needs, in the numbers it can handle.

*Ken Aldred, MHR  
Mitcham*

Note the policy response:	Check the values:					
<p>What policy does the writer object to?</p> <p>What problem is the policy addressing?</p> <p>Why does the writer reject the policy?</p> <p>What new solution does the writer suggest?</p>	<p>Which values does the policy involve?</p> <p><i>Tick one or more boxes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> conserving our heritage</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> freedom of individuals</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> equality</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> justice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> efficiency</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reducing pain or harm</li> </ul> <p>List the words &amp; phrases which point to values.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">Negative wording</td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">Positive wording</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> </tr> </table>		Negative wording	Positive wording		
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# Feminist policies cause breastfeeding decline

Pamela Bone is to be commended for her excellent article chronicling the recent decline in breastfeeding, *Weaning Mothers off the Breast* (*Accent*, 28/3). However, it is not formula manufacturers or 'career women' who are primarily responsible — the decline is caused by feminist policies on child care adopted both by Labor and Liberal parties, which currently allow for government expenditure of \$186 per week per child in a government-subsidised child-care centre (*The Age*, 22/11), while the mother who stays home with her baby receives no child-care money at all.

Successful lactation cannot be established if a mother is separated from her baby and does not have the

opportunity to feed her baby frequently. It is therefore hardly surprising that while wealthy women breastfeed their babies, breastfeeding is declining among lower socio-economic groups.

Mothers from these groups have to take paid jobs to make ends meet, but if they were given the child-care subsidy as a direct payment, it would give them a choice of staying out of the paid workforce while their babies were young.

Upper-class women have the additional advantage that their careers are often of the elitist variety which enable them to take the baby with them — this is not an option for

those who work in factories or as machinists.

Simone de Beauvoir, who was founder of the contemporary feminist movement, objected to payments to housewives because then 'too many would make the choice to stay home'. However, unless government policy stops discrimination against mothers who stay with their babies, we will not be able to break the cycle of health disadvantage in which the poor are caught, and which, as Pamela Bone writes, may well be aggravated in the next 20 years.

*Babette Francis  
12 Denham Place,  
Toorak*

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## Australians don't need Japanese

How short-sighted of Australia to allow our European heritage and culture to be usurped by promoting the teaching of Japanese in place of European languages.

No doubt this policy is encouraged by the lure of 30 pieces of Japanese silver and the prospect of short term economic advantage and efficiency.

We should realise that Japan may not last as the most greedy, number-one economic power, while a united and greatly enlarged Europe, will in the long term have much more to offer Australia.

For cultural, historical and long-term economic reasons, we should keep English as the nation's main language and encourage the teaching of German, French, Russian and Spanish as preferred second languages.

Distance is no longer so important, while economic prosperity based on Japan and the Japanese is likely to continue to elude us and remain a goal seldom if ever achieved.

*Bruce Turner  
13 Davis Street,  
Elsternwick*



### Your notes

Note the policy response:	Check the values:				
<p>What policy does the writer object to?</p> <p>What problem is the policy addressing?</p> <p>Why does the writer reject the policy?</p> <p>What new solution does the writer suggest?</p>	<p>Which values does the policy involve? <i>Tick one or more boxes</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> conserving our heritage  <input type="checkbox"/> freedom of individuals  <input type="checkbox"/> equality  <input type="checkbox"/> justice  <input type="checkbox"/> efficiency  <input type="checkbox"/> reducing pain or harm</p> <p>List the words &amp; phrases which point to values.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Negative wording</th> <th>Positive wording</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Negative wording	Positive wording		
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## Sample Letters

### *Section 3*

# Letters which support other letters

## Fight back against mediocre piped music

I can sympathise with other correspondents who are subjected to piped music on an occasional basis, but spare a thought for employees who are subjected to it for a major part of the working week.

There are ways of fighting back. Several years ago I worked for a leading insurance company. After a few days I located the volume controls for the piped music on my floor. If I arrived early enough, I turned them off and with a bit of luck it was lunchtime before anyone noticed.

We had a few hours peace until the storm troopers arrived to turn up the volume. The approach seemed to be: 'You must listen or you will be fired!'

I suggest that it is time for the formation of 'Citizens for a Silent Workplace'. It has potential for wide membership — those who have musical taste and those with none at all.

Its mission would be to locate and nullify attempts to broadcast piped music.

There is another aspect to this debate which is yet to be considered. Is the 'music' computer generated, or are musicians responsible for the output?

I would dearly love to see a CV with the following entries: second violinist, lifts and lobbies orchestra; classics, jazz, pop, all reduced to common mediocrity.

Is there a musician or computer programmer out there willing to admit his part in all this?

*J.E. McCulloch  
Hampton*



### Your notes

Describe the support:	Check the values:					
<p><b>Whose letter is being supported?</b></p>  <p><b>What is the view being supported?</b></p>   <p><b>How does this writer support the earlier letter?</b></p>	<p><b>Which values does the present writer appeal to in supporting the earlier letter?</b> <i>Tick one or more boxes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> conserving our heritage</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> freedom of individuals</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> equality</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> justice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> efficiency</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reducing pain or harm</li> </ul> <p><b>List the words &amp; phrases which point to values.</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%;">Negative wording</th> <th style="width: 50%;">Positive wording</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Negative wording	Positive wording		
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## Trained drivers take safe driving seriously

Further to the letters from M. Oxer (3/4) and M. Cadle (4/4) regarding car safety, I could not agree more with these two farsighted individuals. Making cars safer, while important, should only be a secondary aspect in preventing car crashes — the obvious solution lies with the driver.

In some parts of the US, road speed limits have been abolished. The result? A dramatic decrease in the road toll. While I would not advocate such a drastic move being taken here, there are good reasons why it has been effective.

All of us have driven during heavy rain, when it has been dangerous to drive at the posted speed limit. Yet many drivers do not slacken speed, rationalising that as long as they obey the law they will be safe.

Drivers are cocooned in a web of speed limits, white lines and the dubious safety features of their cars.

What if, instead, we showed drivers how dangerous this attitude is and gave each driver the skills and knowledge to drive with awareness and confidence? Advanced driving schools treat drivers as thinking human beings who are able, with training, to make decisions regarding their own safety rather than blindly

following the law. We find that drivers respond by taking that responsibility seriously.

Drivers need training and awareness, and they need to be taught to drive to the prevailing conditions. Poor road surfaces, rain and sharp bends do not cause crashes — it is the driver who has failed to take these adverse conditions into account. Airbags, anti-lock brakes and the like are just the icing on the cake.

*Jennie Fickling  
Blackburn  
of Roadskill Advanced Driving*



### Your notes

Describe the support:	Check the values:					
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## Tram passengers need conductors

Charles Sowerwine is right about the need for greater efficiency in the public transport system, but wrong about how this can be achieved. Elimination of tram conductors means reducing the level of service to passengers, and does not address the serious issue of restrictive work practices throughout the system.

It is true that tram systems in Europe have operated without conductors for many years now, but

perhaps Dr Sowerwine doesn't know that in Amsterdam in a few week's time, conductors will be put back on trams on one route in a trial which, if successful, will lead to the reinstatement of conductors throughout the system.

Participants in the debate about public transport in Melbourne would do well to note the four reasons the Amsterdam Municipal Transport

Company has given for re-introducing conductors:

- To reduce fare evasion, which stands at 20 to 25 per cent;
- To improve passenger security;
- To reduce vandalism;
- To speed up trams, which are currently slowed down by drivers having to answer passengers' queries and sell tickets.

*Ray Walford  
Melbourne*

*President of the Public Transport  
Users Association*



### Your notes

Describe the support:	Check the values:					
<p><b>Whose letter is being supported?</b></p>  <p><b>What is the view being supported?</b></p>   <p><b>How does this writer support the earlier letter?</b></p>	<p><b>Which values does the present writer appeal to in supporting the earlier letter?</b> <i>Tick one or more boxes</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> conserving our heritage</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> freedom of individuals</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> equality</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> justice</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> efficiency</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> reducing pain or harm</p> <p><b>List the words &amp; phrases which point to values.</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 50%; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Negative wording</th> <th style="width: 50%; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Positive wording</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> <td style="height: 100px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Negative wording	Positive wording		
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## Sample Letters

### *Section 4*

# Letters which reject other letters



## Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age*, 30/3), is a smokescreen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenage sons to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up on confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magical rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm. Meanwhile we have the merest

tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma, road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

*M. Oxer  
Ivanhoe*

*President of Bicycle Victoria*



### Your notes

Describe the rejection:	Check the values:					
<p><b>What view does the writer reject or oppose?</b> <i>Briefly state the view presented in the earlier letter.</i></p> <p><b>What reasons does the writer give for rejecting the other view?</b></p>	<p><b>Which values does the writer appeal to in rejecting the earlier letter?</b> <i>Tick one or more boxes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> conserving our heritage</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> freedom of individuals</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> equality</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> justice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> efficiency</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> reducing pain or harm</li> </ul> <p><b>List the words &amp; phrases which point to values.</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Negative wording</th> <th>Positive wording</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Negative wording	Positive wording		
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## Too much health cash is spent on technology

There is always a lot of publicity and media hype following successful transplant surgery, such as the liver transplants at the Austin Hospital last year and, more recently the double-heart transplant. While I understand the importance of prolonging a life, particularly a young life, by such modern surgery, I am concerned that too much emphasis is oriented at the high technology end of the health care scale.

There seems to be a false assumption in Western society that a high quality health care system is one that offers an abundance of 'state of the art' equipment and technology.

During recent years there has certainly been a rapid development in that direction, with increased health costs to match. Unfortunately, overall health care does not seem to have improved at a similar rate for the majority of consumers. In fact, in some areas the reverse is true.

Hospitals cry poor, complaining that there is not enough money in the budget for them to function at their full capacity, resulting in long waiting lists of people requiring elective surgery, with even more urgent cases not being guaranteed admission. However, one must wonder if the current situation at some of our hospitals is due, in part,

to an increasing percentage of their overall budget being channelled from the needy general area into the highly expensive specialised and high-tech area.

While there have been some exciting new developments as a result of such technology, this growth industry should not be allowed to dominate the purse-strings of the health care budget. After all, the only true indicator of a high quality health system is a healthier society: one in which fewer people are getting sick.

Jenny Knox  
Doncaster



### Your notes

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## Recycling tax on paper won't increase imports

The goals of environmental groups are to increase paper recycling, and not retard it as claimed by Mr. B. La Fontaine of the Pulp and Paper Manufacturers Federation of Australia (*The Age*, 16/3).

Mr. La Fontaine claims that regulating the paper industry will increase the cost of paper manufacturing in Australia, thus encouraging more imports.

However, legislation such as a tax on virgin newsprint or targets for minimum recycled content in newsprint would apply equally to imports and domestically produced paper. Therefore the cost of Australian produced paper would

not unnecessarily increase relative to imports.

Similarly, a national fund established to subsidise exports of old newspapers and facilitate recycling in the longer term should be contributed to equally by importers and local producers.

We agree with Mr La Fontaine that overall production of paper in Australia should be increased to replace imports. However, we also believe that we should consume much less paper whenever possible.

Paper production should be increased through recycling. Mountains of stationery paper still go to waste in our offices, yet recycled

writing paper is a luxury item. Why don't the paper companies market their recycled papers more vigorously?

They rightly deduce that marketing a product as 'environmentally friendly' means people would look suspiciously at products which use native forest fibre and are chlorine bleached.

Collections of household waste paper also continue to break down because the newspaper industry and publishers still refuse to subsidise export of waste newspapers before a de-inking plant is built to use them here.

Murray Keable  
222 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy  
for Friends of The Earth



### Your notes

Describe the rejection:

**What view does the writer reject or oppose?**  
*Briefly state the view presented in the earlier letter.*

**What reasons does the writer give for rejecting the other view?**

Check the values:

**Which values does the writer appeal to in rejecting the earlier letter?**

*Tick one or more boxes*

- conserving our heritage
- freedom of individuals
- equality
- justice
- efficiency
- reducing pain or harm

**List the words & phrases which point to values.**

Negative wording

Positive wording

## Visually impaired can laugh at folly

Visually impaired people should not be offended by John Spooner's cartoon of a blind man being led over a cliff by a blind guide dog (9/3). People with sight loss do not lose their sense of humour and they, most of all, can laugh at the folly of a blind man who puts his trust in a blind guide dog.

Anyway, it is no big deal to fall off a cliff. Anyone can fall off a cliff.

The trick is in the landing, and Spooner's blind man and guide dog believe they have mastered the art of making a soft landing. Perhaps they have.

*Jim Groutsch  
Flat 4, 45 Gipps Street,  
East Melbourne*



### Your notes

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# Why should our young people lose unemployment benefits?

The hollowness of the Labor Party's commitment to young people has been highlighted by their proposal to reduce unemployment benefits to those aged between 18 and 20 who are living at home.

If self-determination is to be encouraged and dependency discouraged, then how can reliance on parents to support their sons and daughters when unemployed, go towards developing independence and confidence in youth?

All the rhetoric in recent years about 'priority one', empowerment, retraining programs and increased retention rates in schools which were all supposedly aimed at improving the life chances, confidence and self-

image of young people, is empty when their rights are taken away without a second thought.

Moreover, it is a direct incentive for youth to leave home in order to get the full benefits, but at the same time join the increasing number of homeless unemployed young people.

Why have these people been singled out for special treatment? Why are they not fully recognised as adults?

The proposal once again reflects a 'blame-the-victim mentality' which has typified many of the political approaches since 1975. It is very difficult for young people, particularly early school leavers, to

secure employment. There are not the jobs available.

Why are these people and their families who have to bear the financial and emotional burden, singled out to satisfy the Hawke Government's desire to demonstrate its toughness with so called 'dole bludgers'?

If the proposal was to diminish the unemployment entitlements of any other group on the grounds of age, gender or race, there would surely be a public outcry?

*Judith Bessant  
553 The Boulevard,  
East Ivanhoe*

<b>Describe the rejection:</b>		<b>Check the values:</b>					
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## Australia's war role is being rewritten

The Government and media fanfare surrounding the 75th anniversary of the Gallipoli landing highlights the states' and media's rewriting of Australian history. If we believe the media hype surrounding the Gallipoli celebrations we could be forgiven for thinking that all Australians supported Australia's participation in the First World War.

Australia was a divided country during the First World War. A majority of Australians did not support Australia's involvement in World War 1. Australians rejected conscription in two separate referendums during the First World War.

The Catholic Church, the trade union movement, women's groups, as well as Industrial Workers of the World (a forerunner to today's Australian anarchist groups) were all united in their opposition to conscription and Australia's involvement in World War 1.

Thousands of Australians owe their lives to the anti-conscription movement because without such a powerful people's movement their grandfathers and great-grandfathers would have been conscripted to fight and die in a war that was fought for money, trade and the benefit of local business and the European ruling classes. Millions of soldiers,

including tens of thousands of Australians, died for the economic benefit of the world's ruling classes.

The tendency of the Australian Government and media to rewrite Australian history to suit the present is not some new virus we have inherited from the Chinese Communist Party. This tendency to rewrite history is an integral component of Australian folklore that has its origins in the lie that the British colonised a vast uninhabited land, not that the Australian nation was built on the blood and bones of tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

*Joseph Toscano  
Malvern spokesman,  
Anarchist Media Institute*



### Your notes

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## Feminist policies cause breast-feeding decline

Pamela Bone is to be commended for her excellent article chronicling the recent decline in breast-feeding, *Weaning Mothers off the Breast* (*Accent*, 28/3). However, it is not formula manufacturers or 'career women' who are primarily responsible — the decline is caused by feminist policies on child care adopted both by Labor and Liberal parties, which currently allow for government expenditure of \$186 per week per child in a government-subsidised child-care centre (*The Age*, 22/11), while the mother who stays home with her baby receives no child-care money at all.

Successful lactation cannot be established if a mother is separated

from her baby and does not have the opportunity to feed her baby frequently. It is therefore hardly surprising that while wealthy women breast-feed their babies, breast-feeding is declining among lower socioeconomic groups.

Mothers from these groups have to take paid jobs to make ends meet, but if they were given the child-care subsidy as a direct payment, it would give them a choice of staying out of the paid workforce while their babies were young.

Upper-class women have the additional advantage that their careers are often of the elitist variety which enable them to take the baby with them — this is not an option for

those who work in factories or as machinists.

Simone de Beauvoir, who was founder of the contemporary feminist movement, objected to payments to housewives because then 'too many would make the choice to stay home'. However, unless government policy stops discrimination against mothers who stay with their babies, we will not be able to break the cycle of health disadvantage in which the poor are caught, and which, as Pamela Bone writes, may well be aggravated in the next 20 years.

*Babette Francis*  
12 Denham Place, Toorak



### Your notes

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## Economic development and conservation must coexist

Comments by Robert Haupt (*The Age*, 17/3) and, more recently, by Senator Peter Walsh claim that Australia must choose between economic development and environmental protection. Such views reveal a remarkable lack of understanding of the principles of sustainable development, despite the amount of discussion that has occurred over the past few years.

It should be clear by now to politicians and journalists of every persuasion that we cannot sustain continued development that destroys the basis of our life and well-being.

The Institution of Engineers, Australia, in its policy on sustainable development, states: 'Our long term survival and prosperity depend on integration of development and conservation ... Sustainable development is needed because

human ability to alter the environment has reached a stage where entire ecosystems have been needlessly destroyed, others threatened, and their well-being endangered by environmental damage'.

One merely has to look at the costs of cleaning up the thousands of sites contaminated with hazardous chemicals from past industrial activities, or consider the effort and expense involved in dealing with salinity and other soil degradation to recognise that our definition of costs and benefits of development proposals must be much broader than an industry's balance sheet.

A view of economic and environmental well-being as competing interests also totally ignores the economic benefits of reducing overseas borrowings for

new power stations by investing in energy efficiency, the benefits of lowering costs of production by recycling and minimising waste products, the economic benefits of using our timber for high value added products, instead of for woodchips, and the myriad of other opportunities that result from intelligently evaluating appropriate uses of resources.

It is critical now that we end the unproductive debates about economics versus environment and devote our energies to creative efforts to establish sustainable economic development in Australia.

*Deni Greene, Parkville  
Chairperson, Professional Engineers  
Panel on the environment,  
Victoria division,  
Institution of Engineers, Australia*

Describe the rejection:	Check the values:					
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## Australia's workers do not live in Utopia

The proposed improvements to long-service leave provisions recently announced by the Victorian Government have set off a flurry of claims that Australian workers already enjoy utopian working conditions. Some have even claimed that the benefits we enjoy are a joke overseas. The sad truth is that they are a joke; principally because we lag so far behind other countries.

Take maternity leave for example. Only the United States and New Zealand have worse maternity leave provisions than Australia.

Although women can take 52 weeks leave, which is longer than in most countries, it is unpaid leave. And despite the fact that maternity leave does not cost employers one

cent, many private employers still persist in sacking women who try to enforce their right to take leave.

Paid maternity leave is a reality in many countries. In Britain, women can take 40 weeks leave paid up to 90 per cent. In Italy, it is five months at 80 per cent. Norway provides 20 weeks fully paid.

Leave to care for a sick child, which does not exist in the private sector in Australia, is common in many other countries. Austrian parents can take one week a year fully paid to care for a child. In West Germany, Social Security pays for five days a year.

Annual leave loading is another area of controversy. Despite popular belief, leave loading is not something

unique to Australia. Our loading is modest compared to some countries. Belgian workers receive four weeks leave with 90 per cent loading. Swiss workers get five to seven weeks plus 12 per cent loading. French workers receive 30 per cent loading as do Dutch and Danish workers.

Perhaps in future when people make claims about working conditions in Australia, they should first make an effort to discover how workers in other countries are treated.

*John Halfpenny  
Carlton South  
Secretary of the Victorian  
Trades Hall Council*



### Your notes

Describe the rejection:	Check the values:					
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## Tired arguments for increased population

Keiran Ryan of the National Civic Council (1/8) trots out all the tired old assertions in trying to justify a huge increase in population for Australia. He compares our density levels with other countries and finds us low in comparison.

Has he no concept at all about carrying capacity, about the amount of arable land and water that humans need to survive? Does he not realise that our arable land is very small, that our soils are very old and thin and that our water supplies are irregular and poorly distributed?

Demographers will agree that our population is ageing but we have a distinctive age structure with relatively large numbers in the young

adult or child-bearing ages. Even without immigration and with the current level of below-replacement fertility, our population would still continue to grow until 2026, reaching nearly 20 million.

If ageing is a problem, it is one which is not a problem for 30 years or more. Immigration, of course, cannot significantly retard the ageing process.

Mr. Ryan uses the economies of scale argument to justify the need for a bigger population. This is one which has no basis in fact. What is needed to turn the economy around is investment in capital in export industries to deal with our current account problems. We cannot afford

to pour this money into infrastructure to cater to the needs of an ever-expanding population.

Refugees? Of course it is a massive and growing problem. But acceptance of refugees is not the only solution. We must use diplomatic efforts to stop the flow of political refugees and increase our foreign aid to avert environmental degradation which creates economic refugees. Who will stop refugees coming? Defence forces? Perhaps. We will decide as a nation.

Jenny Macleod  
Hackett (ACT)



### Your notes

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## Are violent and bloody scenes necessary on television news?

Recently I have noticed an apparent increase in the amount of explicitly violent scenes in television news reports. For example, the screening of the injuries sustained by the man who was shot in the face in a recent 'mistaken identity' police raid in New South Wales, was both graphic and disturbing.

While not doubting that this event itself constitutes news, is it necessary to show such violent scenes in television news, which is shown when many children are still awake and often watching television?

Film of bullet-ridden bodies in Beirut or crushed bodies in earthquake disasters, is, while relevant, seriously disturbing to many adult viewers, let alone children. Such frequent images of horrific events, which include graphic shots of bloody injuries or

corpses, make death seem commonplace and reduce the very real impact of these tragic occurrences.

Surely the persistency of such bloody reports is not only disturbing but also desensitises people to death and destruction.

The time of most news bulletins is 6 pm, the period when many families will be eating their evening meal and watching the news at the same time. Thus, children are exposed to the graphic reports which are so common in television news.

Although not advocating censorship, I would suggest that there should be two news bulletins: an early edition at 6 pm, in which scenes of graphic violence were absent but the reports informative, and a later bulletin, perhaps after 8 pm, containing the supposedly

'necessary' shots of violence and bloodshed. By screening two different news bulletins each night, the stations could show the obligatory 'blood and guts' stories, while families and children could see an informative edition with no overtly disturbing scenes.

While it is important to be informative, a news bulletin need not show scenes of violence to be comprehensive and convey the basic facts. If the television networks feel compelled to include disturbing images in their reports, then screening two different news bulletins may indeed provide a solution.

Fiona Anderson  
East Ivanhoe

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## Four-wheel drives damage national parks

Neville Lester, president of the Association of 4WD Clubs, quibbles unnecessarily over the percentage of roads recommended to remain open in the Alpine National Park (24/4). It is immaterial whether it is 72.6 per cent as he claims or 83 per cent as was stated by the Department of Conservation and the Environment. The fact remains that the major part of the park will remain open to four-wheel drive users.

Documented evidence shows the severe impact of four-wheel driving on the natural environment. This includes the introduction of exotic plant and animal species, soil erosion, impact on water quality of streams and bisection and disturbance of the habitat of native animals.

The accumulated effects of four-wheel driving are deleterious to the natural environment and are therefore in direct conflict with the primary objective of national parks

which is to preserve and protect the natural environment.

It is therefore entirely inappropriate for any interest group, including four-wheel drive users, to claim that they are being hard done by when the Government decides to close a very small number of roads and tracks in a move to maintain nature conservation as the priority of our national parks.

*Georgia Stewart  
Melbourne  
for The Wilderness Society*



### Your notes

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## USSR, China are not a true test of the Marxist theory

In the wake of the Beijing massacre and the turmoil in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the media commentators have been telling us that socialism is in ruins and Marxism discredited.

If the pundits were to go back to the key works of Marxist theory, they would find that Marx always saw the socialist revolution as arising in advanced capitalist societies, with highly developed economies and with literate, skilled workforces.

These conditions did not apply to the revolutions that occurred in the Tsarist empire and in China. Their economies were backward and had been further eroded by years of war, the working class was not highly educated and was always vastly outnumbered by the peasantry, the

small revolutionary vanguard was to suffer losses in years of civil war and famine.

What developed was not a socialist society but a system in which a privileged share of scarce goods and services became the spoils of the new 'communist' bureaucracy. Instead of withering away, the power of the state increased, with the economy, the armed forces, the militia, the secret police, the media and the education system being made to serve the interests of the new ruling class.

The system that arose was not socialism but state capitalism.

The same is true of all those smaller countries where 'socialist' systems arose from conditions similar to those

in Russia in 1917 and China in 1949, or were created in their own image by one or other of the 'socialist' superpowers.

State capitalism won some victories in building up heavy industry and producing weapons of war; it is now in collapse, not only because the people are demanding political freedom but also because it has been found wanting in supplying consumer needs and in producing technical innovation.

As for socialism; that is something the world has still to see.

Ken Coldicutt  
Box Hill



### Your notes

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## Sample Letters

### *Section 5*

# Letters grouped around traditions

## Many disabled have to use public transport

The Equal Opportunity Board handed down its decision and found that the introduction of the new Met ticketing system did indeed discriminate against people with disabilities.

The Disability Resources Centre quite clearly recognises that the issue is not yet over. While many argue about the dishonesty of some travellers who do not scratch their tickets, for many of us it's the fundamental 'right' to be able to have access to and be consulted on

proposed changes and initiatives in relation to public transport.

Many people with disabilities cannot drive and perhaps are low-income earners; public transport is the only option to be able to go wherever people want to. It is therefore vital to us that it is an efficient and indeed a quality service.

Yet quite foolishly, the Public Transport Corporation has neglected this very large consumer group. In so many ways we could be direct advocates and supporters for a public

transport system that addresses the issues of access.

Some people have attempted to profit from the situation by stating that we have agreed to 'special' concession tickets. Nothing could be closer from the truth - as we do not want to wear a label around our necks stating: 'I'm disabled'. Our right to be integrated into this society should be respected.

*Elina Dalziel*  
791 High Street, Thornbury  
for the Disability Resources Centre



### Your notes

Identify the tradition:	Check the values:				
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## Disappointment for female deacons

On Sunday a batch of male Anglican deacons will be priested at St Paul's Cathedral. Not so their female colleagues.

As deacons these folks can marry people, baptise people and if necessary, bury people. From next week only the males will have the additional authority to bless the sacrament etc.

What a crushing disappointment this must be for these women. Surely

it's time they received stronger secular support. Perhaps for example, their colleagues in the medical profession might refuse to treat any male person who opposes the ordination of women. After all, such an attitude almost implies that women are mentally and spiritually inferior.

In the meantime, spare a thought for the women deacons on Sunday.

*Struan Sutherland  
Brighton*



### Your notes

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# Fitting airbags to cars avoids the real cause of the road toll

The airbag approach to road safety is more like a bag of wind. Any call to fit airbags to motorcars, as advocated by visiting Professor Susan Baker (*The Age*, 30/3), is a smokescreen to the central issue of road trauma and road safety — human behaviour.

Will airbags save passengers, or pedestrians and cyclists run down by motor vehicles? Do we just fit airbags and let loose our high-risk teenagers to drive any way they wish?

Too many engineers, surgeons and politicians seem to have lost their way. Instead of tackling the problem at source they conjure up new and costly technological solutions. Have they given up on confronting the human user factor?

The present push for compulsory helmet wearing by bicycle users is just another example. Sure, helmets reduce head injuries, but the growing assumption is that, like a magical rabbit's foot around one's neck, it will keep one safe from all harm.

Meanwhile we have the merest tokenism by way of user education and training.

So it is with motor vehicle drivers also. Training and licensing of truck drivers might soon be upgraded but what is being done for other drivers?

Stop beating around the bush, stop the windbagging, and let's see some real political will to tackle our bankrupting road trauma, road transport and vehicle-associated environmental problems.

M. Ozer  
Ivanhoe

President of Bicycle Victoria



## Your notes

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## Australia's war role is being rewritten

The Government and media fanfare surrounding the 75th anniversary of the Gallipoli landing highlights the states' and media's rewriting of Australian history. If we believe the media hype surrounding the Gallipoli celebrations we could be forgiven for thinking that all Australians supported Australia's participation in the First World War.

Australia was a divided country during the First World War. A majority of Australians did not support Australia's involvement in World War I. Australians rejected conscription in two separate referendums during the First World War.

The Catholic Church, the trade union movement, women's groups,

as well as Industrial Workers of the World (a forerunner to today's Australian anarchist groups) were all united in their opposition to conscription and Australia's involvement in World War I.

Thousands of Australians owe their lives to the anti-conscription movement because without such a powerful people's movement their grandfathers and great-grandfathers would have been conscripted to fight and die in a war that was fought for money, trade and the benefit of local business and the European ruling classes. Millions of soldiers, including tens of thousands of Australians, died for the economic benefit of the world's ruling classes.

The tendency of the Australian Government and media to rewrite

Australian history to suit the present is not some new virus we have inherited from the Chinese Communist Party. This tendency to rewrite history is an integral component of Australian folklore that has its origins in the lie that the British colonised a vast uninhabited land, not that the Australian nation was built on the blood and bones of tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

*Joseph Toscano  
Malvern spokesman  
Anarchist Media Institute*



### Your notes

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## Australia's workers do not live in Utopia

The proposed improvements to long-service leave provisions recently announced by the Victorian Government have set off a flurry of claims that Australian workers already enjoy utopian working conditions. Some have even claimed that the benefits we enjoy are a joke overseas. The sad truth is that they are a joke; principally because we lag so far behind other countries.

Take maternity leave for example. Only the United States and New Zealand have worse maternity leave provisions than Australia.

Although women can take 52 weeks leave, which is longer than in most countries, it is unpaid leave. And despite the fact that maternity leave does not cost employers one

cent, many private employers still persist in sacking women who try to enforce their right to take leave.

Paid maternity leave is a reality in many countries. In Britain, women can take 40 weeks leave paid up to 90 per cent. In Italy, it is five months at 80 per cent. Norway provides 20 weeks fully paid.

Leave to care for a sick child, which does not exist in the private sector in Australia, is common in many other countries. Austrian parents can take one week a year fully paid to care for a child. In West Germany, Social Security pays for five days a year.

Annual leave loading is another area of controversy. Despite popular belief, leave loading is not something

unique to Australia. Our loading is modest compared to some countries. Belgian workers receive four weeks leave with 90 per cent loading. Swiss workers get five to seven weeks plus 12 per cent loading. French workers receive 30 per cent loading as do Dutch and Danish workers.

Perhaps in future when people make claims about working conditions in Australia, they should first make an effort to discover how workers in other countries are treated.

*John Halfpenny  
Carlton South  
Secretary*

*Victorian Trades Hall Council*



### Your notes

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## Employers must fight portable long-service

Industry is constantly fighting the demands of government and society for greater efficiency and it is now time that employers and employees stand up and fight the introduction of portable long-service leave as a deferred payment for simply working 15 years over some length of time.

Many employers will readily remind us of the value to their business of long-term employees that have developed a special level of knowledge and experience related

not just to their industry but its inter-relationships to the company.

Despite my abhorrence of the concept of removing this last vestige of reward and respect for long-service employees, it annoys me that the Government is simply creating a new tax levy and form to be filled out with the excuse of being a 'deferred payment right'.

Perhaps it is cynical to recount the promises on WorkCare levies which

both industry and the state will live to regret, let alone pay for in the years ahead.

Business needs to stand up and make a statement that lets the Government know we are tired of its supposedly self-funding levies that involve no added bureaucracy.

*Richard Holyman  
Windsor*

*President of the Small Business  
Association of Victoria*



### Your notes

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## Economic development and conservation must coexist

Comments by Robert Haupt (*The Age*, 17/3) and, more recently, by Senator Peter Walsh claim that Australia must choose between economic development and environmental protection. Such views reveal a remarkable lack of understanding of the principles of sustainable development, despite the amount of discussion that has occurred over the past few years.

It should be clear by now to politicians and journalists of every persuasion that we cannot sustain continued development that destroys the basis of our life and well-being.

The Institution of Engineers, Australia, in its policy on sustainable development, states: 'Our long term survival and prosperity depend on integration of development and conservation ... Sustainable development is needed because

human ability to alter the environment has reached a stage where entire ecosystems have been needlessly destroyed, others threatened, and their well-being endangered by environmental damage.'

One merely has to look at the costs of cleaning up the thousands of sites contaminated with hazardous chemicals from past industrial activities, or consider the effort and expense involved in dealing with salinity and other soil degradation to recognise that our definition of costs and benefits of development proposals must be much broader than an industry's balance sheet.

A view of economic and environmental well-being as competing interests also totally ignores the economic benefits of reducing overseas borrowings for

new power stations by investing in energy efficiency, the benefits of lowering costs of production by recycling and minimising waste products, the economic benefits of using our timber for high value added products, instead of for woodchips, and the myriad of other opportunities that result from intelligently evaluating appropriate uses of resources.

It is critical now that we end the unproductive debates about economics versus environment and devote our energies to creative efforts to establish sustainable economic development in Australia.

*Deni Greene, Parkville  
Chairperson  
Professional Engineers'  
Panel on the Environment  
Victoria division  
Institution of Engineers, Australia*



### Your notes

#### Identify the tradition:

**Which tradition can you place the writer in?**

*Tick a box*

- Conservatism
- Liberalism
- Socialism
- Scientific Management

**Write down some of the words or phrases which point to this tradition.**

#### Check the values:

**Which values does the writer appeal to as part of this tradition?**

*Tick one or more boxes*

- conserving our heritage
- freedom of individuals
- equality
- justice
- efficiency
- reducing pain or harm

**List the words & phrases which point to values.**

Negative wording

Positive wording

## Keep national record of everyone's fingerprints

I am saddened by the attitude of some people towards finger-printing. Fingerprinting is one of the few positive means of identification available to mankind, yet we, as a society, treat it as though it is a tool of the police used solely for the purposes of identification in criminal investigation.

Much recent publicity about fingerprinting leads us to believe it is a sinister act likely to have a detrimental effect on our society, with connotations of 'establishment' overseeing the activities of individuals.

I observe this sinister image is embellished by those with a vested interest such as civil libertarians and some within the legal profession. The real truth is, the act of fingerprinting is quick, simple, painless and it leaves no lasting physical or mental damage to the subject.

I argue that every individual in our society, in the best interests of society and when reaching a certain age or stage in life, should be fingerprinted and the prints recorded in the national computer.

We live in a world where major disasters, natural or mankind induced are commonplace. Identification of the victims of disasters are of paramount importance. In fact, on each occasion a death occurs, some form of identification of the deceased is undertaken before the body is finally laid to rest.

Fingerprints taken from an individual and resident in a national computer could only be reactivated by an identical set.

M. Wells



### Your notes

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## Scientific research used to exploit the environment

There are two debates going on in Australia at the moment, the environmental debate and the science funding debate. What seems to me not to have been emphasised enough is the close relationship between the two. The greenhouse effect, acid rain and the loss of our forests are all examples of environmental crises caused, basically, by the increasing speed with which we are using the Earth's finite natural resources to produce material wealth. The Government's current science funding policies, which are designed to make sure that most of the science carried out in Australia is done to serve industry, mean that scientific research is being used as a tool to increase that same material wealth and the environmental exploitation that goes with it.

Under the Government's policies, a much higher proportion of the sources of scientific research funding available in Australia requires a financial return. This means that more and more scientists, including myself, are being diverted from research designed to understand the world we live in and our place in it, to that designed more effectively and efficiently to exploit the Earth's resources for our material well being. Science aimed at creating a financial return must, I believe, almost always lead to increased exploitation. Even if research leads to more efficient production methods, in a free market this usually leads to a higher production rate and so an accelerated consumption of raw materials.

As a country we are increasingly using our energies, not to learn how

to live in ways that will sustain human life on earth, but how to speed our demise in return for short-term material wealth. The Government, by pursuing its current policies is, in effect, increasing the speed and effectiveness with which we will degrade and exploit our environment and its finite resources. Perhaps science should be used to help us learn how to live with less, rather than how to be able to possess more?

*Dr. A. M. Hodges  
14/88 Victoria Road  
Hawthorn East*



### Your notes

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## Return to old virtues

With couples urged to have safe sex by using condoms, if this was carried out to the ultimate conclusion there would be no more babies, no more maternity hospitals, no more baby health centres, no more schools and no more people.

As this scenario progresses there would be a glut of condoms on the market. They could then be given to

the animal libbers who could busy themselves fitting them to virile kangaroos and rabbits thus helping to alleviate another crisis.

Perhaps a better idea would be to return to the old fashioned virtue of no sex before marriage.

*F.L. Jones  
Mordialloc*



### Your notes

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## Conference outlook on surrogacy is one-sided

I have read your reports of the eighth annual conference on bioethics at St. Vincent's Hospital with interest. From these reports it seems the conference is expressing very one-sided opinions, especially about surrogate motherhood.

In 1988, I gave birth to my sister's child using IVF surrogacy. The surrogacy for me was a marvellous experience from which I have only gained. Contrary to Ms Marie Meggitt, of the Association of Relinquishing Mothers, I do not believe surrogacy to be dangerous,

anti-social, anti-family or damaging to women.

Certainly no woman should be forced to relinquish a child. No decision either way should be forced on her either. In my case, I willingly gestated a child who is my genetic niece. Her birth was a cause for celebration for all the family, especially my two children, her cousins.

I have no desire for a third child. I definitely don't want to live with another two-year-old!

The National Bioethics Committee recommended allowing surrogacy, with controls. This seems a more reasonable viewpoint.

I hope the bioethicists at the conference at St. Vincent's are hearing balanced arguments on other subjects; their outlook on surrogacy seems very one-sided.

Linda Kirkman  
Eaglehawk



### Your notes

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## USSR, China are not a true test of the Marxist theory

In the wake of the Beijing massacre and the turmoil in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the media commentators have been telling us that socialism is in ruins and Marxism discredited.

If the pundits were to go back to the key works of Marxist theory, they would find that Marx always saw the socialist revolution as arising in advanced capitalist societies, with highly developed economies and with literate, skilled workforces.

These conditions did not apply to the revolutions that occurred in the Tsarist empire and in China. Their economies were backward and had been further eroded by years of war, the working class was not highly educated and was always vastly outnumbered by the peasantry, the

small revolutionary vanguard was to suffer losses in years of civil war and famine.

What developed was not a socialist society but a system in which a privileged share of scarce goods and services became the spoils of the new 'communist' bureaucracy. Instead of withering away, the power of the state increased, with the economy, the armed forces, the militia, the secret police, the media and the education system being made to serve the interests of the new ruling class.

The system that arose was not socialism but state capitalism.

The same is true of all those smaller countries where 'socialist' systems arose from conditions similar to those in Russia in 1917 and China in 1949,

or were created in their own image by one or other of the 'socialist' superpowers.

State capitalism won some victories in building up heavy industry and producing weapons of war; it is now in collapse, not only because the people are demanding political freedom but also because it has been found wanting in supplying consumer needs and in producing technical innovation.

As for socialism; that is something the world has still to see.

*Ken Coldicutt  
Box Hill*



### Your notes

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## Overseas aid should still be an issue

It is disappointing to note that in this election campaign, with billions of dollars being talked about to lift our standard of living, no politician to my knowledge has suggested any increase in our overseas aid to the underprivileged countries. That surely is a reflection of our perceived level of concern.

I guess there are not too many votes in overseas aid. It is just possible that any suggested increase in it could even lose votes.

So much of the content of the election speeches has been designed to appeal to our self-interests, with a little bit of home charity thrown in to make us feel more comfortable about them.

It is sad that we in this lucky country, who basically have never had it so good, do not think more generously beyond our self-interests towards those who have never had it.

*Kenneth Clarke  
19 Marlborough Avenue,  
Camberwell*



### Your notes

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## Graves hold historic messages for living

With the current interest in the historic Melbourne General Cemetery, I feel that it is an appropriate time for some independent organisation to record the cultural and historic origins of our present society from the graves therein with the publication of an

accurate, illustrated guide available to the public.

It is virtually impossible for individuals or small societies to produce such a viable product that is urgently needed on such an interesting and educational subject.

*E.W. Collett  
Thornbury*



### Your notes

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## Four-wheel-drives help many to enjoy the bush

I wish to correct some items in the report Four-Wheel-Drive Clubs Reject Alpine Park Plan (*The Age*, 9/4).

There are no records of the number of 4WD vehicles in Victoria. The current estimate by the Victoria Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs is 80,000 vehicles. Of these it is estimated that 60 per cent are in commercial or rural use (e.g. plumbers and farmers). This means

there are about 30,000 vehicles for recreation use with the association membership at about 10,000.

Four-wheel-drive touring allows a wide range of people to enjoy the bush including small children, older and disabled people. Many children develop a lifetime interest in and respect for the bush from this early contact.

The statement that 85 per cent of the 2000 kilometres of tracks will be

available for four-wheel-driving is incorrect. The Government's four proposed management plans show that only 72.6 per cent of the total length of vehicle routes will be available for public access.

All user groups must continue to promote and encourage responsible behaviour on public lands.

*Neville Lester  
Melbourne*



### Your notes

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## Four-wheel drives damage national parks

Neville Lester, president of the Association of 4WD Clubs, quibbles unnecessarily over the percentage of roads recommended to remain open in the Alpine National Park (24/4). It is immaterial whether it is 72.6 per cent as he claims or 83 per cent as was stated by the Department of Conservation and the Environment. The fact remains that the major part of the park will remain open to four-wheel drive users.

Documented evidence shows the severe impact of four-wheel driving

on the natural environment. This includes the introduction of exotic plant and animal species, soil erosion, impact on water quality of streams and bisection and disturbance of the habitat of native animals.

The accumulated effects of four-wheel driving are deleterious to the natural environment and are therefore in direct conflict with the primary objective of national parks which is to preserve and protect the natural environment.

It is therefore entirely inappropriate for any interest group, including four-wheel drive users, to claim that they are being hard done by when the Government decides to close a very small number of roads and tracks in a move to maintain nature conservation as the priority of our national parks.

*Georgia Stewart  
Melbourne  
for The Wilderness Society*



### Your notes

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## It's not easy destroying weary train travellers

After another evening spent at Flinders Street watching herds of commuters surge from platform to platform in the hope of finding transport home, I am happy to announce that I have discovered the underlying philosophy of our train network.

The entire system is simply a gigantic Darwinian experiment. By creating a society which favours

aggressive individualists who drive to work over gregarious slow-moving commuters, the Met hopes to prove the survival of the fittest. Success of the experiment will be seen when the speedsters achieve a higher reproductive rate (they have more time, and are more in the mood when they get home from work) and our entire city takes the swift and smelly way to travel.

Though they cause their own extinction, railway unionists, officials and vandals alike will rejoice in knowing that they have finally destroyed the despised and weak train traveller. However, by changing this part of our ecosystem, they will also have altered the whole: polluting our weary Melburnian lungs and our sadly abused planet.

Andrew Tupper  
Rosanna



### Your notes

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## 'Spare parts' up for grabs

Organ transplants — what a minefield in our 'civilisation'. When emotions take over, logic flies straight out of the window.

So you die — become a corpse (that is, rubbish). Relatives are quite satisfied to choose one of two recognised methods of disposal.

Buried — to become compost like the vegetable peels and so on in the garden compost.

Cremated — like the garden rubbish in the old incinerator.

All very sensible but, let someone suggest that a small piece of offal be removed, for the good of mankind, before these processes and all hell breaks loose.

Too much for me. All my spare parts are up for grabs, except by the time I die they will probably not even have 'op-shop' value!

*Cecilia Clarke  
Mount Waverley*



### Your notes

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## Finding a better life in another country

The philosophy of multiculturalism is illogical. Obviously, it is based on the belief that your ethnic origin determines your culture.

For instance, if a multiculturalist hears you were born in Italy, he assumes you are automatically filled to the brim with Italian culture and itching to maintain and propagate that culture no matter what country you choose to go to.

In practice, it is unlikely that a migrant would fit this pattern. Almost by definition, a migrant is someone who is so discontented with his own

country that he wants to leave it permanently and believes he can find something better in some other country.

If you aren't convinced of that, then there's no point in migrating.

Multiculturalists talk as though the sole cause of the social changes in Australia since World War II was the migrant inflow. In fact, similar changes occurred throughout the Western world, and they would have happened in Australia even without immigration. Many factors were at work: increasing levels of formal

education; the growth of cities and the corresponding decline of the rural sector; permissiveness; increasing opportunities for leisure and travel — to name a few.

The country which has most influenced our culture is the USA (which has sent us comparatively few migrants), because its dominance of film and television has enabled it to propagate its values worldwide.

*Malcolm Brandon  
Hawker, ACT*



### Your notes

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## Shepherds would hang their heads in shame

Dr Peter McDonald's 'new study' of Australian families (*The Age*, 31/5) for the Australian Institute of Family Studies spotlights those 'relationships' (what a tired old word!) that do not involve living together. Dr. McDonald points to the 'relationship' that exists between Woody Allen and Mia Farrow by way of example.

Dr. McDonald then proceeds to list a mishmash of other so-called relationships which he forecasts will

all be part of the '1990s story'. 'Sexual relationships' with 'a more or less' regular partner without 'actually living together', rather begs the question in a society which still regards itself as basically Christian.

Surely, then, if Dr. McDonald is even close to the mark with his amoral scenario, something must be done?

What have the leaders of the Christian churches got to say? Or

have they relinquished the moral task in toto?

Our once stable and morally healthy society has slipped so far down the Gaderene slope as to be unrecognisable, a fact that should rightly move the shepherds to hang their heads in shame.

How about the 'Good News', gentlemen? Or must we look to Woody Allen and Mia Farrow for guidance?

Thomas A. Watkin  
Burwood



### Your notes

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## Children have a right to respect as well

I am writing because I am concerned about the general public's increasing disrespect for school children on the public transport system. The travelling public seems to think that they have the right to order young people around, forcing them to compromise their situation, while they provide no leeway themselves.

It is incorrect for people to expect students to give up their seats so that they may read the paper on their way to work. If they wish to sit down on public transport, they should politely ask a young member of the public or a student if they may have the use of the seat. They should not order them to get up, as they do more often than not.

Overweight people seem to think that they have more right to sit down, but these people are not disabled or elderly.

School bags do often get in the way. The ignorant, selfish commuter walks over them, crushing everything inside and then wonders why his own bag gets kicked around. It would not hurt to ask that they be moved, but the level of common sense that these people have is minimal. Piling bags up is no answer — the contents still get damaged.

Students travel on concession, but this is because they have no income. There are many people with an income who still travel at half price, and many others who evade fares.

The concession rate should have no bearing on who is able to sit or stand. Aged pensioners travel on concession. They are given a seat on almost every form of transport. They are the ones who need the seat, not the arrogant desk-jockey who sits down all day.

Many of the general public have very low respect for students. Unfortunately, both of these groups of travellers have to use the same forms of transport but, if a bit more respect was given by both parties, life could become a little easier.

*Sheldon Davis  
Glen Iris (Aged 17 years)*



### Your notes

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## Unrestricted hours will close small shops

I usually agree with Claude Forell and his liberal approach to our institutions. However, I differ on the issue of shop trading hours (13/6).

While it sounds in the spirit of free enterprise and liberalism to allow unrestricted hours, the consequences need thinking through.

Unrestricted hours favour the large business; the small High Street shop, family run, cannot afford to pay

additional casual Libra, and faces the choice of overwork or losing business.

The effects can be seen in the United States where hours are unrestricted. One can do the grocery shopping at the supermarket at 4 am on Sunday morning if that is one's wish — but there are no small shops, no greengrocers, no newsagents, no milkbars selling a variety of items.

For the simplest purchase, a litre of milk, a packet of cheese, a magazine, a few bananas, one must drive to a supermarket (usually of a nationwide chain), park in the hectares of carpark, and seek one's object in a huge barn. I do not relish the prospect of such a development here.

Don Linforth  
Hampton



### Your notes

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## Whatever happened to old-fashioned love?

Married couples experiencing serious difficulties tend to wait until it's 'too late' before seeking professional counselling, according to Dr. Warwick Hartin, national director of the National Marriage Guidance Council of Australia (*Tempo*, 13/6).

Furthermore, when a marriage is dead for 'one partner' there is no going back because: 'You cannot resurrect the dead,' Dr Hartin observes.

'Today people marry for companionship and emotional gratification,' Dr Hartin points out, and marriage is more 'self-centred'. People are in it 'for what they can get out of it'.

Not a very pretty picture, very gloomy indeed. Grim.

Whatever happened to old-fashioned love, 'the kind that would last through the years'? Could it be that those old-fashioned 'husbands' and 'wives' knew something that the modern, well-counselled, 'partners' in trendy 'relationships' do not know?

Could it be that the 'partners' in a modern relationship are not even fully aware that they suffer from a severe 'disease' of the psyche, namely selfishness.

And perhaps the wisdom of *The Age* has something to offer the professional marriage guidance counsellors as well as those couples

contemplating marriage so that they can get off to a right-thinking start in marriage?

It's called the 'Good News'; which embraces a certain amount of sacrifice and altruism.

Such a course of action might 'resurrect' a few positive thought currents which could assist counsellors who, like most of us, can all do with a little guidance from time to time.

Surely, it's worth a try. It might turn out to be a winner in that, what is needed all around is not 'more funds' but more faith.

Thomas A. Watkin  
Burwood



### Your notes

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## More Melbourne families are being forced to sleep in cars

Spare a thought for the many desperate lone parents in Melbourne who, with their children, are sleeping out night after night in their cars because they just can't afford to pay rent. Imagine just how cold that is on a winter night, and how bleak the future must seem for such families.

The Mission of St. James and St. John is seeing an increasing number of families who are living out of the back of their cars — as, no doubt, are other welfare agencies. We strongly commend the Brotherhood of St Laurence for highlighting the rent crisis (*The Age*, 18/6) which is causing such hardship to families.

People can cope with only so much pressure before they break. Not being able to put a roof over your child's head is an enormous psychological pressure.

In our experience many family breakdowns are caused not because people are bad parents but because they simply cannot cope with unemployment and the lack of affordable accommodation. This is particularly the case with lone parents, including single fathers.

The result is that children may end up in foster care, with emotional scars that they may bear for life, and may visit in turn on their own children.

It is in Australia's interest to prevent this cycle of family misery by dealing with the root causes. People don't want charity, they want life choices — the chance of a job, a home, an education, a future for their children.

*Kerry Boland*  
West Melbourne  
Deputy Executive Director,  
Mission of St. James and St. John



### Your notes

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## Paintball opponents attack our freedom

A dangerous suggestion underlies the article by Suzy Freeman-Greene on the paintball controversy (*The Age*, 22/6). It is expressed in her remark that 'a large part of the community ... do not want [people to play war games]'.

So what! Since when do we stop consenting adults from playing

games, or carrying on any sort of activity that does not harm anyone else, just because most of the population does not approve or finds it distasteful?

What about our belief in the value of different strokes for different folks?

The obstructionism of the Avoca Shire Council at the behest of some intolerant wowers is an attack on one of our basic freedoms and should not be allowed to succeed.

*Peter J. Keenan  
Sandringham*



### Your notes

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## Are violent and bloody scenes necessary on television news?

Recently I have noticed an apparent increase in the amount of explicitly violent scenes in television news reports. For example, the screening of the injuries sustained by the man who was shot in the face in a recent 'mistaken identity' police raid in New South Wales, was both graphic and disturbing.

While not doubting that this event itself constitutes news, is it necessary to show such violent scenes in television news, which is shown when many children are still awake and often watching television?

Film of bullet-ridden bodies in Beirut or crushed bodies in earthquake disasters, is, while relevant, seriously disturbing to many adult viewers, let alone children. Such frequent images of horrific events, which include graphic shots of bloody injuries or

corpses, make death seem commonplace and reduce the very real impact of these tragic occurrences.

Surely the persistency of such bloody reports is not only disturbing but also desensitises people to death and destruction.

The time of most news bulletins is 6 pm, the period when many families will be eating their evening meal and watching the news at the same time. Thus, children are exposed to the graphic reports which are so common in television news.

Although I am not advocating censorship, I would suggest that there should be two news bulletins: an early edition at 6 pm, in which scenes of graphic violence were absent but the reports informative, and a later bulletin, perhaps after 8 pm, containing all of the supposedly

'necessary' shots of violence and bloodshed. By screening two different news bulletins each night, the stations could show the obligatory 'blood and guts' stories, while families and children could see an informative edition with no overtly disturbing scenes.

While it is important to be informative, a news bulletin need not show scenes of violence to be comprehensive and convey the basic facts. If the television networks feel compelled to include disturbing images in their reports, then screening two different news bulletins may indeed provide a solution.

Fiona Anderson  
East Ivanhoe



### Your notes

#### Identify the tradition:

Which tradition can you place the writer in?

Tick a box

- Conservatism
- Liberalism
- Socialism
- Scientific Management

Write down some of the words or phrases which point to this tradition.

#### Check the values:

Which values does the writer appeal to as part of this tradition?

Tick one or more boxes

- conserving our heritage
- freedom of individuals
- equality
- justice
- efficiency
- reducing pain or harm

List the words & phrases which point to values.

Negative wording

Positive wording

## Compulsory helmets have not made roads safer for cyclists

Mr. Cain probably thinks that he has made Victoria safe for cyclists after the introduction of compulsory helmets.

But cyclists know that despite the piece of foam on their heads, nothing has changed at all. It still takes nerves of steel to ride on Victoria's roads knowing that one driver in 10 will speed past within two feet of you, one in 100 will pull out in front of you or cut you off, one in 1000 will drive past with horn blaring, one in 10,000 will give you verbal abuse or assault you, one in 100,000 will run into you, causing serious injury, and one in 1,000,000 will collide with you, killing you.

Many drivers have assumed a proprietary right over Victoria's

roadways. Many cannot bring themselves to change lanes, even on four-laned Dandenong Road, when overtaking a cyclist.

Ignorant are those who do not realise that riding two abreast is much safer than riding alone, for it forces drivers to change lanes instead of clinging to lanes occupied by cyclists and squeezing past within a few inches of their lives.

Compulsory helmets have done nothing to convince cyclists that they will not be mown down by some idiot changing lanes without looking. It does nothing to cure the ignorance and recklessness exhibited by a variety of road-users, and never will it reduce the frequency of transport accidents and other incidents.

By introducing compulsory helmets the Government admits that it has failed to ensure an adequate level of road-user education. It admits that it has failed to protect cyclists' right to be on the road. It admits that it has allowed Victoria to become the first state in Australia, and possibly the world, where it is too dangerous for cyclists to share the roads with other road users.

When will this Government stop jumping at short-term answers to problems instead of having the guts to tackle their underlying causes?

*Sean Hardy  
Murrumbidgee*



### Your notes

Identify the tradition:

**Which tradition can you place the writer in?**

*Tick a box*

- Conservatism
- Liberalism
- Socialism
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**List the words & phrases which point to values.**

Negative wording

Positive wording

## Tired arguments for increased population

Keiran Ryan of the National Civic Council (1/8) trots out all the tired old assertions in trying to justify a huge increase in population for Australia. He compares our density levels with other countries and finds us low in comparison.

Has he no concept at all about carrying capacity, about the amount of arable land and water that humans need to survive? Does he not realise that our arable land is very small, that our soils are very old and thin and that our water supplies are irregular and poorly distributed?

Demographers will agree that our population is ageing but we have a distinctive age structure with relatively large numbers in the young

adult or child-bearing ages. Even without immigration and with the current level of below-replacement fertility, our population would still continue to grow until 2026, reaching nearly 20 million.

If ageing is a problem, it is one which is not a problem for 30 years or more. Immigration, of course, cannot significantly retard the ageing process.

Mr. Ryan uses the economies of scale argument to justify the need for a bigger population. This is one which has no basis in fact. What is needed to turn the economy around is investment in capital in export industries to deal with our current account problems. We cannot afford

to pour this money into infrastructure to cater to the needs of an ever-expanding population.

Refugees? Of course it is a massive and growing problem. But acceptance of refugees is not the only solution. We must use diplomatic efforts to stop the flow of political refugees and increase our foreign aid to avert environmental degradation which creates economic refugees. Who will stop refugees coming? Defence forces? Perhaps. We will decide as a nation.

*Jenny Macleod  
Hackett (ACT)*



### Your notes

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## Public telephones are disappearing

I have noticed, over the past two weeks or so, a reduction in the number of public telephone boxes.

It is interesting that these public amenities should disappear without consultation with residents served by that box, prior to privatisation of the system and while Telecom is advertising that 9 out of 10 public phones are working.

It has been argued that privatisation of phone services will lead to a cessation of non-profitable services.

Is that why the boxes are disappearing? Or is it setting the scene for alternative service providers?

Either way, the decrease in the number of public phone utilities is a step backwards — disadvantaging those unable to afford a phone and those who need emergency access to phone services.

David Greene  
Clifton Hill



### Your notes

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