

# A writing and notetaking strategy

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This article describes how analysing an advertisement can be a striking and effective way of helping learners develop a useful strategy for dealing with written text, particularly for learners preparing for academic tertiary institutions. The advantage of an advertisement is that it provides a short text with the emphasis on communication of a few important ideas.

First the learners need to be introduced to the four criteria for classification — form, position, function and meaning. This can be done in the following way. The learners are asked to count how many different type-faces there are in the following tasteful gift advertisement or one like it.

If it is appropriate, vocabulary like *lower case*, *upper case*, *italic*, *bold* can be introduced here, but it is not essential. When the learners have decided on the number of different type-faces, an example of each is listed in a column on the blackboard. Next to each example, the form is briefly described. The tasteful gift advertisement contains six different forms.

After the form of each type-face is described, the learners move on to look at the position of each different form. Is it first, is it second, is it before a paragraph, is it in the middle of the page or to the side? The results of this analysis are discussed and listed in the third column. Then the function of each different form is examined. Is it a heading, is it an answer to a question, is it designed to attract? Finally the meaning of each form is looked at. In advertisements there is often a deliberate play on words which results in a more complex set of relationships. *Tasteful* in a *tasteful gift* is an example of this.

## A tasteful gift for North American friends.

• New Zealand Spring Lamb •

**Delivered in time for Thanksgiving or Christmas.**

Use the order form to give friends, family or business contacts in the United States a unique New Zealand present — our finest export lamb.

And what a gift!  
Choice cuts of prime New Zealand lamb, specially tenderised then carefully freezer-wrapped and personally delivered anywhere in the United States. The recipient gets prior notice of arrival.

**Flavour Packed**  
Your gift of New Zealand Spring Lamb arrives specially packed in dry ice in a reusable styrene container. This package is further protected by an



overwrapping of plastic film.  
**Quality Guaranteed**  
DEVCO guarantees your gift of New Zealand Spring Lamb will arrive in perfect condition.

**Free Recipe Booklet**  
To help your friends taste New Zealand lamb at its best, a comprehensive lamb cooking guide is enclosed with each pack, with the compliments of DEVCO.

ORDER  
HERE!

Deliver each pack  
One 10 1/2 to 4 lb. boned leg  
of lamb.  
Two 12 1/2 lb. boned legs of lamb  
Eggs are 100g each  
Lamb chops

Price per pack \$2295.00

Number of packs ordered \_\_\_\_\_

Total amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Payment mode accompanying order \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone No \_\_\_\_\_

Name of recipient \_\_\_\_\_ Message to go with pack \_\_\_\_\_

Deliverers address (street address must be stated) \_\_\_\_\_

Form to DEVCO, P.O. Box 2799, Wellington Telephone 724-2711

Allow 3 weeks for delivery

DEVCO

DEVCO is the trade name of The Meat Export Development Company.  
Wholesalers of New Zealand Lamb in North America.

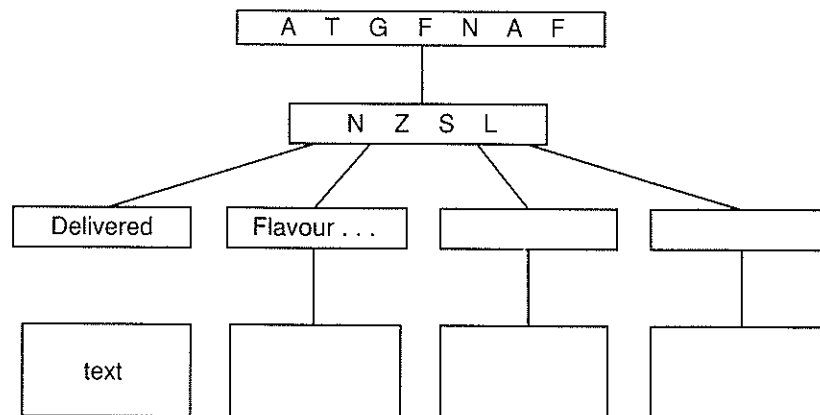
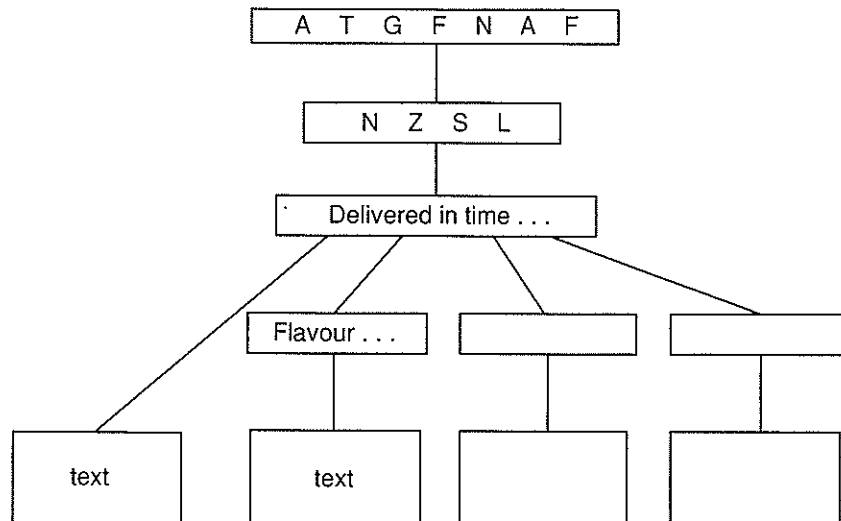
H2 NZ LISTENER, NOVEMBER 10, 1984

Here is the completed chart which the teacher and learners work together to build up on the board.

	Example	Form	Position	Function	Meaning
1	A tasteful gift	large, bold, with a full stop	centred, at the top	to catch the reader's attention, to raise a question	a thoughtful and nice tasting gift
2	NZ spring lamb	large italics, capitals for each word	centred, second	to answer the question	
3	Delivered in time	medium bold, with a full stop	left justified, third and above text	to elaborate the answer to the question, to act as a heading for the following text?	
4	Use the order form	normal text	left justified, under a heading	to provide details	
5	Flavour Packed	capitals for each word	left justified, capitals for each word	to act as a heading, to highlight main points	
6	Devco	capitals	in the text	to make the name stand out	the name of the company

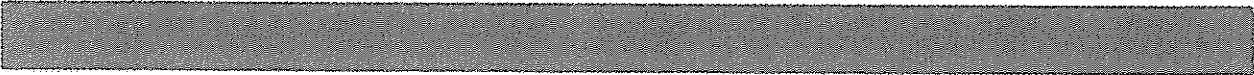
The most difficult distinction to make in the tasteful gift advertisement is between 3 and 5 on the chart, *Delivered in time . . .* and *Flavour Packed* and it is worth letting the learners argue and justify their decision. In fact *Delivered in time . . .* is slightly larger type, has a full stop, and does not have a word beginning with a capital. This difference in form corresponds to a difference in function. *Delivered in time . . .* functions as the third in the series of main headings but perhaps also functions like *Flavour Packed* in acting as a heading for the following text. The learners should look at the meaning of the text after *Delivered in time . . .* to decide if it really is functioning as a heading.

When all the four criteria for classification have been applied, the learners are told to use the following strategy: *Make a tree diagram of the text so that items with a similar form, position and function are on the same level.* This task is often more difficult than it seems. There are two possible diagrams for the tasteful gift advertisement because learners have to make a decision about the function of *Delivered in time . . .*



The important principle to learn from this analysis is that items with a similar form and position are likely to have a similar function. Or expressed in a different way, a change in form indicates a change in position and function. This pervasive principle is important because it applies to many aspects of language use. An awareness of it will help understand the function of grammatical forms. For example, a change in form from past to present tense in a text indicates a change of function, for example from description to generalization (Selinker, Trimble and Trimble, 1976). It can also help learners to understand the changes in form of spoken language such as lowered pitch and increased speed to signal asides and examples.

When diagrams are made of professional articles from journals or chapters of textbooks, they provide an excellent notetaking overview and basis for a summary, and they also bring home to the learners how they can use form, position, function, and meaning as signals to the reader of how their text is organized. Unfortunately, it also brings home to them how poorly the organization of some texts is signalled to the reader.



Once learners have mastered the principle and the organizational strategy it gives rise to, they can assess their own use of headings and subheadings in assignments and project work. Some fun with an advertisement can provide the basis for a principled approach to academic writing.

## Reference

Selinker, L. and L. Trimble (1976) 'Scientific and technical writing: the choice of tense'. In: *English Teaching Forum*, 14:4: 22–26.

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