Supplementary Notes on Features of Different Genres

The structural and linguistic features of the types of writing introduced in Worksheet One are defined and summarized as follows. Please note that this document is just a guide to some typical and common features and is not meant to be an exhaustive list. These features may also vary in different communicative contexts.

I. Personal Letter

A letter is 'a missive communication in writing, addressed to a person or body of persons; an epistle' (From *Oxford English Dictionary OED online*. URL: www.oed.com). Typical informal contexts are writing to family members, relatives and friends, and love letters.

Structure of a Personal Letter
1. **Date** – This is the date when the letter is written
2. **Salutation and Name of Recipient** – The greeting usually starts with the word 'Dear' followed by the given name of the recipient or relationship and it ends with a comma. Two examples are shown: 'Dear Ronald,' 'Dear Uncle,'.
3. **Introduction** – This is the opening of a letter. It may include greetings like 'How are you?'. Sometimes, you may refer to a previous letter.
4. **Body** – This is the main part of the letter. It includes the message that the writer wants to tell the recipient. It is often divided into paragraphs.
5. **Closure** – This part indicates the letter is going to end. The writer may ask the recipient to reply here.
6. **Complimentary Close** – This short expression includes a few words on one line. It ends with a comma. Some examples are shown below.
    'Yours sincerely,' 'Best regards,' 'Love,'
7. **Signature** – the signature of the writer

Language Use in a Personal Letter
1. **Sentence Structure** – Accuracy of grammar may be more important than an email. Most of the time, complete sentences are expected.
2. **Style** – Language use may be personal. For example, first and second person pronouns may be frequently used. May not be as formal as official letter writing. Depending on the relationship between the writer and the recipient, a personal letter may sound formal.

📖 See **Text A** for a sample personal letter. The teacher may go through this letter with students, guiding them through the structure of the letter.

II. Diary

A diary is 'a daily record of events or transactions, a journal; specifically, a daily record of matters affecting the writer personally, or which come under his personal observation' (From *Oxford English Dictionary OED online*. URL: www.oed.com).

Structure of a Diary
1. **Date & Day of the Week** – This is the date when the diary is written.
2. **Weather** – This is the weather of the day when the diary is written.
3. **Body** – This is the main part of the diary. It usually records what the author has done during the day. It is often developed into paragraphs and the length may vary.

Language Use in a Diary
1. **Sentence structure** – Brief, short and often fragmented: 'Went to church today. Had dinner with friends….'.
2. **Formality and Accuracy** – *Informal*. Accuracy may not be very important for a diary
3. **Style** – Highly *personal*. For example, the first person singular pronoun 'I' may be frequently used.

 See **Text C** for a sample diary. Teachers should, however, note that students in Hong Kong may not be used to the practice of diary writing. In recent years, *weblog*, a public online journal, which is similar to diary in nature, has become very popular among the youth. (see, for instance: http://www.xanga.com/). Ask your students to share their experience.

III. Email

An email/electronic mail is 'the sending of non-spoken information between individuals over a telecommunication network to a selected location or locations where it is stored for subsequent retrieval in a computer; information sent in this way' (From *Oxford English Dictionary OED online*. URL: www.oed.com).

Structure of an Email

The format of an email may be ***very similar to that of an informal letter***. However, certain necessary parts of an informal letter may become optional, e.g. introduction, closure and complimentary close. Necessary parts in an email are shown below:

1. **Greetings and Name of Recipient(s)** – e.g. 'Hi, Sam,' or 'Dear Sam,'
2. **Body** – This is the main body of the letter. It includes the message that the writer wants to tell the recipient. It is often developed into paragraphs or short points.
3. **Name of the Sender**
4. **Signature** – this part usually includes detailed contact information of the sender

Language Use in an Email

Language use in an email may greatly vary depending on different contexts, the subject matter and even the participants. In formal contexts like job applications, language may be more formal and similar to that of formal letters. In personal contexts like chatting between friends, language use may tend to be less formal.

1. **Sentence structure** – Varied structures, but often close to a personal letter. May contain fragmented sentences, depending on the formality of the communication.
2. **Formality and accuracy** – Formal grammar and spelling may be followed, but not necessary in interpersonal communication among friends.
3. **Punctuations** – Punctuations are sometimes used in an idiosyncratic and unconventional way.
4. **Style** – Shorthand, acronyms, abbreviations, colloquialisms, etc. are quite common.

 See **Text H** for a sample email (informal and personal). Study the features of the language with your students. Get your students to tell you their personal practices in writing emails.

 The following articles may give you ideas as to how email writing can be incorporated into the teaching of English:

Li, Lan. (2000). Email: A Challenge to Standard English? *English Today 64.* 16 (4): 23-29.

Li, Yili. (2000). Linguistic characteristics of ESL writing in task-based e-mail activities. *System* 28: 229-245.

IV. Interview Transcript

In this set of material, an interview refers to 'A meeting between a representative of the press and some one from whom he seeks to obtain statements for publication' (From *Oxford English Dictionary OED online*. URL: www.oed.com).

Structure of an Interview

The structure of an interview is similar to a ***dialogue*** in the sense that participants both ***take turns*** and contribute in the whole process. However, participants in an interview normally take a clear role, either as an interviewer asking ***questions*** or an interviewee giving ***answers***. The interviewer may occasionally give responses to the interviewee's answer. These roles, in normal circumstances, do not change throughout the whole process. Here is the typical structure of an interview:

1. **Introduction** – The interviewer will usually introduce himself and also the topic.
2. **Body** – These will involve a series of turn-taking, usually in the form of question-an-answer, i.e. the interviewer asks questions and the interviewee gives answers. One person speaks at a time.
3. **Closure** – This indicates the interview is going to end. Normally, the interviewer will show this by saying 'That's all for my questions' and 'Thank you'.

Language Use in an Interview

1. **Sentence structure** – Language use tends to be brief and short, as interviews are usually conducted orally. A large number of questions can also be found.
2. **Formality and accuracy** – *Formal* grammar is usually followed.
3. **Style** – The style of the interviewer normally tends to be objective and neutral while that of the interviewee(s) may vary depending on the context, subject matter and personal factor.

📖 See **Text D** for the transcript of an interview. You may also use this text to teach your students the differences between reported speech and direct speech.

V. Recipe

A recipe is "a statement of the ingredients and procedure necessary for the making or compounding of some preparation, esp. of a dish in cookery" (From *Oxford English Dictionary OED online.* URL: www.oed.com).

Structure of a Recipe

1. **Title** – The name of the dish
2. **Serving size** – The number of people the dishes can serve.
3. **Ingredients** – The materials needed for the cooking of the dishes.
4. **Amount of ingredients** – The quantity of materials needed for the cooking of the dishes.
5. **Preparation method** – The procedures/instructions given for the cooking of the dishes.
6. **Preparation time** – The amount of time needed for the cooking of the dishes.

Language Features of a Recipe

1. **Sentence structure** – Brief and short. Point forms are normally used.
2. **Verb form** – Imperative: 'Add sugar', 'Mix all the ingredients'…etc.
3. **Vocabulary** – high degree of 'cooking' jargon, e.g. cooking methods (fry, stir fry, steam, stew, bake, grill), names of cooking ingredients (sugar, flour), terms for measurement (gram, oz, teaspoon).

 See **Text E** for a sample recipe.

VI. Story

"A narrative of real or, more usually, fictitious events, designed for the entertainment of the hearer or reader; a series of traditional or imaginary incidents forming the matter of such a narrative" (From *Oxford English Dictionary OED online*. URL: www.oed.com).

Structure of a Story
1. **Plot** – This is what a story is about. It is usually consisted of a beginning, a climax, and an end. Some stories may even end up in the same place they begin.
2. **Climax** – This is the most important moment/development of a story that readers usually have the strongest feeling and impressions.
3. **Characters** – There are usually two types of characters in a story i.e. leading characters (protagonists) and subsidiary characters. Not only can a character be a person, it can also be an animal or even a thing.
4. **Space & Scene** – These are about the time and setting that a story takes place.

Language Features in a Story
1. **Narration** – A story can be written in first person narration or third person narration. For the former one, the character will use the first person pronoun *I* when talking about himself/herself and the story will sound more personal, subjective and yet vivid at large. The readers and the characters will share a more close and intimate relation since the readers are able to "see thought" what the character is thinking. Dialogues in direct quotation are used more often. As for third person narration, a story is reported from an outsider's point of view and hence, it will sound relatively more objective, but readers will not have a sense of involvement into the story as strong as in first person narration.
2. **Tense**: The narration is often written in *past tense*.

VII. ICQ Messaging

"As the name implies, ICQ or 'I Seek You' is simply a way of getting in touch with people and friends. ICQ makes it easy to find people with similar interests across the globe, to establish new friendships, to communicate with colleagues, family members and friends no matter when or where they are. And once friendships and connections have been established you just need to go online to get in contact without the geographic and time related limitations of the offline world." (From *What is ICQ?*. URL: http://www.icq.com/products/whatisicq.html). To put it in simple terms, ICQ history is a record which contains all the messages sent to or received from conversational partners/friends online via the program ICQ.

Structure of an ICQ Message Exchange

1. **Incoming messages** – Messages a person receives.
2. **Outgoing messages** – Messages a person sends.
3. **Type of message** – Messages can be in a form of text, web page address (URL), greeting cards, mails, a request for ICQ chat/phone, etc.
4. **Date and time** – A specific moment that a message being sent or received.

Language Features in ICQ Exchanges

1. **Sentence structure** - Brief and short expressions, often incomplete one-liners.
2. **Formality and accuracy -** Formal grammar and spelling are largely neglected, as long as the participants can understand the messages.
3. **Punctuations -** Punctuations are used in an idiosyncratic and unconventional way.
4. **Style -** Full of shorthand, acronyms, abbreviations, colloquialisms, etc.

 See **Text G** for a sample exchange of ICQ massages.

 Here are some useful references on the linguistic features of ICQ messaging in Hong Kong. James (2001) even gives suggestions as to how one can use ICQ texts in teaching English.

James, G. (2001). Cantonese particles in Hong Kong students' English emails. *English Today* 17: 9-16.

Lee, Carmen K. M. (2002b) Literacy practices in computer-mediated communication in Hong Kong. *Reading Matrix*. 2(2). URL: http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/lee/article.pdf

VIII. Newspaper Article

A newspaper article is an article reporting news (From *WordNet*. URL: http://wordnet.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn).

Structure of a Newspaper Article
1. **Headline** – A catchy statement about a particular event/issue.
2. **Name of the reporter** – It indicates who is responsible for the reporting of the news.
3. **Main body**
   - A brief summary: The newspaper article usually starts with a short paragraph which summarizes the whole event/issue.
   - Main body: Discussion parts with subheadings in each section.

Language Use in a Newspaper Article:
1. **Structure and formality** – Sentence structure and use of vocabulary are of formal style. Short paragraphs. Usually contains quotations (e.g. of an interview).
2. **Style** – Impersonal.

📖 See **Text F** for a sample newspaper article.