



Literacy Secretariat

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Nominal Groups



Imagine you wanted to describe this boat. What options do you have to express this?



Adding information — loosely

I went to the marina yesterday
and saw a great boat, really sleek.

It was a ski boat.

I think it was fiberglass.

She was bright yellow
and I bet with that outboard
she goes like the wind.

This information is added in little 'bites', usually by adding new clauses or small groups of words.

This is typical of texts on the left side of the register continuum.

Packing information in tightly

I want **that boat**.

What if we wanted to add almost all that information in a more confined space?

I want **that ski boat**.

This information is added by expanding a nominal group, not by adding clauses.

I want **that outboard ski boat**.

This is typical of written language.

I want **that fiberglass outboard ski boat**.

I want **that yellow fiberglass outboard ski boat**.

I want **that sleek, yellow fiberglass outboard ski boat**.

I want **that sleek, yellow fiberglass outboard ski boat that goes like the wind**.

What is a nominal group?

A nominal group is centred around a noun.

There might be words that do something to the noun before it

noun

There might be words that do something to the noun after it



Everything in the rectangle belongs to the nominal group

What are the patterns in the nominal group?

These words answer:

What kind of boat is it?

I want that boat.

I want that **ski** boat.

I want that **outboard ski** boat.

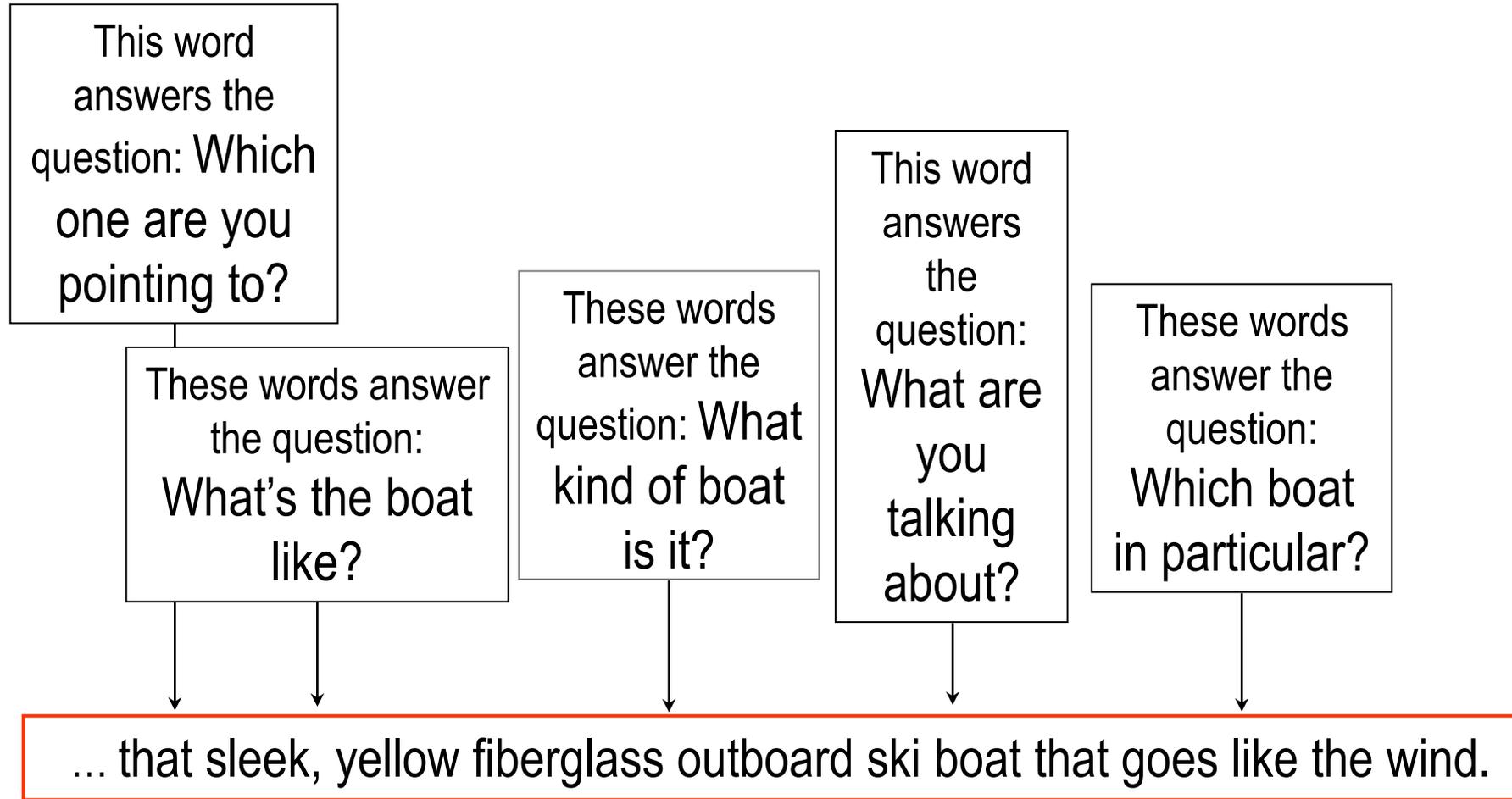
I want that **fiberglass outboard ski** boat.

I want that **yellow** fiberglass outboard ski boat.

I want that **sleek, yellow** fiberglass outboard
ski boat.

These words answer: What is the car like?

What functions do all the subgroups have?



What does this picture show?

This picture shows ...



How many are there?

What do they look like?

What kind are they?

What are we talking about?

Which ones in particular?

... two spacious double-storey timber beach houses on the dune.

How many are there?

What are they like?

What kind are they

What are we talking about?

Which ones in particular?



They cost \$6.99.

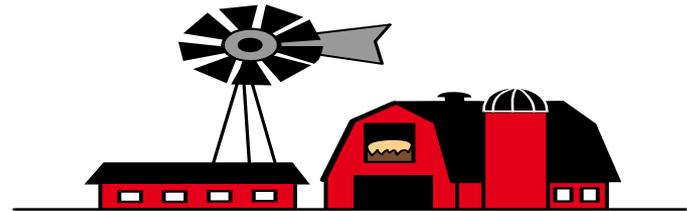
What cost \$6.99?

A pair of cool, new replica MIB sunglasses as worn in the film ... cost \$6.99.

These functional questions can be given functional labels

Which one are we pointing to?	How much / many?	What is it like?	What kind is it?	What are we talking about?	Which one in particular?
Pointer	Numerative	Describer(s)	Classifier(s)	Thing	Qualifier(s)
that		sleek, yellow	fiberglass outboard ski	boat	that goes like the wind
	a pair of	cool, new	replica MIB	sun glasses	as worn in the film
	two	spacious	two-storey timber beach	houses	on the dune

Write a noun group about each of the two images on this slide. Try to include a describer, classifier and **qualifier**.



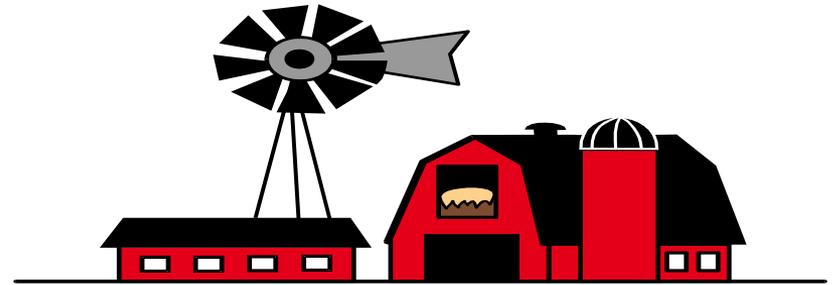
Some possible answers

- red cotton flag on the mast
- fast racing yacht with full sails
- experienced ocean going sailors who are sitting on deck



Some possible answers

- red timber barn near the house
- large grain silo beside the barn
- enormous metal windmill which pumps water



Noun groups can be expanded with other language features apart from those already mentioned. Look at the table below and then expand the three noun groups by adding examples of the missing language features.

Specifies (Which?) eg. this, a	Quantifies (How many?) eg. some, couple of	Intensifies (How much?) eg. largely, moderately	Describes (What is it like?) eg. peaceful, smart	Classifies (What type?) eg. wooden, native	Names (Who or what is the head word?) eg. house, Kangaroo	Qualifies (What other information?) eg. with his brother, behind you
<i>the</i>	<i>three</i>	<i>very</i>	_____	<i>plastic</i>	<i>cups</i>	<i>on the table</i>
<i>those</i>	_____	<i>rather</i>	_____	<i>English</i>	<i>towns</i>	<i>which I visited</i>
_____	<i>majority of</i>	_____	_____	_____	<i>students</i>	_____

Underline the other noun groups of more than one word in this text

Yesterday, a small group of locals held an extremely noisy protest. These few resident were angered by a possible new rubbish dump. They claim that the main problem is a likely increase in the amount of dust. However, the state manager of the company which plans to build the dump said there is no need for alarm.

Answers

Yesterday, a small group of locals held an extremely noisy protest. These few residents were angered by a possible new rubbish dump. They claim that the main problem is a likely increase in the amount of dust. However, the state manager of the company which plans to build the dump said there is no need for alarm.

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Analyse the remaining noun groups

Specifies Quantifies Intensifies Describes Classifies Names Qualifies

Answers

Specifies	Quantifies	Intensifies	Describes	Classifies	Names	Qualifies
<i>the</i>				<i>main</i>	<i>problem</i>	
<i>a</i>			<i>likely</i>		<i>increase</i>	<i>in the amount of dust</i>
<i>the</i>				<i>state</i>	<i>manager</i>	<i>of the company which plans to build the dump</i>
	<i>no</i>				<i>need</i>	<i>for alarm</i>

Uses of Nominal Groups

- Expanding nominal groups allows more information to be conveyed by using fewer words because the number of clauses is reduced and therefore fewer verbs, reference items (e.g. It, This), conjunctions (e.g. and) etc are needed

Packing Information in Tightly

Version A

Tom's new mobile is really cool. Green is his favourite colour. It is a Motorola and it has Bluetooth. It is going to replace the one he's had for years.

Version B (Expanded nominal group)

Tom's really cool, new Bluetooth enabled Motorola mobile in his favourite green

is going to replace the one he's had for years.

Version A contains 30 words in five clauses. Version B conveys the same information in 22 words in one clause. However, it seems “out of place” with the tenor of the text. If the context required the field to be more technical and the tenor to be more formal, then it would seem more appropriate.

Rewrite this text by expanding the noun groups

Afghanis brought Islam to South Australia in 1859. These people were cameleers. In Maree they practised their religion in a mosque made from an old mud hut. This was how mosques first began in Australia. In 1889 they used the money they earnt to build a mosque. It was in Little Gilbert Street. It was beautiful.

Adapted from Multicultural life, Issue 2, June 2004

A possible new version with expanded noun groups

Afghani cameleers brought Islam to South Australia in 1859. An old Maree mud hut became the first mosque in Australia. In 1889 the Afghanis' earnings were used to build the beautiful mosque which stands in Little Gilbert Street.

Nominal Groups in Context

- It is important for teachers to know how and why nominal groups are expanded in different contexts so they can teach students how to construct and comprehend them.
- In mathematics, for example, describers are not often used apart from those that describe size, length and colour (e.g. straight, tall).
- The use of most describers (e.g. cute, nice, delicious, quiet) would appear “out of place” in mathematics, but very much “in place” in subject English.
- Sometimes several qualifiers are used in combination and it is important that the student understands each one so they know exactly which angle, number, point etc is being talked about

Some Nominal Groups in Maths

Pointer	Numerative	Describer	Classifier	Thing	Qualifier(s)
	two		right-angled isosceles	triangles	which are drawn with a common base
this			parabolic	curve	intersecting the linear function
the			prime	factors	of 21
	all		even	numbers	between 6 and 32 which are divisible by 5
the				angle	of depression from the top of the cliff to a ship out at sea

Appropriateness of extending noun groups

- Extended noun groups have their place in all genres, but sometimes their overuse is inappropriate
- Compare these two attempts at writing a procedure
 - A) Place 100 mg of salt into the solution.
 - B) Place the exact amount of 100 mg of salt into the solution which was prepared earlier.

Appropriateness of extended noun groups

- Sometimes certain genres have less need for some of the language items that can extend noun groups
 - Compare the following attempts at writing historical recounts
- A) A hundred years ago this country, Australia, became a federation. It was an important historical event.
- B) A hundred long years ago this wonderful country, Australia, became a very good federation. It was simply one of the more important historical events.

Noun groups across the ESL Scales

Scale 6	9	10	12	14
<p>Chooses a range of vocabulary to expand noun groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – numbers: a quarter of, a lot of – describers: a large, bright star – classifiers: state/federal government – occasionally some short prepositional phrases as qualifiers (eg 'The man in the shop was ...') <p>Literacy Secretariat <i>Literacy is everyone's business</i></p>	<p>Expands noun groups by selecting from a small range of vocabulary for more delicate meanings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – describer (a <i>nice</i>, <i>comfortable</i> flat) – classifier (a <i>nice furnished</i> flat, a sharp 2B pencil) – qualifier: using a longer prepositional phrase (a nice <i>furnished flat near the centre of the city</i>; 	<p>Expands noun groups by choosing from a wider range of vocabulary for more delicate meanings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – combining describers through listing (the <i>biggest</i>, <i>most colourful</i>) – qualifier: using a relative clause which may include ellipsed words (the <i>biggest</i>, <i>most colourful hardware centre (which is) located in the city</i>) 	<p>Expands noun groups accurately using</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – qualifiers using less common expressions (one of the most important and exciting medical discoveries <i>in recent times</i>) – variations in order (<i>his face</i>, <i>handsome and athletic</i>, ..) 	<p>Uses confidently a wide range of noun groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – describers: <i>thick black rimmed</i> spectacles; <i>inadequate</i> conditions, <i>horrid</i> confinements, <i>controversial and problematic</i> issues – classifiers: <i>surgical</i> procedures; <i>human</i> consumption – expressing modality and cause: <i>the potential effect of this</i>

Professional Learning

- The *Teaching ESL Students in Mainstream Classrooms (TESMC)* course and the *How language Works* course both raise teacher awareness of the importance of nominal groups in schooling and build their capacity to explicitly teach it within the contexts of different learning areas so that students are able to make appropriate language choices
- ESL Regional Consultants also offer training



Government of South Australia

Department of Education and
Children's Services

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