

HOW TO DESCRIBE, DEFINE, GIVE EXAMPLES...

Do you remember CLASSIFYING from one of our previous lessons? Can you recall some typical expressions?

Examples: There are **two types of** plastics: thermosetting or thermoplastic.

Matter **may be classified as** solid, liquid and gas.

Matter **can be divided into two groups:** pure substances and compounds.

Masaryk University **consists of** nine faculties.

When we read scientific texts, we often find typical words that express different functions –

e.g.:	COMPARING	... <i>is bigger than</i> ...
	DESCRIBING CAUSE AND EFFECT	... <i>is caused by</i> ...
	DESCRIBING A PROCESS	... <i>first</i> ... <i>finally</i> ...
	GIVING EXAMPLES	... <i>for example</i> ...
	DEFINING - giving definitions	... <i>may be defined as</i>

3. a) Match each text with one of these functions.

Which of them is mainly classifying / comparing / describing cause and effect / describing a process / giving examples / defining something?

b) What are the main topics of these texts? What is being compared / classified / defined?

4. Now find the typical expressions in each text and underline them.

(e.g. *Classifying: two types of... consists of*)

A.

A language is a basic means of human communication. It is language more than anything else that distinguishes man from the rest of the animal world.

Other animals, it is true, communicate with one another by means of cries: for example, many birds utter warning calls at the approach of danger, apes utter different cries, such as expressions of anger, fear and pleasure. But these various means of communication differ in important ways from human language. For instance, animals' cries are not articulate. This means, basically, that they lack structure. They lack, for example, the kind of structure that enables us to divide a human utterance into words.

We can change an utterance by replacing one word in it with another: a good illustration of this is a soldier who can say e.g. 'tanks approaching from the north', or 'tanks approaching from the west'; but a bird has a single alarm cry, which means 'danger!'.

B.

Inorganic chemistry

A branch of chemistry concerned with the study of those aspects that do not fall within the study of organic chemistry. It is the study of elements and their compounds. This includes the chemistry of some compounds of the element carbon, such as its oxides, metal carbonates and hydrogen carbonates, but excludes all organic compounds such as alcohols, esters and hydrocarbons.

C.

By next year, more women will be working than men. Two out of three women now work, 60% full time. There are about 127,000 males aged 18-24 who have been unemployed for a year or more. Only 38,000 women fall in the same category. 45% of women graduates are in work within six months of leaving university, as opposed to 42.3% of men. After a year 12% of male graduates are unemployed, but only 8% of women. The number of women entering management schools was around 10% a decade ago. Now it is 20-30% and rising. Researchers predict that within a generation teaching will be an all female profession. At school boys are lagging behind girls in all subjects, even in the sciences, the traditional "male" preserve. In 1993 45.8% of girls achieved 5 top grade GCSEs (grads A,B or C) compared with only 36.8% of boys. Girls are twice as likely to get an A in "A" level English. Boys outnumber girls two to one in Britain's schools for children with learning difficulties. In special units for behavioural problems there are six boys for every girl. 80% of girls plan to go to college, compared with only 60% of boys. Teenage boys are much less optimistic about the future than girls according to one recent study. Young men represent one-eighth of the population but commit third of all crimes. The suicide rate among young men has risen by 70% in the last decade. Young men (15-24) have a suicide rate of 16 per 100,000: the rate for girls is five.

D.

For the last hundred years the climate has been growing much warmer. This has had a number of different effects. Since the beginning of the 20th century, glaciers have been melting very rapidly. For example, the Muir Glacier in Alaska has retreated 2 miles in 10 years. Secondly, rising temperatures have been causing the snowline to retreat on mountains all over the world. In Peru, for example, it has risen as much as 2,700 feet in 60 years. As a result of this, vegetation has also been changing. In Canada, the agricultural crop line has shifted 50 to 100 miles northward. In the same way cool-climate trees like birches and spruce have been dying over large areas of Eastern Canada. In Sweden the tree line has moved up the mountains by as much as 65 feet since 1930. The distribution of wildlife has also been affected, many European animals moving northwards into Scandinavia. Since 1918, 25 new species of bird have been seen in Greenland, and in the United States birds have moved their nests to the north. Finally, the sea has been rising at a rapidly increasing rate, largely due, as was mentioned above, to the melting of glaciers. In the last 18 years it has risen by about 6 inches, which is about four times the average rate of rise over the last 9,000 years.

E.

All plants and animals need carbon for growth. Carbon is present in the atmosphere in the form of carbon dioxide gas. But it is present only in small amounts. This means it has to be used again and again. Animals and plants continually take in and give out carbon during respiration. They also take it in when they feed, and give it out when they die. This continual process is called the carbon cycle. Plants take in carbon from the air during photosynthesis. In this process, plants use energy from the sun together with carbon dioxide from the air. They then make sugars, and other carbohydrates. The carbohydrates are needed for the growth of roots, stems and leaves. The leaves may subsequently be eaten by animals, which digest the carbohydrates. The carbon is then used for building muscles and bones. Some of the carbon, however, is returned to the atmosphere after respiration, when carbon dioxide is released from the body.

F.

The vast majority of children in Britain (87%) attended state (local authority) schools which provide compulsory education from the age of 5 to 16 years. These schools can be classified according to the age of the pupils and the type of education provided. Basically, there are two types of school: primary and secondary, although in some areas there are also middle schools. Primary schools cater for children aged 5-11, and secondary schools for ages 11-16 (and in some areas up to 18 years). Primary schools can be subdivided into infant schools (for ages 5-7) and junior schools (for ages 7-11).

Secondary schools are normally of one type for all abilities viz comprehensive schools. More than 90% of children in state schools attend this kind of school. In some areas middle schools exist as an extra level after primary school for children aged 8 or 9 to 12 or 13. Pupils then transfer to senior comprehensive schools. In a small number of areas, pupils may be grouped according to their ability and selected by means of an examination at the age of 11. In these areas, grammar schools cater for those with academic ability and secondary modern schools for those with less academic ability.

When pupils reach the age of 16 there may be three choices open to them. Firstly, they may leave school. Secondly, they may stay on at school for two more years if it has a Sixth Form. Thirdly, they may transfer to a Sixth Form College or a Tertiary College.

5. WRITING: Chose a topic (e.g. music, films, sports, university life, literature, travelling, architecture...). Decide which language function you want to apply. Write a paragraph (maximum length half a page) using the standard phrases, structures and vocabulary. Bring your text to the class next week, please.

EXEMPLIFYING

for example

e.g. we read as "for example"

for instance

such as

This means... which means ...

i.e. we read as "this means / which means"

A good illustration of this is...

DEFINING

... is concerned with the study of... may be defined as...

... is a thing that ...

COMPARING/CONTRASTING

more women than men

boys *outnumber* girls

much less ...

six boys *for every* girl

compared with ...

two *out of* three

as opposed to ...

girls are *twice as likely* to ...

... but only ...

boys are *lagging behind*

a decade ago ... now

the suicide *rate* is ...

CAUSE AND EFFECT

effects

have been causing

due to ...

as a result of this

has been affected

DESCRIBING A PROCESS

continually

during

then

continual process

subsequently

after

in this process

when

CLASSIFYING

can be classified according to ...

one type

Firstly

can be sub-divided into...

two types of

Secondly

may be grouped according to ...

Thirdly

and selected by ...



Sources: ¹ Zimmerman, Fran. *English for science* New Jersey : Regents/Prentice Hall, 1989. Jordan, R. R. *Academic writing course*. New ed. London : Collins ELT, 1990.

Lesson adapted from Marie Sabolová and Hana Němcová.