

Processes and Strategies

Overview

This chapter focuses on how students can apply their knowledge and understandings to comprehend, respond to and compose visual texts. Some processes and strategies are used intuitively, particularly when viewing familiar texts in known contexts. However, unfamiliar texts, tasks and contexts require deliberate selection and manipulation of viewing processes and strategies.

The intent of this chapter is to provide teaching and learning experiences that can be applied to all phases of viewing. Students need to develop a broad repertoire of processes and strategies to understand, interpret and discuss a range of still and moving images in different texts viewed for a range of purposes.

A range of processes and strategies can be introduced, developed and consolidated at all phases of development. This chapter is designed to support the Major Teaching Emphases listed under the 'Processes and Strategies' aspect for each phase of development in the *First Steps Viewing Map of Development*.

By explicitly teaching processes and strategies — and providing opportunities for students to analyse, use and reflect on the strategies used when viewing — teachers enable students to develop the skills and knowledge required to understand visual texts in a wide range of contexts. These processes and strategies are not hierarchical or specific to a phase; students at all levels will need to be learning about and using a wide range of processes and strategies.

This chapter contains four sections:

- **Section 1 — Viewing Processes and Strategies**
- **Section 2 — Teaching Viewing Strategies**
- **Section 3 — The Viewing Process**
- **Section 4 — Practical Application of Viewing Processes and Strategies**

SECTION 1

Viewing Processes and Strategies

Images are a very important part of our culture. In the past, school literacy activities in the area of viewing focused mainly on processes and strategies to help students interpret the meaning of still images by linking images and print in printed texts. These activities generally concentrated on understanding the visual codes and conventions of semiotic or sign systems (of which written language is one), such as the use of colour, line, shape, format and texture. However, the introduction of new technologies and new forms of multi-modal texts involve the integration of more complex semiotic or sign systems, such as those used in TV, films, videos, animations, computer games and on the Internet. This requires that viewers make meaning by considering simultaneously the five semiotic systems.

The five semiotic systems are:

- **linguistic:** oral and written language, e.g. vocabulary and grammar
- **visual:** still and moving images, e.g. colours, vectors and viewpoints
- **auditory:** music and sound effects, e.g. volume, pitch and rhythm
- **gestural:** facial expression and body language, e.g. movement, speed and stillness
- **spatial:** layout and organisation of objects and space, e.g. proximity, direction and position.

(Anstey and Bull, 2006)

Essential Knowledge About Viewing

Teachers need to plan learning experiences that will help students to develop a repertoire of processes and strategies that they can apply flexibly as they engage with a range of visual texts.

Students need to learn about the following processes and strategies to assist with comprehension of still and moving texts:

- the vocabulary used to discuss visual texts
- ways to interpret literal and inferential meanings from a range of visual texts
- ways to decode and explore the structure of different visual texts
- ways to extract and organise information from visual texts
- ways to monitor viewing

- ways to identify, consider and question how visual texts can be used to influence people's views.

To help plan for effective viewing, teachers need to analyse texts and resources they want students to view, then decide which specific knowledge, skills, processes and strategies students need to engage with those texts.

Building Students' Knowledge Within the Cues

All viewers draw on cues from the text to make sense of what they are viewing. These cues can be semantic, graphic (or technical), syntactic or pragmatic. During the process of deconstructing and using visual texts, effective viewers use each of these cues interdependently. It is critical that students, from a very early age, be provided with opportunities to build their knowledge base within each cue.

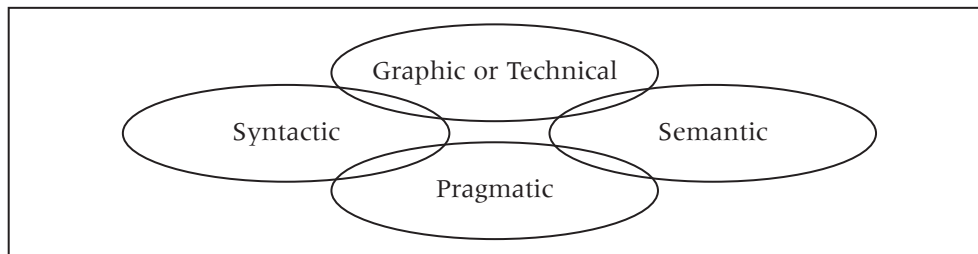


Figure 4.1 Viewing Cue System

Semantic Cues

Viewers draw on semantic cues to help them know if what they are viewing makes sense. Semantic cues are associated with the overall meaning of a visual text, and viewers use them to make a personal connection. Students' semantic knowledge includes their cultural and world knowledge, their knowledge of the topic or concept, and the features of visual texts.

Graphic or Technical Cues

Viewers draw on graphic or technical cues to identify, locate, select, navigate and make meaning from a variety of visual texts.

Syntactic Cues

Syntactic cues are associated with the structure of the visual text. These cues include viewers' knowledge of the visual grammar features, knowledge or image patterns, and knowledge of the organisation and structure of whole visual texts. Syntactic cues also include how visual elements are arranged, e.g. balance, layout, vectorality and reading paths.

Pragmatic Cues

Viewers use pragmatic cues to help them understand the effect of a visual image. Pragmatic cues are based on the creative choices made when viewing or creating a visual text. Figure 4.2 shows an image from *Home*, by Narelle Oliver. Fire is about to destroy the bushland where a pair of peregrine falcons live. The image creator uses image framing, camera shots, lines, shapes, colour, texture and size to encourage the viewer to make sense of the falcons' plight.

The high angle helps the viewer see things from the falcons' perspective. The position of the birds, circling above the landscape, creates empathy. (The vectors do not suggest purposeful forward flying.)

Line, shape, colour and texture emphasise the difference between the natural and the built environment.

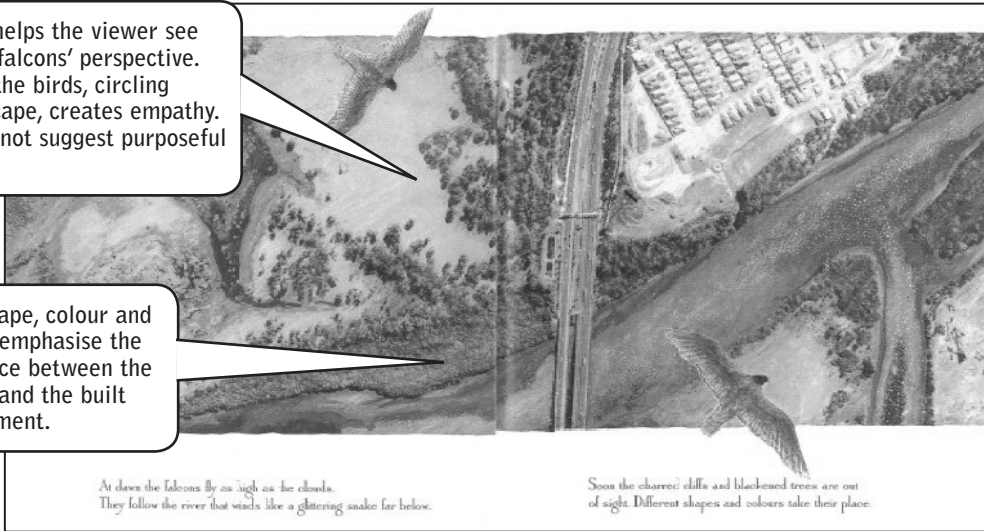


Figure 4.2 Students Use Pragmatic Cues to Understand This Image

Defining the Knowledge Base

All viewers have some prior knowledge. It is the amount of relevant prior knowledge — and the activation of that knowledge — that contributes to a viewer's success in understanding and assimilating new information. One of the goals of effective teaching is to provide experiences that allow students to build up their knowledge base.

Topic or Concept Knowledge

Teachers need to determine students' current knowledge of the topic and related concepts, as some students may need to be involved in activities that build up their topic knowledge. This can be done by:

- selecting a variety of resources that present the information in different ways
- designing specific activities to build up background knowledge
- providing multimedia experiences
- talking about the topic from the teacher's own experience
- discussing and analysing texts and experiences.

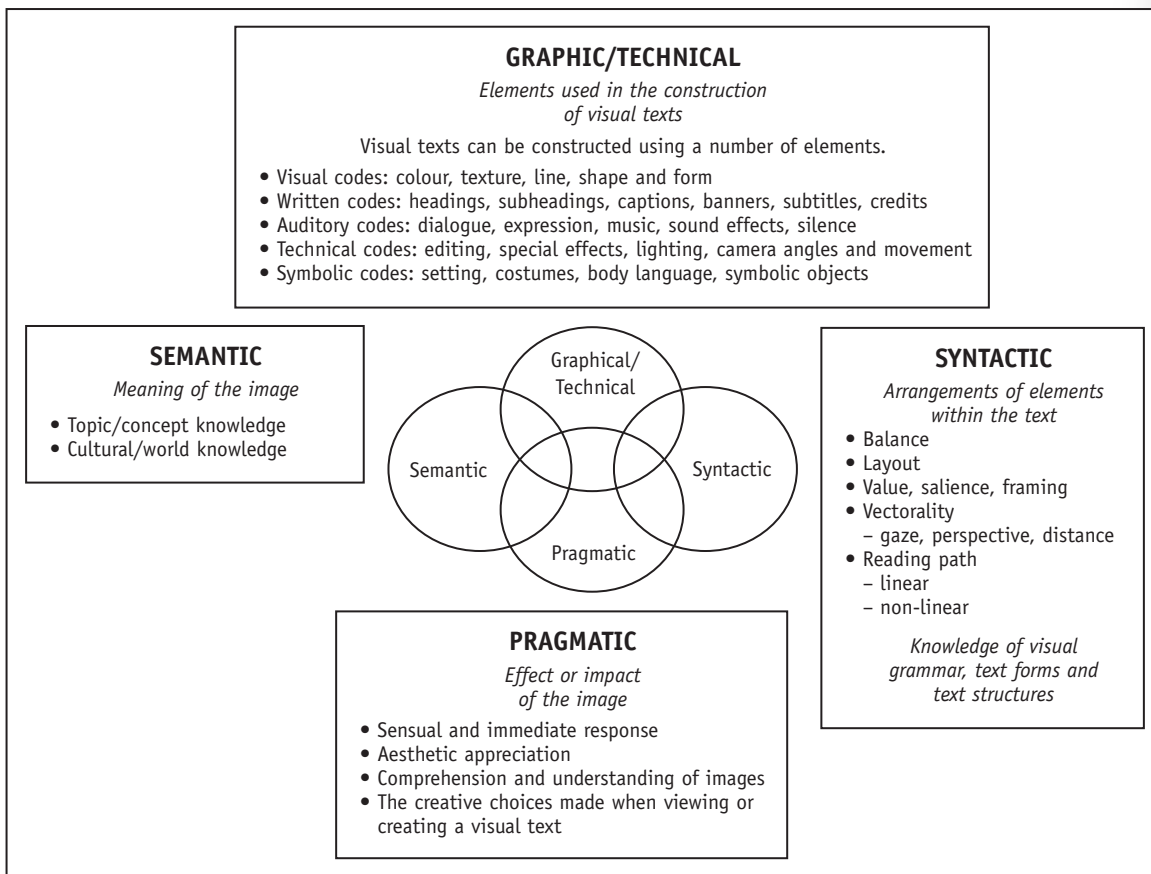


Figure 4.3 Knowledge within the Cueing Systems

Cultural or World Knowledge

Cultural or world knowledge consists of a viewer’s experiences, values, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Viewer’s cultural knowledge can have a significant impact on their interpretation of a text.

Text Knowledge

Text knowledge refers to a viewers’ knowledge of the purpose, structure, organisation and language features of a variety of text forms.

- Text structure refers to the way ideas, feelings and pieces of information are linked in an image
- Text organisation refers to layout, or the way a text is organised, e.g. text print, graphs, captions, tables, fonts, colour.
- Text features refers to the visual grammar used in a text, e.g. the codes and the conventions.

Visual Grammar

Visual grammar refers to the viewer’s knowledge of the different codes and conventions used in visual text and the way they are used by text designers to construct meaning. These include codes such as colour, framing, camera angles, as well as conventions such as vectors and reading paths.

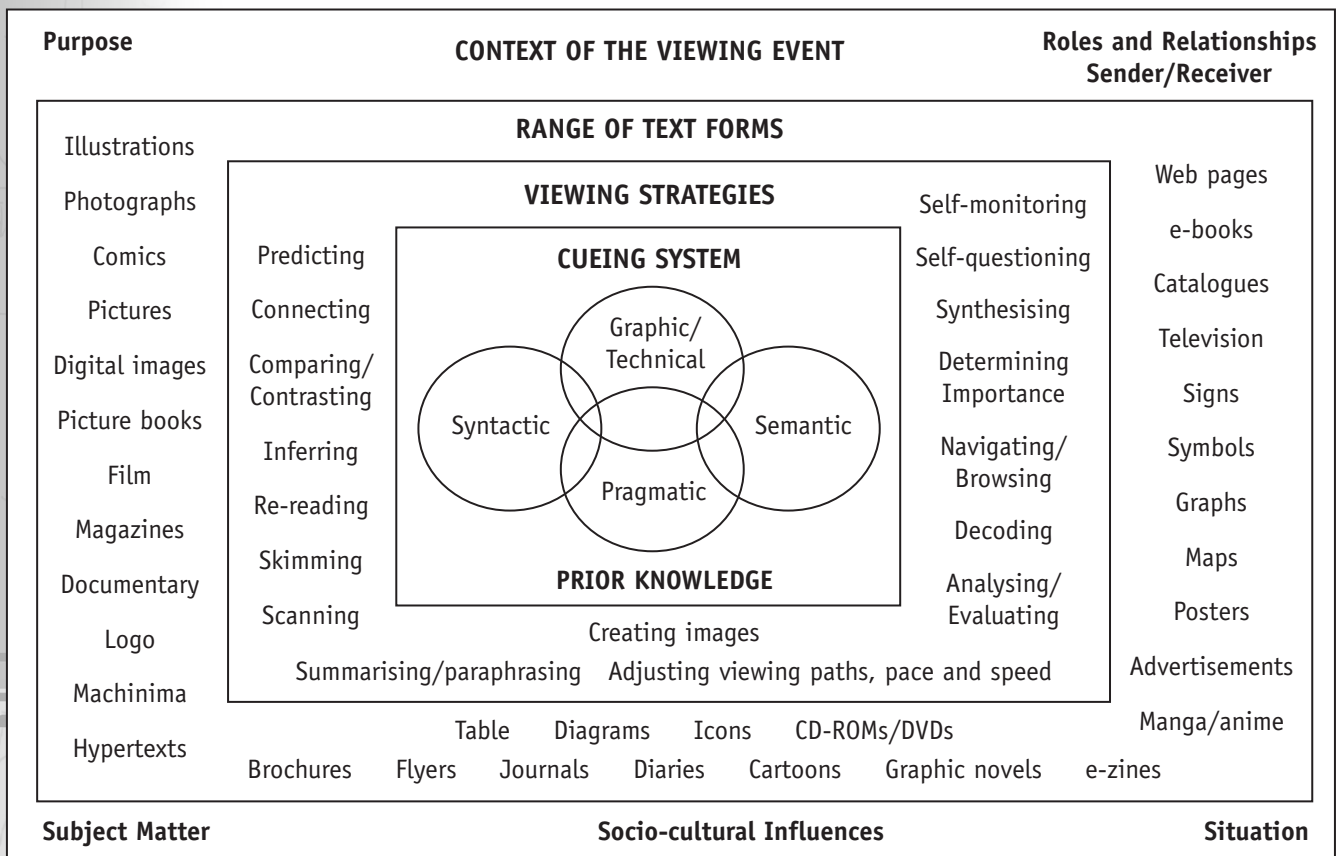


Figure 4.4 The Multi-dimensional Model of Viewing

Using Strategies

In addition to building students' knowledge base within the four cueing systems, teachers need to provide explicit teaching of viewing strategies. They need to provide opportunities for students to practice and consolidate their strategies before, during and after a viewing event. Processes and strategies can be separated into metacognitive and interpretative categories.

The following descriptions are based on the DET WA Curriculum Guide: English (2005).

Metacognitive Processes and Strategies



Students should be taught these metacognitive processes and strategies:

- Vocabulary for describing and discussing viewing and thinking strategies, e.g. predicting, browsing, monitoring, reviewing, rewinding.
- When and why to use particular viewing strategies.
- Ways to plan, monitor, evaluate and adjust their thinking for viewing.
- How to evaluate the effectiveness of different viewing strategies.
- Ways to select, evaluate and modify viewing strategies.

Interpretive Processes and Strategies

Students should be taught these interpretative processes and strategies:

- Ways of viewing different visual text structures, e.g. focusing on special effects in a film.
- The vocabulary needed to understand and discuss elements of visual texts, e.g. point of view, line, shot selection.
- Ways to support interpretations with evidence.
- The ways visual (and other) elements can be combined to create and interpret images, e.g. combining symbols of wealth such as jewellery and expensive cars in advertisements.
- Frameworks or graphic organisers for identifying main ideas in texts, e.g. mind maps, tree diagrams, retrieval charts.
- Ways to consider points of view presented to viewers by the inclusion or exclusion of specific items or conventions.

Reflecting on Strategies

Students need the opportunity to reflect on the strategies they made use of before, during and after viewing. Reflection involves analysing and making judgements about what has been learnt and how learning took place. Students need the opportunity to stop and think about what they have learnt. Providing time for students to reflect on their viewing is important, as it helps them to:

- become aware of viewing strategies they are using
- monitor the use of their viewing strategies
- apply viewing strategies in other contexts
- refine their use of viewing strategies
- critically evaluate the effectiveness of the viewing strategies they used.

Teachers can guide students to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies through:

- scaffolding discussions about strategies used, e.g. **What strategies helped you to organise your information?**
- modelling responses to reflective questions through 'thinking aloud', e.g. **The Venn diagram helped me sort the information I found on the website.**
- providing guiding questions, e.g. **What helped you get started with the task?**



Figure 4.5 Discussion of Viewing Strategies