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Picture Books: Adverbials in context



When looking at teaching grammar in context, it is useful to be familiar with a range of quality literature. Deep analysis of language choice assists with comprehension and supports writing while developing talk about language that becomes part of general classroom discourse.

In literature, **adverbials** can play an important role in developing characterisation as we are given insight into character behaviour. **Adverbials** are critical to establishing and shifting the setting as they indicate time and place. When placed as sentence openers they often assist in advancing the plot or emphasising change as the reader is

alerted to new circumstances.

The role of **adverbs** and **adverbial phrases** (sometimes referred to as prepositional phrases) is to add detail to the happenings (verbs) within a text. Within a clause an **adverbial** can tell extra information about circumstances such as where, when, how and with whom. For more detail see Derewianka, 2023 and Humphrey, Droga and Feez, 2012.

An **adverb** consists of one word such as nearby, yesterday, calmly or together. An **adverbial phrase or group** is a group of words often beginning with a preposition (e.g. on, at, with, under, through). The following clauses contain **adverbial phrases** adding extra details to the activity.

The children had to play **indoors**. (where / place)

The plane landed **early**. (when / time)

She motioned **hesitantly**. (how / manner)

The dogs ran **across the road**. (where / place)

The families arrived **at six o'clock**. (when / time)

My sister travelled **with her best friend**. (with whom / accompaniment)

With care the student completed her work. (how / manner)

The following books have been selected as they are particularly useful for exploring the use of **adverbials** across a text. They are critical in the text achieving its purpose and can be connected to the overall structure and cohesion of the text. Conversations about the choices can occur during reading when exploring meanings and when deconstructing model or mentor texts to explicitly teaching writing.

[**Going to the Footy by Debbie Coombes**](#) (2019, Magabala Books)

This is a great book to teach young students about **adverbial phrases**. Coombes is a Tiwi artist who shares many ways to get to the footy. After the initial page, each page consists of one **adverbial phrase** telling how people go to the footy, for example, in a tinny, on a bus or on a plane.

[The Shack that Dad Built by Elaine Russell](#) (2005, Little Hare)

This book is a series of episodes recounting the author's recollection of when she was a child and her dad built a shack for the family just outside the Aboriginal mission at La Perouse in Sydney. It is an autobiographical recount of a particular time and place in her life.

Throughout the episodes **adverbial phrases** provide detail, particularly about place, as the family move to La Perouse and experience events in and around their new home. Take a look at [Connecting Reading and Writing: The Shack that Dad Built](#) for a complete teaching sequence.

[Press Here by Herve Tullet](#) (2011, Allen & Unwin)

Press Here is a fun, interactive book containing coloured dots. The brief written text entices the reader to physically interact by tapping and rubbing the dots and shaking the book through a series of commands. Most pages contain **adverbial phrases** including those which tell where to tap and the directions in which to rub or tilt. **Adverbs** such as gently and again also add detail to the requested actions. Tullet's other books [Mix it up!](#) (2021, Allen & Unwin) and [Let's play!](#) (2024, Allen & Unwin) also provide numerous opportunities for identifying and discussing the role of **adverbials**.



[Silver Buttons by Bob Graham](#) (2013, Walker Books)

Bob Graham develops one moment in time as a young child takes his first steps while simultaneous events occur across the neighbourhood and

broader city. This is achieved using the **adverbial phrases** of time, at 9.59 on Thursday morning and later at that moment, which suspends time for one minute. Events across the city are shared through **adverbial phrases** of place from out in the street and over in the park to far out over the bay.

Analysis of the text and teaching ideas can be found in [Put it in Writing](#) (Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015).



[The Deep by Tim Winton and Karen Louise](#) (1999, Freemantle Press)

The Deep is the story of Alice who overcomes her fear of jumping off a jetty and swimming in the deep at the beach where her family lives by the sea.



At key points across the narrative, the reader is guided to follow the ordinary repeated events of the family with **adverbial phrases** like every morning and every day. As the plot progresses, time slowly becomes more precise with some mornings, sometimes, one morning, suddenly. These

adverbials are used as sentence openers and highlight the move from the typical events to something that is unusual and a significant shift for the character. Tracking the **adverbials** reflects the overall narrative structure. Take a look at [Connecting Reading and Writing: The Deep](#) for a complete teaching sequence.

References

Derewianka, B. (2022) [A new grammar companion for teachers](#), 3rd Edition. PETAA, Sydney.

Humphrey, S Droga, L & Feez, S (2012) [Grammar and meaning](#), 2nd Edition. PETAA, Sydney.

Rossbridge, J & Rushton, K (2015) [Put it in writing](#). PETAA, Sydney.

Rossbridge, J. (2020) [Connecting Reading and Writing: The Deep](#)

Rossbridge, J. (2023) [Connecting Reading and Writing: The Shack that Dad Built](#)



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