of the community would be familiar with. In other words, members of a **discourse community** – that is people such as readers of this kind of English-language newspaper – know what an advertisement does and should look like, and the writer has taken this into account in order to make sure they recognise what they are reading for what it is.

The letter below succeeds for the same reasons, although it is very different in character. It is typical of its kind (a formal letter of notification). Thus it follows an established construction pattern:

<div align="center">

Stating the subject

⬇

Acknowledging receipt of a previous letter

⬇

Saying what is to be done

⬇

Exhorting the letter's recipient to do something

⬇

Signing off

</div>

The letter uses specialised **topic vocabulary** (e.g. *Notice of Intended Prosecution*; *alleged traffic offence*) and also employs vocabulary and grammar which ensures its formal **tone** (*I am in receipt of … ; Your prompt response would be appreciated*).

```
Dear Sir,

I refer to the Notice of Intended Prosecution/Section 172 Road
Traffic Act 1988 form sent you in relation to an alleged traffic
offence.

I am in receipt of your further correspondence and have noted the
contents.

I will, on receiving confirmation from the hospital, re-examine
your file. If I decide to excuse the penalty, your payment will be
refunded and the points removed from your licence.

Your prompt response would be appreciated.


Yours faithfully,
```

Genres

The intended reader of the letter also recognises instantly what kind of letter it is because it is typical of its kind (both in terms of construction and in

choice of language), just as the advertisement was typical of its kind for the same reasons. We call these different writing constructions ('advertisements', 'letters', etc.) **genres**, and we refer to the specific choice of vocabulary within genres as the **register** that the text is written in.

'Newspaper advertisements' and formal 'letters of notification' are not the only genres around, of course. 'Literary fiction' is a genre of English which is different from, say, 'science fiction'. The characteristics of the latter may well differ in a number of ways from the former, and a specific genre may influence the writer's choice of register. 'Newspaper letters' are a recognisable genre, different from the notification letter above and different again from 'holiday postcards' or 'application letters'. 'Scientific reports' represent a genre of writing, just as 'film criticism' is a genre all of its own.

Knowledge of genres (understanding how different purposes are commonly expressed within a discourse community) is only one of the many 'knowledges' or 'competences' that a reader brings to the task of reading, and which a writer assumes the reader will know. Without these 'knowledges' a communication like the notification letter above would have little chance of success.

These 'knowledges' (which we can group under the general heading of **schematic knowledge**) comprise:
- a knowledge of genres
- general world knowledge
- sociocultural knowledge (that is the social and cultural knowledge which members of a particular social group can reasonably be expected to know)
- topic knowledge (that is knowing something about the subject being discussed).

All of this is exemplified in the following newspaper headline taken from *The Observer* newspaper:

Move over, Big Brother. Now politics is the latest reality TV

Because of our knowledge of genres we recognise this collection of words as a newspaper headline. However, in order to make sense of them we need more than this. Someone who did not have the relevant knowledge might need to be told firstly that *reality TV* involves cameras watching people who have been put, on purpose, in difficult situations (as survivors on a desert island, for example) and secondly that the most successful of all these programmes was called *Big Brother*, where contestants were crammed into a house, filmed all the time, and voted out of the house one by one by the viewers. Of course, it might be possible to deduce some of this information: we could, for example, recognise that the capital letters of *Big Brother* suggest that it is the name of something. But members of the discourse community do not have to make that effort because of their shared sociocultural and topic knowledge.

one place to the left again. Each student writes the next sentence of the story in front of them.

This procedure continues until each student has their original piece of paper in front of them. They are then told to write the last line of the story.

Here is one such story produced by a group from a multilingual, lower intermediate class (the participating students were Chinese, Turkish, Mexican, Spanish, and Korean):

> Once a ~~upon~~ a time a beautif prin~~ses~~cess ~~leavt~~ lived in a ~~eas~~ castle by a river.
>
> She was very clever. **She always read and studied.**
>
> However she hasn't seen the gergous nature around her, where she was living, she had an stemother that ~~he~~ hate her very much. *She had a lovely dog, it's was very loyalty.* One day, her stepmother bought a basket of red apples from the local market.
>
> **The stepmother putted poison in apples.**
>
> Her dog ~~seen~~ saw ~~of this tha~~ what the stepmother do, ~~w~~ so, when the stepmother ~~give~~ gave the apple to her, her dog jumped and ~~eate~~ ate the apple. then, the dog ~~w~~ died.

Student-generated fairy story

This story is full of language mistakes (we will look at ways of using these mistakes on page 118 in Chapter 7) and as a story it has its limitations, as it was produced under considerable time pressure. But it made the rest of the class laugh when they heard it and, more importantly, it made writing enjoyable. Despite problems of expression, the participants had produced something in writing without much preparation and they had taken pleasure in doing it.

Directions, rules, instructions – a really useful activity is to ask students to write 'instructional' text for others to follow. This could take the form of writing directions to a place (how to get to their school from the station or the airport, for example).

Students can be asked, in groups, to write the four (or five, or six) principal rules of a game they like and know how to play. They are told that the rules must be as clear as they can make them so that there is no uncertainty about what is meant (though asking people to provide