

# Essential English Community *of* Practice

Saturday 8th February  
St Joseph's Nudgee College



In the ever-evolving world of education, uncovering the treasures, tropes, and triumphs of teaching Essential English brings countless rewards as we engage our students. This event celebrates the rich opportunities within the Essential English course and offers practical strategies to help you make the most of them. Whether you're new to teaching Essential English or have years of experience, this gathering is a collaborative space for learning, sharing insights, and building a supportive community dedicated to inspiring student success.

## Keynote: Unearthing potential

**Jo Bickerstaff, North Lakes State College**



### Abstract

Teaching Essential English is like digging for treasure. Beneath the surface of text and sentence structure lies a wealth of

invaluable skills that equip students to navigate life's challenges. Essential English isn't just about the mechanics of language; it's a map that leads students to practical tools for real-world communication, critical thinking, and emotional resilience—the foundations for their futures.

Literacy is the key to this foundation, underpinning every aspect of success. From decoding workplace texts to interpreting media and making informed decisions, it's the mortar that connects personal and professional achievement. For students, especially those

from diverse or disadvantaged backgrounds, Essential English is the path to competence – and confidence, ensuring students are equipped to thrive.

In a world often marked by division, Essential English serves as a bridge, cultivating empathy—essential for thriving in our interconnected global society. This subject is a tool for inclusivity, unearthing and amplifying marginalized voices while fostering creativity and individuality.

Most importantly, Essential English is transformative. It provides us with opportunities for storytelling, polishing our diamonds allowing them to shine. Each lesson is an excavation of personal growth, revealing the unique potential within every learner. As educators, our role is not merely to hand over the map but to guide students as they uncover the treasures within themselves. Teaching Essential English is about preparing our students for life. Together, we dig deep, unearthing possibilities, and empowering students to claim the treasures of their full potential.

## Presenter

**Jo Bickerstaff** has been inspiring students and colleagues since she began her teaching journey in 2000 in Central Queensland. Now the Head of English at North Lakes State College, Jo combines her decades of experience with a passion for fostering innovative and inclusive learning environments.

Jo played a pivotal role in shaping Queensland's English curriculum as a member of the Writing Team for the 2019 General English syllabus. She is also a co-author of the 'Macmillan Essential English QCE' textbooks, collaborating with Tony Hytch to create practical, student-centred resources.

A firm believer in the transformative power of education, Jo embraces the idea that teaching is a continuous process of discovery. The longer she teaches, the more she appreciates the vastness of what remains to be learned, finding daily inspiration in her students and colleagues. This curiosity makes her an enthusiastic collaborator, always eager to share insights and adopt fresh approaches. When she's not shaping minds, Jo can be found on the front veranda, reading — fiction, non-fiction, magazines, newspapers (remember those) and recipe books! She also finds joy in swimming, where she clears her mind and rejuvenates, and in cooking, where she creates delicious experiences to share with family and friends.

## Program

Time	Activity	Presenter
9:00 am	<b>Introduction and welcome Housekeeping</b>	Anne Wood Candice Green
9:10 – 9:40	<b>Keynote:</b> Unearthing potential	Jo Bickerstaff
9:45 -10:50	<b>Presentations</b> – 18-minute presentation + 3 mins for q's. 1. Engaging students with reading in Unit 2: Texts and human experiences 2. Empowering engagement: Co designing Essential English task sheets with students 3. Fostering respectful, inclusive and productive learning environments in Essential English classrooms 4. Managing engagement in Essential English: Tools and techniques	Lucy Clinch Sonya Barnes Johanna Foley Kate Jenian and Stephanie Bridge
10:55– 11:25	Fancy morning tea:	Ab Fab catering
11:30-12:10	<b>Workshop Session 1</b> - Choose 1 of: (a) Planned Perplexity: Using sequenced WICOR strategies to engage students in the analysis of documents or literature excerpts - Lisa Magee (b) Read all about it! But how? – Karina Hepner (c) Strategies to better engage male students in the Essential English classroom – Melanie Ralph (d) Wrangling with aspects of texts – Julie Arnold	
12:15 – 1:00	<b>Workshop Session 2</b> – Choose another 1 from: (e) Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners in Essential English - Kate Elliott (f) Read all about it! But how? – Karina Hepner (Repeat of b)* (g) Strategies to better engage male students in the Essential English classroom - Melanie Ralph – (Repeat of c)* (h) Wrangling with aspects of texts – Julie Arnold – (Repeat of d)* * if required	

This program constitutes 3 hours 45 mins CPD

# Presentations

## Presentation 1

### Engaging students with reading in Unit 2: Texts and human experiences

#### Abstract

As an Essential English teacher, one of the biggest questions we find ourselves asking is "how do I get my students to read a book and like it?" The aim of this presentation is to share some tips on helping students connect on a personal level with reading a memoir based in Unit 2. Additionally, I will explain how I incorporated this reading experience into the class work and assessment task for the unit. In unpacking these ideas, I will also share some advice that I wish I knew in my first year of teaching Essential English.

#### Presenter

**Lucy Clinch** has taught Essential English since 2022 at Redlands College and will be taking on a new Head of Department (English) role in 2025. She has studied a Master of Education (Inclusive Education) and enjoys working in classrooms with diverse learning needs and interests. Lucy believes Essential English helps to unlock skills and capabilities in students that they don't often realise they have, which makes teaching the subject so enjoyable and rewarding.

## Presentation 2

### Empowering engagement: Co designing Essential English task sheets with students

#### Abstract

Involving students in the design of their assessment task sheets can significantly improve engagement and understanding, particularly in Essential English. This approach empowers students by aligning tasks with their interests, clarifying expectations, and fostering ownership of their work. Specifically, by collaborating with students on the task sheets, teachers can scaffold the syllabus objectives, guiding students to co-create task parameters, language, and structure that are both relevant and accessible. Connecting the task to real-

world applications further enhances relevance, showing students the practical value of their English skills. This method, piloted with Year 11 students last year, has led to some of the most engaged and high-quality responses in Year 12, making it a promising strategy for all Essential English assessments.

#### Presenter

**Sonya Barnes** has been teaching Essential English since its implementation, following years of experience teaching English Communication. Based in regional Queensland, Sonya is dedicated to supporting students academically and pastorally as Head of House at St Stephen's Catholic College, Mareeba. With a Masters degree in student wellbeing, she focusses on creating learning experiences that resonate with students' lives and goals, blending academic growth with personal development. Sonya is passionate about using real-world applications in Essential English to make the curriculum relevant and engaging, and is always looking for innovative, student-centred approaches that foster a positive, inclusive classroom environment.

## Presentation 3

### Fostering respectful, inclusive and productive learning environments in Essential English classrooms.

#### Abstract

This presentation is designed to be collaborative, with a focus on the importance of:

- building students' self-confidence and personal drive to succeed in Essential English through developing goals and targets.
- creating clear expectations, supported by routines, to ensure student engagement in learning.
- using restorative practices to support classroom behaviour management strategies; and
- creating positive partnerships with parents.

#### Presenter

As Head of Senior Years Students, **Johanna Foley** supports the pastoral care, behaviour management and student wellbeing of Years

10-12 students. Johanna has a strong interest in pedagogy, positive education, and restorative practices. Having worked in a variety of leadership roles, Johanna is keen to support teachers with developing strategies that foster respectful and inclusive classroom environments that encourage students to work productively and to the best of their ability. Johanna is currently completing a Master of Educational Leadership, specialising in Leading Learning, at Australian Catholic University.

## Presentation 4

Managing engagement in Essential English: Tools and techniques

**Abstract** Busting myths around Essential English and its students

- Selling Essential English to the students to make them care
- Maximising participation in the classroom
- Keeping students accountable and meeting checkpoints

### Presenters

**Kate Jenian and Stephanie Bridges** are both Senior teachers, who have been co-ordinating Essential English at their current or previous schools. They are passionate advocates for Essential English, and in re-engaging students back into English, and potentially experiencing success in English for the first time, or the first time in a while

## Workshops

### Workshop A

Planned Perplexity: Using sequenced WICOR strategies to engage students in the analysis of documents or literature excerpts

#### Abstract

Do you want your students writing, inquiring, collaborating, organising and reading independently? This workshop, inspired by the AVID strategy, is designed to present students with direction for sequenced and scaffolded WICOR strategies which support them to work independently to unpack meaning in documents, collaborate with peers and finally, make their group's thinking "visible". After understanding how to instruct students in conducting a 'critical read', teachers will explore strategies that prompt students to analyse multiple documents or literary excerpts, present their findings to their collaborative group, address an essential question and, as a group, build a thesis with a clear perspective. Students will then 'make

thinking visible' by creating a 'Planned Perplexity Poster'.

The 'Planned Perplexity' strategy provides a structured step-by-step guide for text analysis that can be adapted for all contexts and year levels. Teachers will be provided with a template to deliver direction to students to support them to complete the sequenced and scaffolded activities. Whilst the 'Planned Perplexity' strategy can be run digitally, this workshop focuses on getting students out from behind their screens to explore perplexing and puzzling texts.

#### Presenter

**Lisa Magee** recently joined the Senior English team at St Laurence's College, after six years at Marsden State High School. She is an accomplished educator, who is passionate about supporting her colleagues to develop innovative pedagogical approaches. With over 20 years' experience in the classroom and leadership in both WA and QLD, Lisa offers insightful strategies on enriching the dynamics in English classrooms, to enhance students' collaborative and individual learning outcomes, empowering them to tackle complex texts with confidence.

## Workshop B

### Read all about it! But how?

#### Abstract

In 2023, Education Queensland announced its renewed commitment to teach reading, privileging evidence-based approaches to this complex process. Teachers across the nation collectively sigh that their students are not reading enough and, quite simply, they're not reading at all. Indeed, reading is everyone's work in schools; however, the English teacher has been gifted unique moments in the timetable to focus explicitly on this life-long skill. This presentation will aim to provide lesson-ready activities for reluctant readers to implement in classrooms. By providing contextualised reading strategies, you will return to your Essential English students ready to engage them in useful learning opportunities.

#### Presenter

**Karina Hepner** has worked in a number of schools for three decades. She currently teaches in Toowoomba, where she is also privileged to be the teacher librarian.

## Workshop C

### Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners in Essential English

#### Abstract

A classroom is a microcosm within a microcosm. What happens when some students are too exam-anxious to try? Lack the confidence to get started? Think they might transition to full-time work during Year 12 because "when am I ever going to use this in my life?"

Kate has prepared students for the CIA exam in 2024 and 2023. She has also taught Unit 2 (Human Experiences) in a way that encourages students to become comfortable with the language of text structures, both by using (and annotating) them and making conscious use of some in their note-taking processes.

This session features eight teaching ideas that support students to receive comparable input

while engaging at a level and to the extent that they are ready. The tips relate to: (1) starting by building exam structure and word count awareness, (2) preparing students to handwrite without complaint, (3) subject and mode-specific vocabulary building, (4) annotating and highlighting questions, stimuli and our own work with consistent codes/colours, (5) perspectives / points-of-view, (6) CaVABs - even though the language is changing, (7) identifying, describing and explaining with reference to the audience, and (8) practising empathy while exploring how (target) audiences are invited to respond.

#### Presenter

**Kate Elliott** teaches at a college where most students study Essential English, Kate has prepared diverse classes of up to 23 students for the CIA exam. For Unit 3 Topic 2, her students have largely worked off-line (write-by-hand stamina!), engaged in whole-class verbal and written modelling, partaken in vocabulary pre-loading (informed by a range of texts relating to that year's CIA topics), and had text structures reinforced as they annotated their self-produced note pages. She's also built the language of text structures into informal conversations during yard duties to subtly reinforce a connection between classroom vocabulary use and life beyond classroom walls.

## Workshop D

### Strategies for better engagement of male students in the Essential English classroom

#### Abstract

Essential English classrooms typically include a higher proportion of male students who are more likely than girls to disengage from learning and to leave school early. Research from eSafety indicates that "young men are struggling to understand what manhood means in a rapidly changing world" and "their online experiences are marked by tensions, complexities and possibilities." These tensions can often manifest themselves negatively in the Essential English classroom.



Drawing on her experience in a range of complex schools over the last 16 years, Melanie will model a range of strategies that can help improve the engagement of young men in the English classroom, to the benefit of all learners in the room. Melanie does not seek to suggest that girls' engagement is a lower priority (It's not!). Instead, this workshop seeks to invite teachers of Essential English to meet boys where they are and utilize a relational pedagogical approach, whereby educators seek to develop meaningful and productive relationships based on values, shared respect, and the importance of dialogue.

Melanie will provide opportunities for participants to explore a range of practical strategies and planning approaches that benefit all students but have particular value for male students.

#### **Presenter**

**Melanie Ralph** is a high school English and Drama teacher, writer, and illustrator. With over 17 years' experience in diverse school settings around the world, she has honed her skills as an educator who values high expectations, student voice, and teacher agency. She has a keen interest in educational philosophy, which she explores in her writing that can be read on her blog. Her side hustle, Bare Bones Teaching, offers illustrated character maps and resources that help students to unpack classic literature. Bare Bones is also on YouTube, where Melanie shares helpful videos for students and teachers.

## **Workshop E**

### **Wrangling with aspects of texts**

#### **Online attendance**

**To cater for our members who are unable to attend in person, we will be streaming the keynote and the presentations as well as the two most popular workshops. Recordings will be available until the end of term, at least.**

#### **Abstract**

The concept of an 'aspect' of an Australian popular culture text is a new one in the 2025 version of the Essential English syllabus. Certainly, it was a treasure I had to hold up and examine from various angles before I could see its worth. I wanted to define this catch-all term, that seemed to mean any possible thing about a text, in a way that made sense to me for learning and assessment in Year 12 Topic 2. In this workshop, we'll explore entry points to a range of Australian popular culture texts and do a little dive into one that helped me see more opportunities to plan a great unit: *The Arsonist*, by Chloe Hooper. Yes, I know it's an English prescribed text, but I reckon it would work or at least that you could apply the thinking to what you think would work better. In any case, you'll come away with plenty of departure points; that is, examples of how an aspect of a text can be used by students as a springboard for a written response. I'm hoping you'll come away with plenty of ideas for your IA4.

#### **Presenter**

**Julie Arnold** is an educator of preservice English teachers at QUT. Her research interests are in accessible assessment practices, currently how formative assessment works differently in English and mathematics. Other research and teaching interests are in English curriculum, especially building teacher linguistic subject knowledge for writing instruction. Before and beyond university, Julie was a Teacher and Head of English. She co-authors Cambridge's *Essential English for Queensland Schools* with Rhiannon French, Enoch Byrne, and Lynda Wall. In her role as Vice President of The English Teachers Association of Queensland, Julie takes an active interest in instructional leadership and curriculum development.

## We will be filming.

Some presentations during the day will be filmed for uploading to the members only area of the website and images of some attendees may be captured in the process. Images of individuals and groups may also be captured at registration and at morning tea for posting on our website or on social media.

**If you want your image NOT to be captured, let us know when you register.**

## Registration

Registration opens    Monday 23 December 2024

Registration CLOSES        Tuesday 4 February

**Cost:** \$50 for members for in-person attendance. Other prices are on the website.

## Conditions of registration

1. Change of persons registered - sometimes schools may need to substitute one teacher for another on their registrations. If so, please notify the change to the Administration Officer so that we can prepare the appropriate Certificate of Participation and Individual program.
2. Many schools prefer to receive an invoice for registrations and pay on that rather than pay at the time of registration. We are happy to offer this convenience, but it must be recognised that **registration commits you to payment**. See also the Cancellation Policy below.
3. Many schools are now insisting on an **Order Number** on the invoice. If your school is one of these, please record it in your online registration.
4. **Cancellation Policy** – If you register for face-to-face attendance and have to cancel your physical attendance, the following will apply:
  - a. Cancel your registration by 31 January 2025 and receive a refund of your full registration fee OR transfer over to the online attendance group and receive a refund of the face-to-face component of your registration fee.
  - b. From 1 to 3 February, you will receive a refund of the face-to-face component of your registration fee.
  - c. From 4 February no refund is possible.
  - d. Cancellation to be by email to [adminofficer@etaq.org.au](mailto:adminofficer@etaq.org.au) .