



'The reading and writing of Standard English, alongside proficient language development, is the key to unlocking the rest of the academic curriculum. Pupils who struggle to read struggle in all subjects and the wonders of a knowledge-rich curriculum passes them by unread.'

Ofsted Reading Framework 2021

“Ways of thinking are embedded in ways of using language”

– Mercer and Littleton, 2007

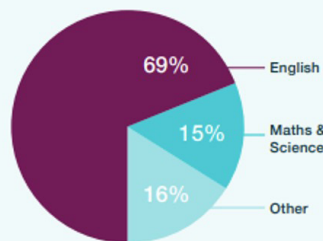
Oracy is already present in schools, but too often it is hidden away in our questioning, class discussion or presentations without gaining the attention it deserves.

The ability to articulate thoughts and exemplify your arguments through talk, often precedes the ability to coherently write in a fluent manner. For some subjects, opportunities to implement oracy strategies, have proved easier to come by, whilst evidence suggests oracy confidence is clearly higher in some subjects than others.

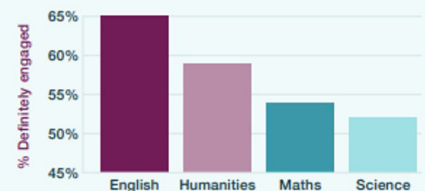
Source: [Voice21-Impact-Report-2023-v21-web-1.pdf](#)

How is oracy implemented across different departments in secondary schools?

In secondary schools, oracy confidence and expertise is not evenly distributed across departments. The majority of Oracy Leaders in secondary schools are from the English department.

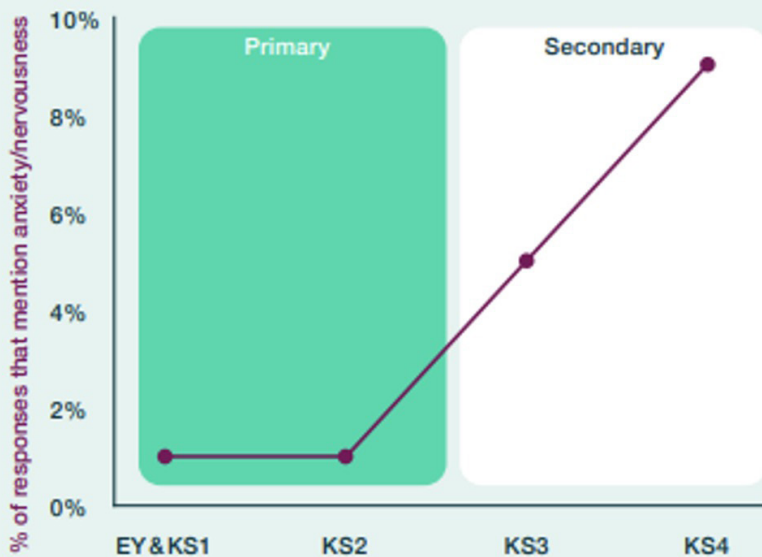


Reported involvement in oracy, by department (secondary schools)



Across the school, English and Humanities teachers are most likely to be 'definitely' involved in the development of their school's oracy provision, whilst maths and science teachers are least likely to be 'definitely' involved.

Anxiety/nervousness by key stage



At the same time, as students enter secondary education, their awareness of the complexities – and confidence in delivery – of classroom talk is increasingly seen as a barrier to effective oracy. If 'reading and writing floats on a sea of talk' then neither will float if students are unwilling to express themselves orally.

'Research reveals that an explicit focus on oracy fosters confidence, academically and socially and emotionally. This suggests that oracy education is particularly important at transition when students are adapting to a new social environment and academic challenge...There is a 'quantitative and qualitative step change in language'2 at secondary school, when compared to primary school, which may partly explain the 'academic dip' reported by many teachers at transition' [

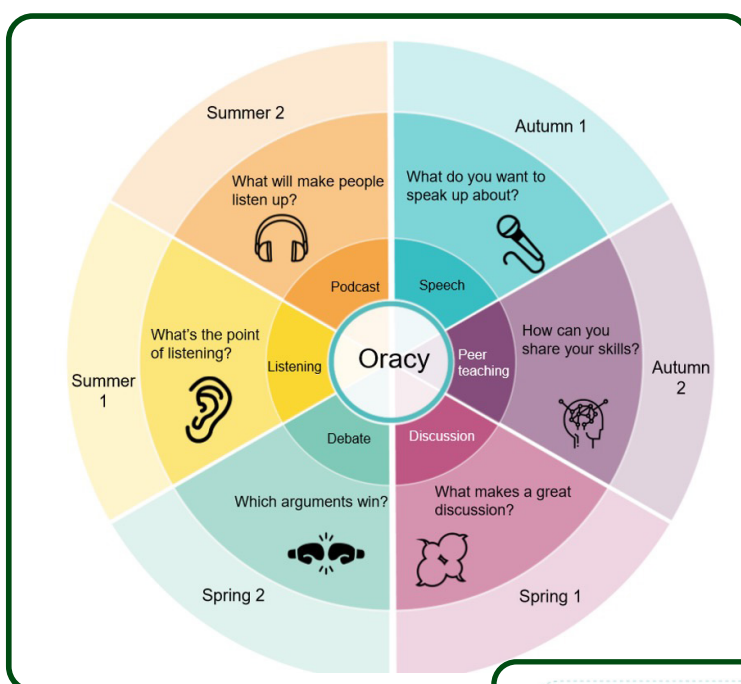
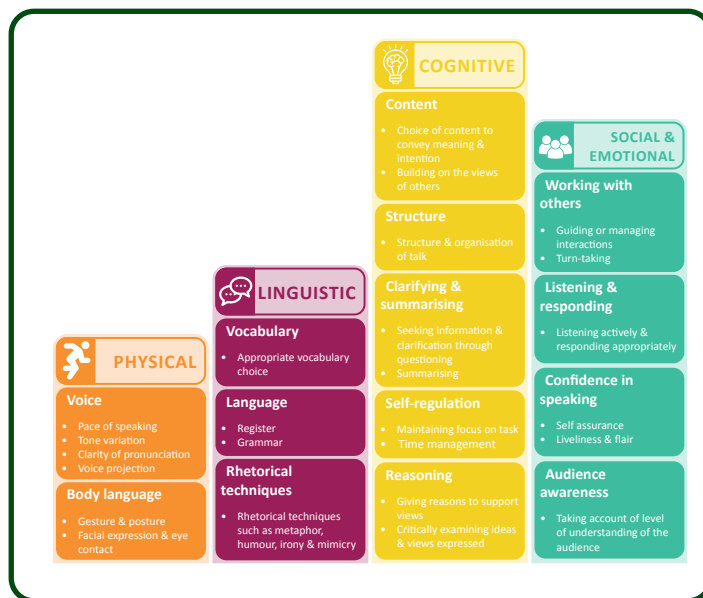
Deignan, A., Candarli, D., Oxley, F. 2023. The Linguistic Challenge of the Transition to Secondary School: A Corpus Study of Academic Language. Routledge: London. P. 12].

Oracy within not alongside curriculum?

The second example here looks at how you can tangibly link Oracy into a scheme of work through different forms of reception from podcasts to peer teaching. James Mannion sums up why we need these opportunities here:

In some ways, oracy is similar. For example, young people (and many adults) often find it incredibly difficult and anxiety-inducing to stand at the front of the room and deliver a speech. And experts do make this look easy. We could say the same of other aspects of oracy such as debating, chairing a meeting or making small talk with a stranger at a bus stop.

But there is a key difference as well. I can't ride a unicycle, paint with oils or plaster a wall – but I don't feel that my life is particularly diminished by my inability to do these things.



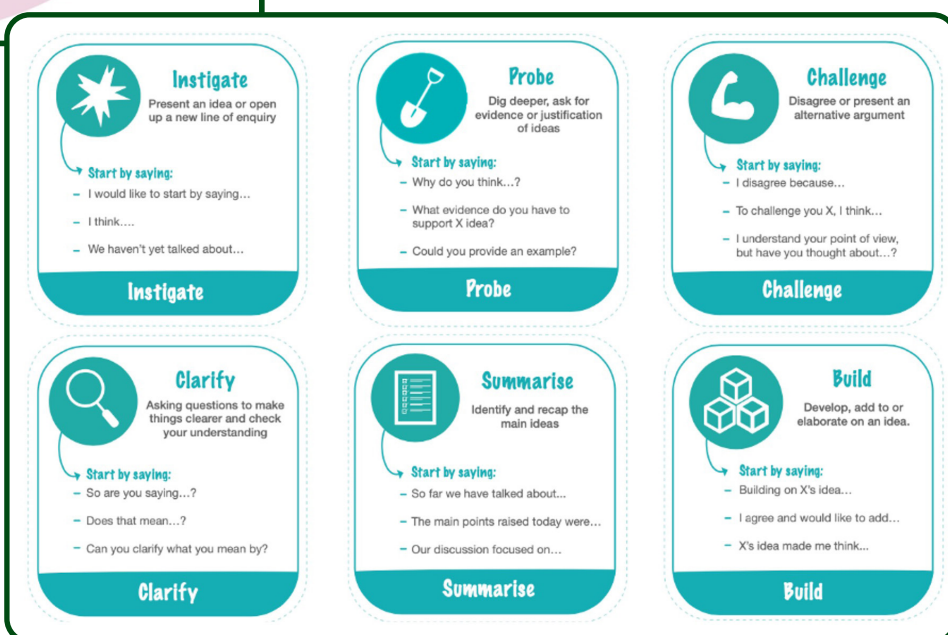
Also, this inability is a choice – I have no doubt that I could learn to do these things if I wanted to, or at least to get better at them than I am now.

In contrast, if you don't learn how to speak and listen effectively in a range of contexts, this will adversely affect you for the rest of your life in a variety of ways. It will affect the "first impressions" people form of you. It will determine whether you shine or clam up in an interview. It will affect your ability to make friends, to meet romantic partners, to establish and sustain healthy relationships with friends and family members. It will affect your ability to work with others, to persuade people of something they have never considered before, or to resolve or de-escalate conflicts – to name just a few. [\[The transformative power of oracy - ORACY CAMBRIDGE\]](#)

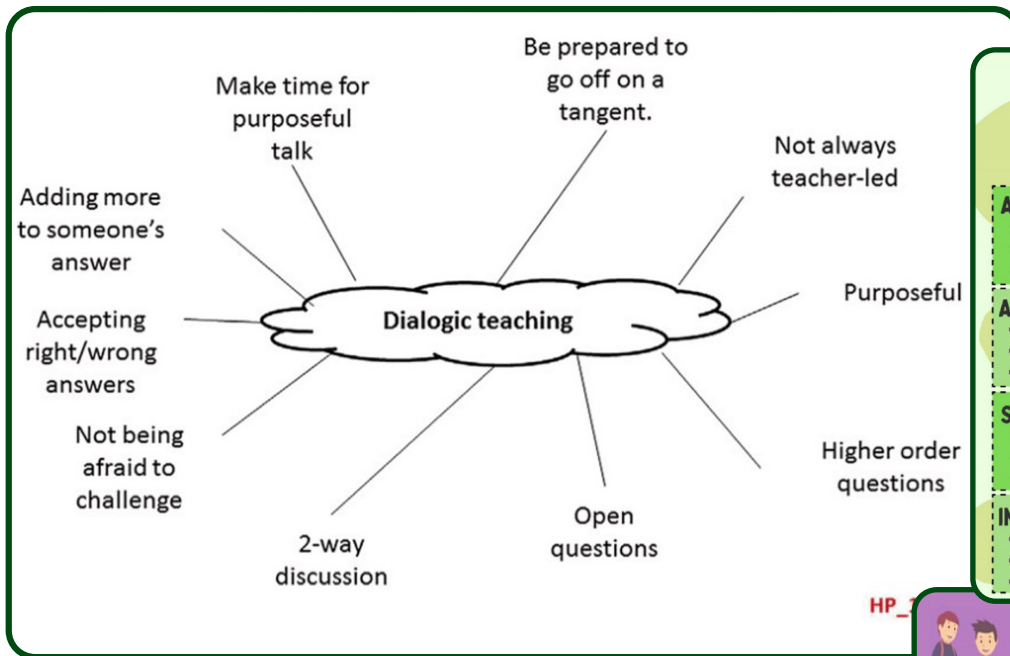
Putting this into practice: what different types of talk can we use in class?

'We need to define oracy more precisely. Is it speaking and listening, 'dialogic talk', 'exploratory talk', 'accountable talk'?

Teachers, and school needs, can best define and explain oracy through examples (it's just good learning, right?). This is tricky with oracy, as every teacher already does it – to varying degrees – so it is ripe for fuzzy understanding and very little meaningful change to classroom practices.



There is real value in lots of existing practices that could be described under the oracy umbrella. 'Think-pair-share', 'cold calling', debating, classroom discussion, or 'book talk' can all benefit learning. They need to be sharply, scaffolded and supported, otherwise any whole school focus can quickly devolve into a few tricks being displayed during observations.



ACCOUNTABLE TALK

Higher-Order Thinking & Academic Conversations

| | |
|--|--|
| AFFIRM <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks for explaining that... • That's a great point... • I like the way you... | CONNECT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That makes me think of... • That reminds me of... • I can relate to that because... |
| AGREE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I agree with...because... • I like what...said because... • I agree with...but... | DISAGREE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I disagree because... • I'm not sure I agree with...because... • That idea doesn't seem to fit with... |
| SUMMARIZE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So far, we've said... • We decided that... • We concluded... | SUPPORT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you know that? • Where is that in the text? • Can you give an example? |
| INQUIRE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about... • Can I ask...a question about... • What are your thoughts on... | CLARIFY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you explain that again? • What do you mean when you say... • I don't understand what you mean when you say... |

As pupils progress through school, the academic demands of various disciplines become more demanding and specific. Vocabulary, reading and writing becomes highly specialised, and communication becomes reliant on rare knowledge and ways of working. This means we may need to resist formulaic whole school approaches, and instead respect approaches to communication and oracy that best fit the curriculum.

We need to ensure oracy supports pupils' learning, whilst maintaining clear parameters of classroom control for teachers. We can ask: will it work with a really challenging class on a wet Friday afternoon in November?' [\[Questions about oracy \(theconfidentteacher.com\)\]](#)

HOW CAN I USE Exploratory Talk?

I can agree and disagree with my peers and build upon others ideas

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| WAYS TO ADD TO ANOTHER PERSON'S IDEA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd like to add to what you said about... • That's a great point about... and also... • I like what you said about... and I wonder... • I agree with... because... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I also think... • I'd like to add... | WAYS TO DISAGREE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That's one way to think about it, however... • I agree with the part about... but, I disagree because... • You could look at that another way, perhaps consider... • I disagree with... because... • I see it differently because... | WAYS TO SUMMARISE OR CLARIFY A QUESTION OR IDEA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So are you saying that...? • I'm not sure what you meant by...? • Can you tell me more about...? • So what happened was... is that right? • I think you are saying that... is that correct? |
|--|--|--|



Click the image of Professor Neil Mercer to watch his video 'Oracy Cambridge: The power of talk'

Further reading:

- Leading resource hub for Oracy, 'Voice21' produced this impact report in 2021: [Voice21-Impact-Report-2023-v21-web-1.pdf](#)
- PDF on different types of talk from the National Literacy Trust, found here: [Microsoft Word - Different types of interactive talk.docx \(thomastallisschool.com\)](#)
- Article on exploratory talk from Structural Learning: [Exploratory Talk \(structural-learning.com\)](#)

Check out our Library resources:

[Recommended Reading for KS3](#) | [Challenging Reading for KS3](#) | [A Guide to Support Reading at Home for Parents](#)