

OUTSTANDING TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

**FINAL REPORT ON THE OTLA PHASE 6 (ENGLISH) PROJECT -
DEVELOPING ORACY SKILLS**

Harlow College

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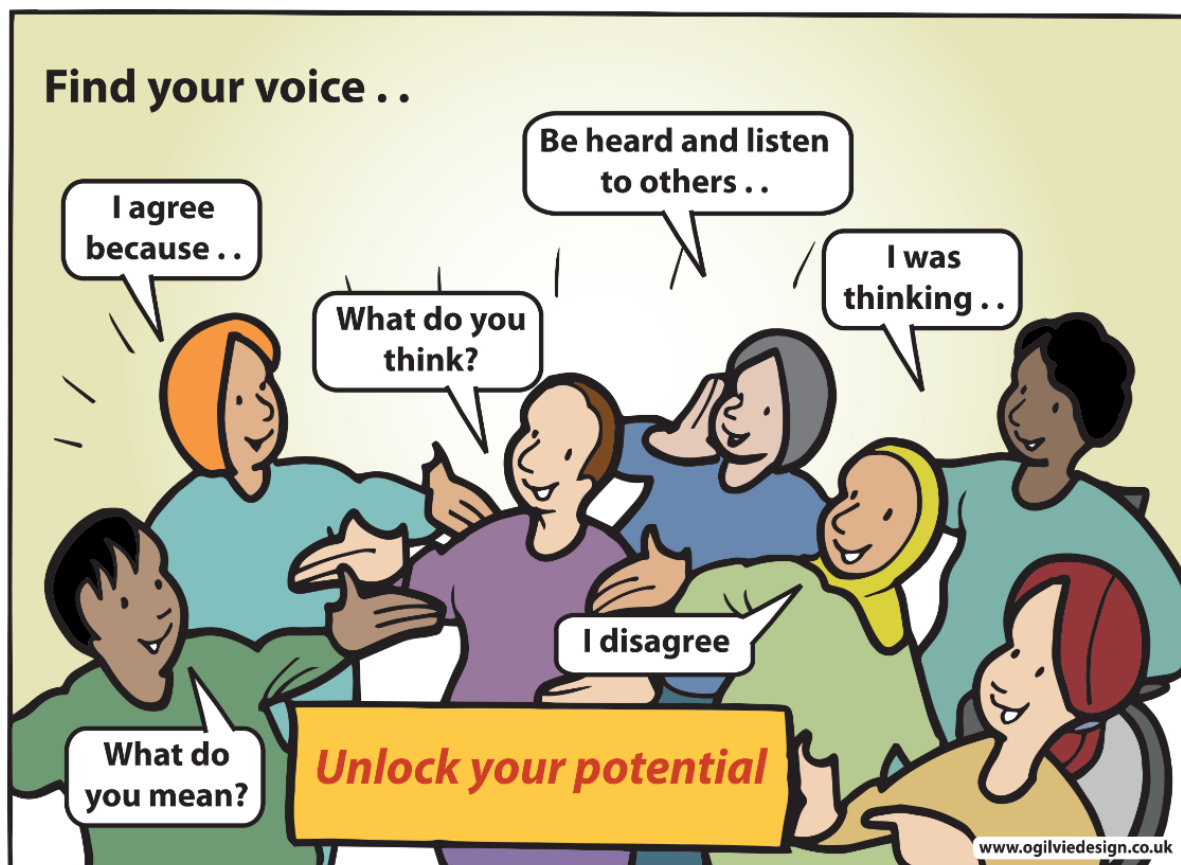
That Reading Thing
for people who don't know they can

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Final Report - Developing Oracy Skills

Harlow College



This project is based on my own CPD experience with School 21 where I developed my knowledge and understanding of oracy-based approaches to Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and was also completely enthused by the ideas and practices demonstrated by learners and staff.

Summary

Having seen children confidently articulating their thoughts and ideas with expertise and confidence clearly demonstrated to me how having effective oracy skills can empower, motivate and inspire young people – literally changing lives. What I came to understand is that oracy – the ability to reason, respond, and explain yourself in speech – needs to be afforded the same priority and value as reading and writing, not just seen as an add-on, or limited to a Functional Skills requirement.

Harlow is an area with high levels of deprivation. Learners from this area leave school with a lower GCSE grade profile than the UK average. The college also has a large proportion of children looked after, and/or studying English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, because of the large number of asylum seekers in the surrounding areas.

Getting our learners to speak, to engage with the world as individuals with something to say, is incredibly important. Not just for passing exams, but for inclusion, equality and diversity!

Rationale

One of the ongoing difficulties we face involves trying to enrich the programme beyond the traditional exam focus, embed stretch and challenge opportunities, and provide learners in a post-16 setting (vocational and academic) clear links to employability. These issues have been identified in learner feedback, walkthroughs, our inspection report (Ofsted, 2019) and, as a consequence, in our own SAR. Research from the government's National curriculum review panel (James et al, 2011) shows that there is a direct relationship between dialogic teaching and improved individual and collective academic outcomes.

A recently published report (Jay et al, 2017) shows that spending more class time on meaningful dialogue that encourages learners to reason, discuss, speculate, argue and explain can improve English results. Furthermore, the development of oracy at curriculum level through a talk-centred approach can have a *"pronounced effect on achievement across the curriculum, as well as enhancing learners' eloquence, confidence and wellbeing"* (Mercer et al, 2020).

In addressing the above, we believe that developing learners' ability to critically engage with texts, ideas, and the ideas of others through dialogic approaches can have significant benefits in terms of attainment, retention and progression.

Approach

Having been inspired by the work of Voice 21 and School 21 we spent time deciding which oracy strategies and resources could be adapted and implemented in a Post-16 setting with learners who find it challenging to voice opinions or explain ideas. We chose 2 groups to work with, a GCSE resit group from Hairdressing and Beauty, and a first year A Level Literature group.

What we noticed from the outset is that whilst the A Level learners had a wider range of vocabulary, and subject specific terminology (as well as the confidence of having passed their GCSE English, unlike the resitters) they were still reluctant and unwilling to articulate their ideas through spoken language

Given the duration of the project, we discussed a range of possible approaches that could be embedded quickly and that would be the least onerous in terms of adaptation, application, and assessment (of the learners and the strategy itself). We also wanted to choose strategies that could be used across both GCSE English Language and A Level English Literature, the two subjects we teach.

We wanted the learners to feel confident and consider themselves to be part of an exciting journey of discovery. The findings of our questionnaire at the beginning of the project showed that all the learners considered oracy to be important and wanted to be better at it.

We tried to apply and be aware of the Four Strands within The Oracy Framework used in Voice 21 (Figure 2d-1) in all of our classroom strategies, namely:

- Physical (voice and body language)
- Linguistic (vocab, language, rhetorical techniques)
- Cognitive (content, structure, clarifying and summarising and reasoning)
- Social and Emotional (working with others, listening and responding, confidence in speaking, audience awareness).

However, there was also an understanding that these were aspirational goals to be achieved across a far longer period of time.

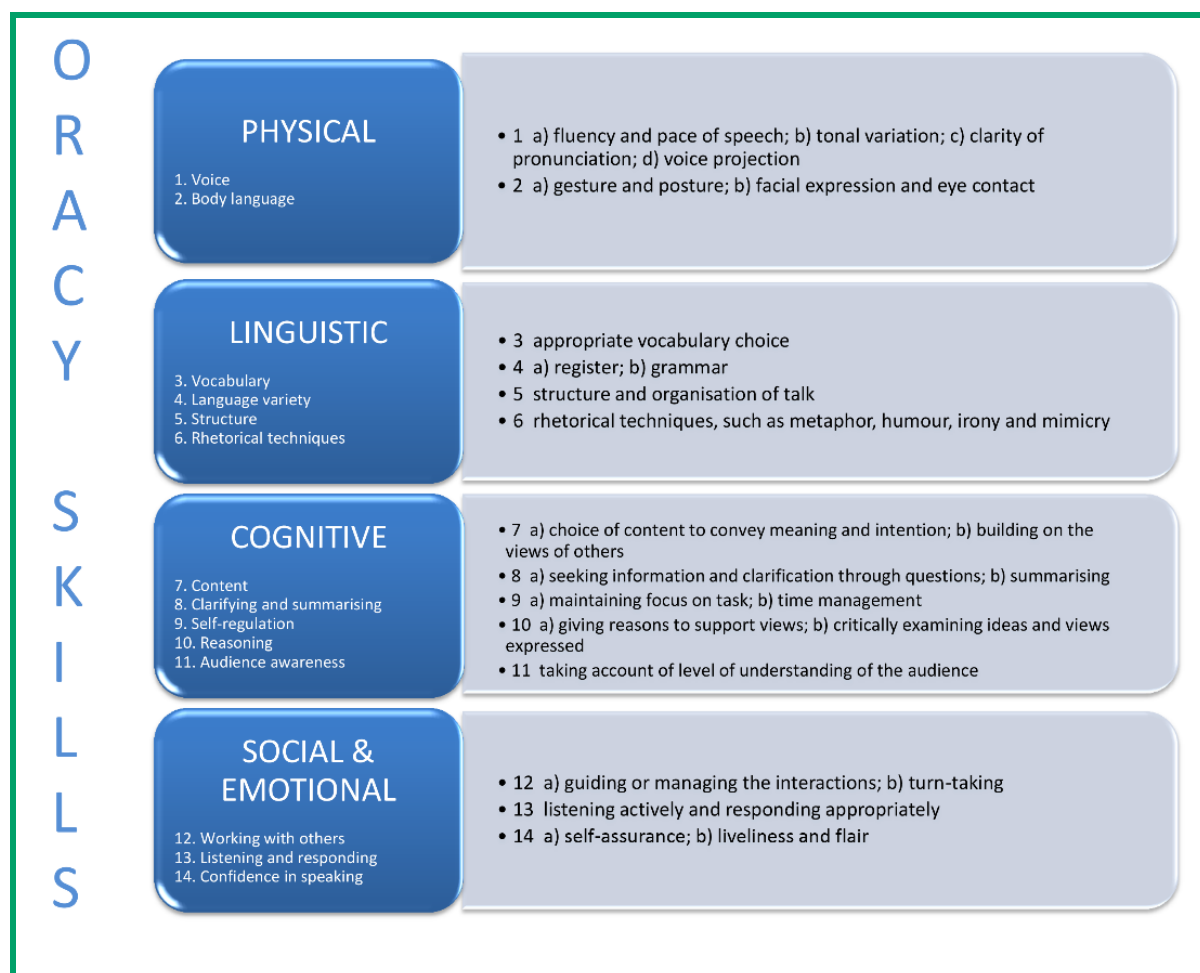
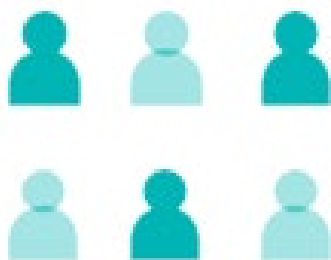


Figure 2d-1: Oracy Skills Framework

Professional learning: Evidence of changes in teaching, learning and assessment practices

From the outset we made a deliberate decision to actively encourage talk by being conscious of talking as an educational resource. In terms of delivery, we prioritised oracy as an activity before the writing tasks – whatever we were doing in class had to be discussed, explained, or described. The 'traverse' strategy (Figure 2d-2) was used to get the learners talking about anything at first and for short bursts of time. This proved successful with the learners who got fully involved – one teacher commented that she had been trying all year to get one learner to speak without success!

Traverse grouping



Learners stand in two parallel lines opposite a speaking partner – learners are given a specific topic and time to talk to their partner depending on the group and activity. Once the time is up, a person from one end of the line moves to the other so that partners are always new to each other. This can be used as an icebreaker, warm up activity, or to assess learners' knowledge and understanding.

Figure 2d-2: Traverse strategy

Time was gradually extended and the topics changed in-line with the GCSE or A Level assessments. As the weeks progressed, and as a way of scaffolding responses to support learners, we used PETER prompt cards (Point, Evidence, Technique, Explain, Reflect) to focus on paper 1, question 5 for GCSE English language– something that the learners were familiar with. Learners really enjoyed progressing through the coloured cards, recognising the differences between the skills for each stage, and making the activity a bit of a competition.

In our classroom activities we gave learners longer to consider their ideas; we encouraged listening – no interruptions – to build on the answers of others. By changing the groupings of the tables (changed according to learners' feedback) this allowed for cross class/group talk. In the A level group, the tables were always arranged in a horseshoe shape so that learners were able to see and listen to the contributions of one another more effectively, as well as taking into account the 4 strands. By the 4th week, learners were moving tables around before I even got into the room. What we found from implementing the strategies was that the learners were becoming used to using speaking as a strategy to engage with learning, knowledge and understanding; as teachers we were able to assess their knowledge and understanding more quickly. The classroom felt more dynamic and responsive.

Evidence of improved collaboration and changes in organisational practices

We held regular meetings to discuss the outcomes of our oracy approach to Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and found a new confidence and excitement about how this approach could positively influence our learners. We also recognised that oracy is not a quick fix. We could see that some learners were developing their oracy skills across the weeks: they were talking for longer with greater focus, were more confident and were prepared to talk through ideas with others. However, we realised that for oracy to have a meaningful impact and see real change in our learners would require a buy in, a strategic and cultural shift that can be achieved only through practitioners having the understanding of how oracy can positively impact on learners' progression. The direct participants in the project have therefore

taken the opportunity for professional learning through external training offered through Voice 21, The National Oracy Pioneers programme, and attendance at School 21 Great Oracy Exhibition.

Based on our professional experience, classroom practice, and reflection, we feel passionately that learners can benefit from the inclusion of our oracy project in our curriculum planning. Although Functional Skills groups weren't directly involved in the project, we can see that oracy will have a huge impact in enabling learners to pass their Speaking and Listening through increased confidence. As an area that supports most of the programmes in the college, we believe that strong oracy skills will have a positive impact on learners' progression, confidence and motivation. We initially intend to work collaboratively with the English team to disseminate our findings, share practice and embed oracy in our curriculum planning for next year. The OTLA project is already identified in the Harlow College's QIP as a means of improving achievement and retention, with possible collaborative CPD opportunities to expand the use of oracy across college.

Evidence of improvement in learners' achievements, retention and progression

Given the starting point for our learners, evidence of improvement with a skill like oracy is difficult to track over such a short space of time. Oracy is not a single skill, and is powerfully intertwined with learner's self-esteem, self-efficacy, and sense of place in the world. For our learners, oracy (the capacity to speak out), makes you visible, and many of our GCSE and our Level 3 learners, feel uncomfortable about this. However, the results of our learner questionnaire, collated at the start of the project, confirmed our belief in the need for good oracy skills. 78% felt that they wanted to speak, but didn't have the confidence, 87% wanted to feel more confident in verbalising their ideas, and 75% considered that being able to explain yourself helped with their learning. At the end of the project we asked the learners to reflect on their experience of a more oracy-based classroom. Their responses were mostly positive to neutral, with no negative feedback.

The learners said oracy:

"helped boost my confidence"

"it helped me speak up to other people"

"It definitely helped my social skills...and share my ideas"

"I feel that the oracy project helped me with my social communication with others. In particular, the writing task."

From a professional stance, we are convinced by the positive impact oracy has had on our learners and classroom, and intend to invest time and effort in continued planning and research.

Learning from this project

We have found that our focus on developing oracy skills has had a positive impact on Teaching, Learning and Assessment. However, we also strongly believe that strategies need to be carefully considered, and planned for to maximise its potential in the classroom. We will be reviewing these at the end of the year, and modifying/creating our own resources to meet the specific needs of our learners.

A focus on oracy skills can change the dynamics and interactions of a classroom, making it more student led. However, oracy cannot be explored only by individual teachers; it needs the support, enthusiasm and commitment of the whole team.

Of the resources we used, some were more effective than others; the A level learners didn't like the discussion cards as they thought that they inhibited their responses and offered too many choices. Some oracy techniques need to be streamlined to allow for the time restraints of lessons. There were too many colour-coded cards to work through with the learners; some were ambiguous and needed modelling, or refining.

Putting into place our oracy skills programme several weeks into the term meant there was some work to do to convince the learners of its relevance, and for them to be less resistant. It needs to be planned for, and for teachers to be confident in its implementation from the start of the academic year, so that oracy skills are accepted as a key element in the culture of the programme/s.

In order to achieve results, oracy skills development should be planned for. It should be an active part of every lesson, for every learner, and afforded the same value as reading and writing. Oracy should not be seen as a bolt-on to reading and writing, which is often shown by the struggle to complete the speaking and listening component of the Functional Skills assessments. It is a central aspect of the curriculum.

Appendix 1 - Specific strategies used in the classroom

Groupings - Traverse grouping



Learners stand in two parallel lines opposite a speaking partner – learners are given a specific topic and time to talk to their partner depending on the group and activity. Once the time is up, a person from one end of the line moves to the other so that partners are always new to each other. This can be used as an icebreaker, warm up activity, or to assess learners' knowledge and understanding.

Table set ups

Table set ups – deliberate management of tables to encourage speaking and listening. Range of patterns set up for GCSE across the weeks. A Level maintained U-shaped arrangement. Tables moved at the beginning of every session, and put back at end (attached).

Oracy prompt cards GCSE

1. To support responses to GCSE AQA Paper 1 question 5 using the DROP method (triple, drop, shift, zoom, zoom out) and PETER. This method has 5 components, so used with groups of 5 having to verbalise their explanation of their specific part working from an image.
2. Coloured progression cards using adaptation of V21 four strands (attached).

We used these cards to promote oracy in the classroom, starting from the basic to the more complex. We also wanted to begin to engage with the four strands across the weeks, building on the learners' confidence, whilst at the same time recognising that given the duration of the project, this would probably not be successful.

Weeks 1-3, Yellow - Encouraging communication without specific expectations, to build confidence and using their voice and body language positively.

Weeks 4-7, Orange - (Cognitive and Linguistic) developing and building of processes of thought and expanding using terminology with confidence.

Weeks 8-10, Green - Green slides – (Cognitive, Linguistic, Physical and Social) Confidence in speaking, listening and engaging with others. Confidently summarising, arguing a point, expanding vocabulary with reasoning with correct terminology usage with explanations.

Oracy prompt cards A Level

Class discussion using sentence starters and roles with a group. Agree, Build, Challenge and Instigate. Each role has a range of sentence starters for the learner to select in order to support them with articulating a specific response, and a way to begin (attached).

Appendix 2 – Discussion cards

<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>I have a similar opinion to ... because...</p>	<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>I have a similar opinion to ... because...</p>
<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>It see it in the same way as ... because ...</p>	<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>It see it in the same way as ... because ...</p>
<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>I would like to echo what ... said because ...</p>	<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>I would like to echo what ... said because ...</p>
<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>I support ... because ...</p>	<p><u>AGREE</u></p> <p>I agree with ... because ...</p> <p>I support ... because ...</p>

<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what... said...</p> <p>Linking to what ... said, I would like to add...</p>	<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what... said...</p> <p>Linking to what ... said, I would like to add...</p>
<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what... said...</p> <p>I had a similar thought to ... which is ...</p>	<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what... said...</p> <p>I had a similar thought to ... which is ...</p>
<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what... said...</p> <p>Building on what ... said, I think ...</p>	<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what... said...</p> <p>Building on what ... said, I think ...</p>
<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what ... said...</p> <p>I would like to add to what ... said. I think ...</p>	<p><u>BUILD</u></p> <p>I would like to build on what ... said...</p> <p>I would like to add to what ... said. I think ...</p>

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I don't see eye to eye with ...
on this because ...

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I don't see eye to eye with ...
on this because ...

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I have a different opinion to ...
because ...

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I have a different opinion ...
because ...

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I hear what ... is saying, but I
think ...

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I hear what ... is saying, but I
think ...

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I have a very different opinion
to ... because ...

CHALLENGE

I disagree with ... because ...

I have a very different opinion
to ... because ...

<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>I would like to start by saying ...</p>	<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>I would like to start by saying ...</p>
<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>I think we should start by thinking about ...</p>	<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>I think we should start by thinking about ...</p>
<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>To begin with, let's talk about ...</p>	<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>To begin with, let's talk about ...</p>
<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>I think the first thing we need to consider is ...</p>	<p><u>INSTIGATE</u></p> <p>I think ... because ...</p> <p>I think the first thing we need to consider is ...</p>

Appendix 3 – Groupings



Groupings



Nest

Students stand apart and whisper their ideas to themselves



Pairs

Two students talking together



Trios

Three students talking with each other. Two students have a discussion while the third observes then summarises and critiques



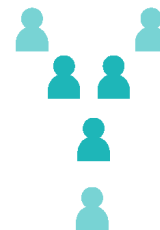
Traverse

Pupils stand in two parallel lines opposite a speaking partner.



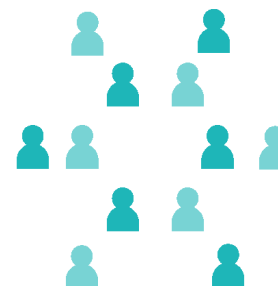
Circle (of 6 to 12 students)

A group of six students face each other in a circle. Pupils step inside the circle individually and speak to the group, considering their audience, maintaining good eye contact and using appropriate body language.



Onion

Students form an inner and outer circle. Up to six pupils stand back-to-back in the inner circle, with each facing a partner on the outer circle.



Coaching Onion/Fishbowl

A coaching onion is a useful tool for switching discussion partners as pupils on the inner circle can rotate to face someone new. It also allows students to contribute ideas to a larger group without worrying about speaking to them all at once.

A fishbowl enables the outer circle to observe the inner circle's discussion.

Appendix 4 – Oracy prompt cards



The Four Strands

Cognitive

The deliberate application of thought to what you're saying

Linguistic

Knowing which words and phrases to use, and using them

Physical

Making yourself heard, using your voice and body as an instrument

Social

Engaging with the people around you; knowing you have the right to speak

Yellow slides - Encouraging communication without specific expectations to build confidence and using their voice and body language positively.

Oracy framework

- Fluency & pace of speech
- Tonal variation
- Clarity of pronunciation
- Voice projection
- Gesture & posture
- Facial expression & eye contact

Orange slides Focus on (Cognitive and Linguistic) Developing and building of processes of thought and expanding using terminology with confidence.

Oracy framework

- Appropriate vocabulary choice
- Register/Grammar
- Rhetorical techniques such as metaphor/humour,
- Summarising

Green slides - confidence in speaking, listening and engaging with others. Confidently summarising, arguing a point, expanding vocabulary with reasoning and correct terminology usage with explanations.

Oracy framework

- Guiding or managing interactions
- Turn-taking Listening actively & responding appropriately
- Self-assurance
- Liveliness & flair
- Taking account of level of understanding of the audience

What have you have learnt today?

What has been the purpose of our lesson today?

How might you tell someone at home what you have learnt today?

Who might use what we have learnt today in their daily lives?

How could you improve your learning next lesson?

Name one strength and one weaknesses of this lesson?

One thing you have done today and identify how you could do it better

What knowledge have you gained this lesson?

How have you interacted with your peers this lesson?

What changes might you make next lesson to how you work?

If you were to go back in time and start today's lesson again, what would you change

How did you feel at the beginning, middle, and end of the lesson?

How might you work differently next lesson in order to improve your use of language devices?

What have you done well this lesson?

What is the most important thing we have learnt today

Explain one key thing you have learnt today?

Explain one thing you know now, that you did not know at the start of the lesson?

How you will use what you have learnt today?

How have you worked today?
Why was this the best way?

Explain

How might you use the knowledge you have gained this lesson, in the future?

Explain

How have you used your existing skills and knowledge in today's lesson?

Go Back

What evidence do you have to SHOW what you have learnt today?

Compare what you know now with what you knew at the start of the lesson.

How is it different?

To what extent do you feel what we have learnt today is useful? Why?

Summarise in 2 sentences of what you have learnt today.

In pairs, assess your work.

Take it in turns to discuss one strength and one area for improvement in your work, and in that of your partner.

Explain how your understanding changed, this lesson?
Why is this?

Summarise three things have you learnt today?

What is the most important thing you have learnt today?

Explain why is it most important?

What do you need to do now as a result of what we have learnt today?

Explain how will you do this?

Explain what can you do now, that you could not do at the start of the lesson?

Explain how today's lesson altered
your knowledge or understanding?
How?

Explain why you think we have studied
what we have, this lesson?
How will it help you?

Explain in what way you might use
your learning from today's lesson, in
your future employment or study?

If you were going to teach this lesson to
fellow student, what would you identify as
the key things they would need to know?

Explain what connections can you
make between today's learning
and what we have studied
previously?

Explain how today's learning connects
to what you already know?

Explain a skill you used during this lesson?
How was this important?

Explain what skills have you improved this lesson?
How have you improved them?

Explain
What strengths and weaknesses have you seen in yourself this lesson?

Compare how today's lesson made you feel compared to last lesson?

To what extent do you feel you have engaged with the lesson today? Why?

To what extent do you feel you have learnt in today's lesson?
Why?

To what extent do you feel you
have (or have not) learnt this
lesson?
Why?

Explain how you could have done
things differently this lesson?

What affect might that have had?

Swap your work with a partner and
assess it:
Explain to them what have they done
well?
How might they improve?

Explain what strengths have you
shown in today's lesson?

What areas for improvement can
you find?

Explain what difficulties have you
encountered today?

How have you overcome them?

Assess your learning using 'Knows'
from the session.

Explain how you met them?

What key question could you ask to find out whether someone has understood today's lesson?

[Go Back](#)

Write three key questions which you think people in the class should be able to answer, based on today's lesson.

When ready, go and ask 3 people your questions.

Choose three keywords we have used this lesson.

Write a definition for each and then explain it to the rest of the class.

Compare what you have learnt this lesson with what you learnt last lesson.

How is it similar?

How is it different?

In pairs, take it in turns to try and talk for 30 seconds about today's topic without pausing or repeating yourself.

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