The Oracy for Employability Toolkit

Student Learning Pack



voice 21

ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Contents

1. Getting started 3

3. Workshop overview 7

4. Workshop 1: Participating Voices 8

5. Workshop 2: Stories of Self 12

6. Workshop 3: Group Discussion 13

7. Reflection 16

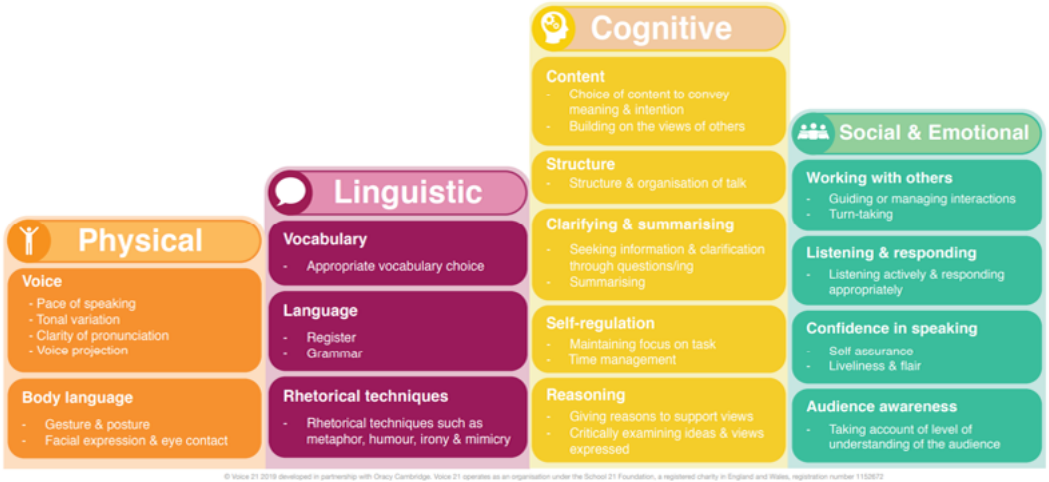
8. What's next? 19

Getting started

What is oracy?

Oracy is articulating ideas, developing understanding and engaging with others through speaking, listening and communication.

The Oracy Education Commission (2024)[1]



This is the Oracy Framework[2]. It includes lots of different skills that help us to become confident speakers, listeners and communicators and shape how we engage with the world around us.

We use different skills depending on:

Our **context**
(the situation we are in)

Our **audience**
(who we are communicating with)

The **purpose** of talking
(why we are communicating)



When would I use the skills from the Oracy Framework?

Informal example



Context
On the bus



Audience
A group of my friends



Purpose
To entertain (telling a joke)

In this example, we might use the following oracy skills:



Physical: Using facial expressions to make my friends laugh



Linguistic: Making careful choices about the words or phrases I use to tell the joke



Cognitive: Sequencing the narrative of the joke



Social and emotional: Being aware of whether my friends liked the joke

Formal example:



Context
In college



Audience
My college tutor



Purpose
To explain (my work experience application)



Think: Look at the Oracy Framework. In this formal example, which skills from the Oracy Framework might you use?



Physical:



Linguistic:



Cognitive:



Social and emotional:

How do I feel about my oracy and employability skills?

This Oracy for Employability Toolkit will help you to strengthen your oracy skills and build your confidence to use your voice in lots of different situations

Reflection 1

Take a moment to think about what you understand about employability. It's ok if you can't answer these questions yet.

- What does 'career-readiness' or 'employability' mean to you?
- How might oracy skills relate to employability?

Reflection 2

Look at the different contexts for talking below. For each one, rate how confident you feel from 1 to 3 (1 = not confident, 3 = very confident).

- ☐ Telling people about myself (for example at an interview)
- ☐ Talking on the phone or on a video call (for example to book a medical appointment)
- ☐ Talking with a group of people (for example discussing a problem with colleagues)
- ☐ Talking with someone senior (such as a tutor or a manager)
- ☐ Talking to a larger audience (for example to give a presentation)
- ☐ Talking to someone I don't know (such as a customer)

Look at your confidence ratings. Notice the situations where you feel confident talking and those where you feel less confident.

Reflection 3

Before starting the workshop series, take some time to think about your past experiences with oracy. What opportunities have you had to speak…



In different contexts (for example in school, at home, or at work)?



For different audiences* (familiar and unfamiliar, small or large)?



For different purposes (for example 'to explain' or 'to question')?

*an audience can be as small as one person (when we practise speaking alone, we are an audience of one).

Taking part in the workshops: Guidelines for discussion

It is important that you feel comfortable to take part and share your thoughts and opinions. Your ideas are valid and are valued by your tutors and peers. Use these guidelines to help you during each workshop. The more you participate, the more you will gain from each activity.

Discuss openly

Share your ideas and opinions – there is no right or wrong way to contribute.

Collaborate respectfully

Listen carefully to what others have to say, and be mindful of how you respond to them.

Engage fully

Try to participate as much as possible – the more you put in, the more you get out.

Feedback honestly

Share what you think about the workshops with your tutor: what are you enjoying, and what are you finding challenging?



Workshop series overview



This workshop series is all about helping you to develop your speaking, listening and communication skills to prepare you for what comes next after school and college. You'll take part in experiences that encourage you to explore how to use your voice with confidence in different situations.

Instead of just learning a checklist of "employability skills," you'll have the chance to think about what being employable actually means to you – your goals, your choices, and the steps you can take next.

The workshop series is organised in three sections:

Participating Voices

In this workshop, you will explore the link between language and identity, and the choices you can make in different talk

Stories of Self

In this workshop, you will uncover how you can tell compelling stories about yourself and your experiences, and how this can be mobilised in an interview context

Group Discussion

In this workshop, you will deepen your understanding of what an effective group discussion looks and sounds like, including how to reflect on and strengthen specific oracy skills.

Workshop 1: Participating Voices

In this workshop, you will explore the following questions:

- ✔ How is oracy used in the wider world?
- ✔ How are language and identity linked?
- ✔ Which 'voices' can I draw upon to participate in different conversations?



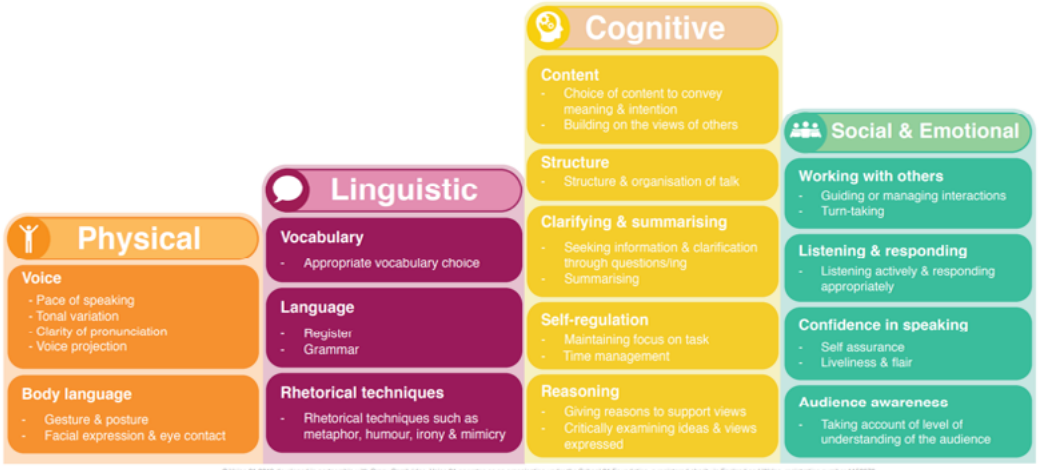
Oracy in the wider world

Why is this important?

Oracy skills are used by everyone all of the time – whether they realise it or not. The purpose of this workshop is to show you the importance of oracy and how oracy skills can be used deliberately to help you become a confident communicator in different situations, for different purposes and with different audiences.

TOP TIP

Use the **Oracy Framework** to adapt the way you communicate for specific contexts, purposes and audiences, enabling you to make considered and deliberate choices about which oracy skills you will use and why you will use them.



Our participating voices

Why is this important?

In order to communicate effectively in different situations, it is important to reflect on how you choose to make use of your voice. The way you communicate can change depending on who you are talking to and why. Learning about this helps you understand how your identity can shift in different situations and how you can use different 'voices' to your advantage. This means making thoughtful choices about the oracy skills you use and how you take part in different conversations.

You could reflect on the different identities we take on, and how our language choices might change as a result.

Influencing voice
Motivate others, foster connection, influence change

Storytelling voice
Tell a compelling story about yourself and your experiences

Expert voice
Share personal expertise with others to building their knowledge and understanding

TOP TIP

Take time to consider which 'voice' you might use in different situations. You can adapt your oracy skills to use these different ways of communicating in different situations.

Voices in action: being tactical

Why is this important?

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations where it can be difficult to know what to say or how to say it. Conversational skills can seem complicated, so learning about different 'moves' for talk can help you to make strategic decisions about how you participate in discussions with confidence.



The Talk Tactics are scaffolds that show you different ways you *could* contribute to a discussion. Using your natural ways of speaking is always best, but sometimes you might need a bit of inspiration.

TOP TIP

Use the **Talk Tactics** flexibly – there is no right or wrong way to speak, so take time to think about how you would like to contribute to a discussion.

Workshop 1 next steps:

- Consider when and where you can see yourself using your different 'voices'.
- Think about the purpose of using different voices, both now and in the future.
- Experiment with different 'tactical' ways of engaging in conversations.

Workshop 2: Stories of self

In this workshop, you will explore the following questions:

- ✔ **What does it mean to listen actively, and why is this important?**
- ✔ **How can I use the Oracy Framework to tell compelling stories about myself and my experiences?**
- ✔ **How can the 'storyteller voice' be used to support my employability?**



Our listening skills

Why is this important?

Listening is a key part of oracy – without it, we cannot communicate effectively. When we listen actively, we signal to the speaker that they are heard, respected and valued. Exploring the oracy skills involved in active listening will help you to build meaningful connections with the people around you.

'Active listening' means consciously choosing to listen to and understand someone else so that you can respond to them in a thoughtful way

TOP TIP

Listening is so much more than simply facing the speaker or nodding (our physical oracy skills). Use the **Listening Wheel** to identify other oracy skills that you can use to demonstrate active listening and make the speaker feel valued.



Exploring Stories of Self

Why is this important?

We all tell stories about ourselves and our experiences, but the way we tell a story depends on who we are talking to, the situation we are in, and the reason for telling the story in the first place. This means we need to adapt our speaking and listening skills. When you understand how oracy skills help you share your experiences, you can use them confidently in real-life situations, such as job interviews.

Storytelling voice

Tell a compelling story about yourself and your experiences

TOP TIP

Before telling a story about yourself, consider the **purpose** for talk and who your **audience** will be. Once you know this, you can tailor your oracy skills to suit the **context** for talk.

Context
(the situation we are in)

Audience
(who we are communicating with)

Purpose
(why we are communicating)

Using stories in interviews

Why is this important?

Interviews are necessary to enter higher education and employment, but many people find them nerve-wracking and don't feel prepared. Your oracy skills are the key to confidence – use them to practise how you share personal stories in formal contexts, and reflect on these experiences to help you improve for the future.

Practising how you tell your story for an interview helps to build your confidence by experimenting with your oracy skills in a safe space. Feeling those 'interview nerves' in a mock situation builds resilience, so when the real interview comes, you're better prepared.

TOP TIP

Situation
Task
Action
Result

Use the **STAR framework** to support your answers to questions during an interview. You could also prepare some interview-style questions to practise with such as:

- What motivated you to apply for this job?
- Tell us about a time when you have worked well in a team?
- Tell us about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills?
- Describe a challenge you've faced in the past and how you handled it.

Our stories of self

Why is this important?

Storytelling isn't only for formal situations like interviews. We also share personal stories with colleagues and friends in everyday conversations. Practising telling stories in informal settings supports you to connect with others socially, even when you don't know them well. It's also important to learn how to be a good audience – remember, active listening is respectful and shows that you value what others have to say.

Knowing how to ask thoughtful **follow-up questions** is an important skill. When you ask the speaker questions about what they have said, you show them that you are interested and that you care.

TOP TIP

- If you are listening to someone else's story, ask follow-up questions to show that you are listening actively.
- Have the confidence to ask clarifying or probing questions. This will help you to dig a little deeper to find out more about what someone is telling you.

Instigate a discussion

"Tell me about..."
"What did you think about...?"

Clarifying questions

"What did you mean by...?"
"What is...?"

Probing questions

"Can you tell me more about…?"
"Why do you think...?"

Workshop 2 next steps:

- When telling stories of self, be mindful of your purpose for talk, your audience, and your context for talk.
- Make deliberate choices about which oracy skills you use when you speak in both formal and informal contexts for talk – the way you use these skills might change depending on how familiar (or unfamiliar) your audience is.



Workshop 3: Group discussion

In this workshop, you will explore the following questions:

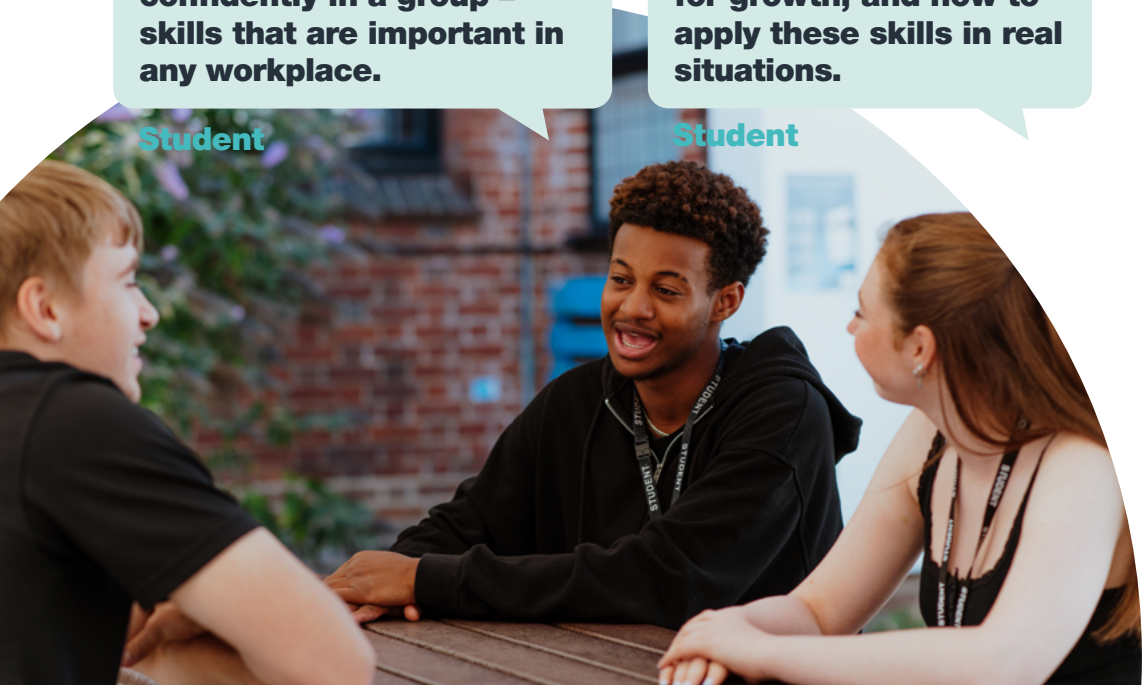
- ✔ **In which contexts might I engage in a group discussion?**
- ✔ **Which oracy skills can I use to engage in a group discussion effectively?**
- ✔ **How can I reflect on, and progress with, my oracy skills?**

I was shown how to express ideas clearly, listen to others, and work confidently in a group – skills that are important in any workplace.

Student

I enjoyed the practical opportunities to reflect on my strengths, areas for growth, and how to apply these skills in real situations.

Student



Contexts for discussion

Why is this important?

Group discussions happen every day in many different contexts: in the classroom, at work, and in everyday life. Learning how to take part in discussions with both familiar and unfamiliar people helps you become an adaptable and confident communicator. The oracy skills that you practise using during group discussions can be used in any situation and will support you to prepare for further study and future careers.

Context

Group discussion

- Tutor group discussion
- Group project meeting
- Professional development session

TOP TIP

Think about the **purpose** of talking when having a group discussion. Knowing why you are having the conversation will help you to decide how you could participate.

Purpose

- What is the purpose of the conversation?
- What do I want to get out of it?
- How will I achieve this?

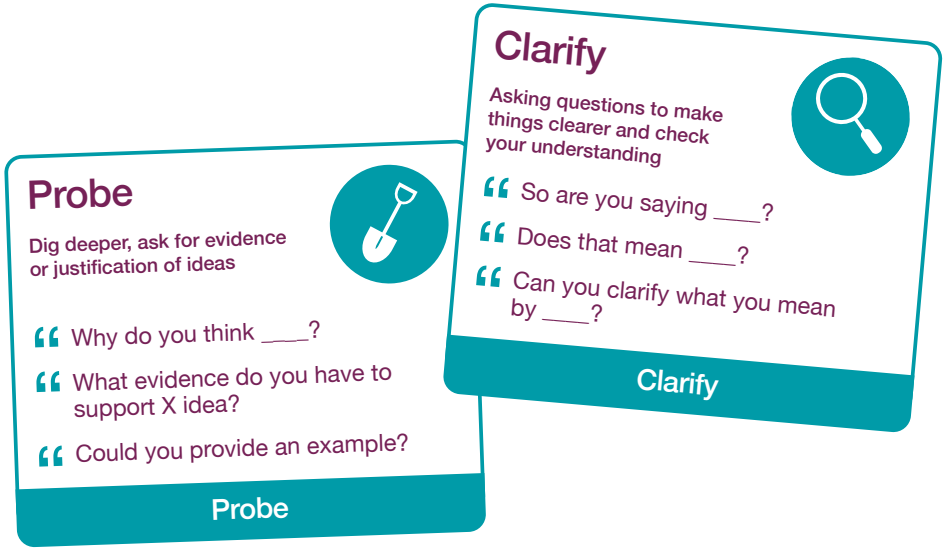
Purposeful Talk

Why is this important?

Conversations happen all the time, but some are more productive than others. Recognising when a discussion is (or isn't) helpful is a useful skill. Your knowledge of oracy can help you identify features of different types of talk, and recognise what a productive discussion might look and sound like. This awareness will help you to participate in group discussions more effectively, and perhaps encourage you to use your own oracy skills to redirect the conversation.

TOP TIP

Offer clear reasons for your opinions so that others can truly understand your point of view, and try to move discussions forward by asking clarifying or probing questions.



Identifying discussion skills

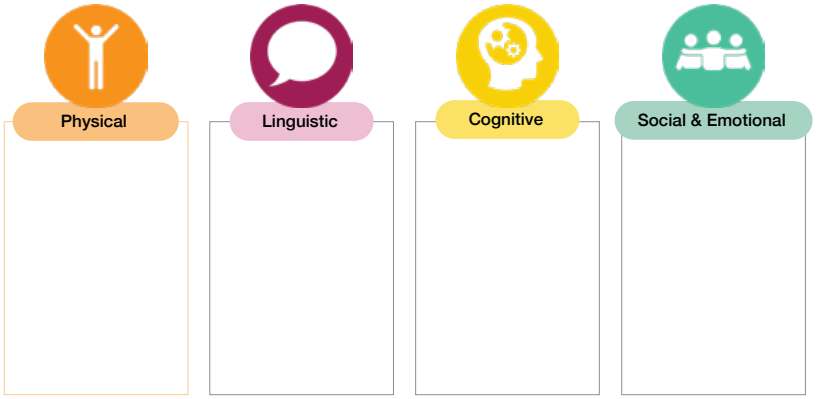
Why is this important?

Learning to identify specific oracy skills that people use during group discussions will help you to understand what works well to sustain and develop a conversation. Having this awareness supports you to engage more effectively in group discussions, and develop the skills to steer the conversation in a purposeful direction.

TOP TIP

Use the Oracy Framework to notice the oracy skills that others use. You could also use the skills from the Oracy Framework to give oracy-specific feedback to your peers, or to reflect on your own oracy confidence and progress over time.

Employers look for people who demonstrate effective communication, collaboration and potential leadership skills – each of these can be developed by learning about what makes a discussion purposeful.



A reflective discussion

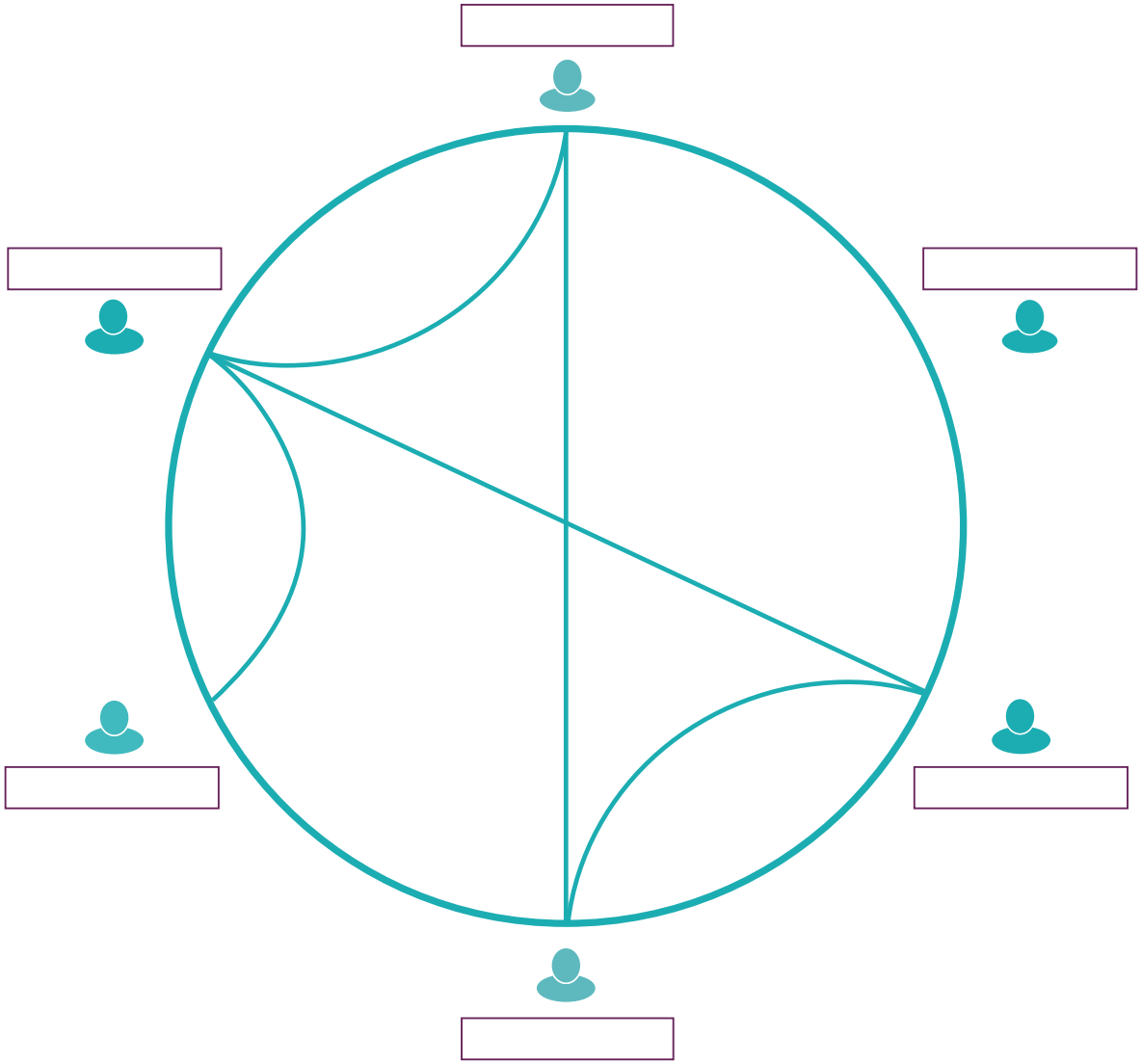
Why is this important?

Experience improves confidence: if you know what it feels like to take part in an exploratory group discussion, and reflect on the skills you used, you begin to develop your oracy expertise and confidence to take part in future contexts for talk. Taking time to think about what went well and what you could improve on is essential to improving your discussion skills over time.

Getting involved in group discussions is one of the best ways to strengthen your oracy skills, enabling you to grow in confidence. Every time you take part, you get the chance to experiment with different ways of communicating and discover what works best in different situations. These experiences don't just help you in college – they prepare you for the future, whether that's at university, in the workplace, or in everyday life.

TOP TIP

Listening actively is key: in order to challenge, clarify or probe effectively, we need to pay close attention to what others are saying and think about why they might be saying it. When we listen actively, we can respond constructively.



Workshop reflection

Participating Voices

Key takeaways

Oracy skills I developed

Stories of Self

Key takeaways

Oracy skills I developed

Group Discussion

Key takeaways

Oracy skills I developed

Oracy skills – student reflections

✓ **Which oracy skills have you developed? What are you most proud of?**

Which skills do you feel you need more practice with? How could you improve these skills?



✓





✓





✓





✓



Oracy skills – tutor reflections

✓ **Which oracy skills have they developed? What changes in the student have you noticed?**

Which skills do you feel they need more practice with? How could they improve in these areas?



✓





✓





✓





✓



What's next?

5 top tips to continue developing your oracy skills

Listen first

Great communication starts with listening. Understanding others helps you respond thoughtfully and demonstrates respect.

Use the skills from the Oracy Framework

Keep this in mind when preparing for or taking part in different types of conversations.

Adapt your approach

Ask yourself: What is the context? Who is my audience? What is the purpose of this conversation? Adjust your oracy skills accordingly.

Practice regularly

Seek out opportunities to practice your oracy skills Experimenting with different contexts, audiences and purposes for talk helps build your confidence in the future.

Reflect and improve

After conversations or presentations, think about what went well and what you could do differently next time.



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council and Royal Holloway, University of London, whose generous funding and support made the production of The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* possible.

We would also like to thank staff and students at Strode's College and Windsor College, from the Windsor Forest College Group, for testing and developing the learning materials within this resource. Their contributions and thoughtful feedback have helped shape The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit*.

The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* was created by Jessie Ricketts (Royal Holloway University of London), Amanda Moorghen and Amy Howe (Voice 21), and Emma Kadri-Langford and colleagues (The Windsor Forest College Group) in 2026, as part of a project which was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The copyright in this Toolkit belongs to Royal Holloway and Bedford New College and it can be used under the Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND licence. If you wish to modify this Toolkit or use this Toolkit for commercial purposes, please get in touch with jessie.ricketts@rhul.ac.uk to discuss the terms of a licence.

Endnotes

1. Oracy Education Commission (2024) *We Need to Talk: Final Report of the Commission on the Future of Oracy Education in England*. Oracy Education Commission.
2. The Oracy Framework (2020) was developed in conjunction with Voice 21 and Cambridge University as part of an EEF pilot project