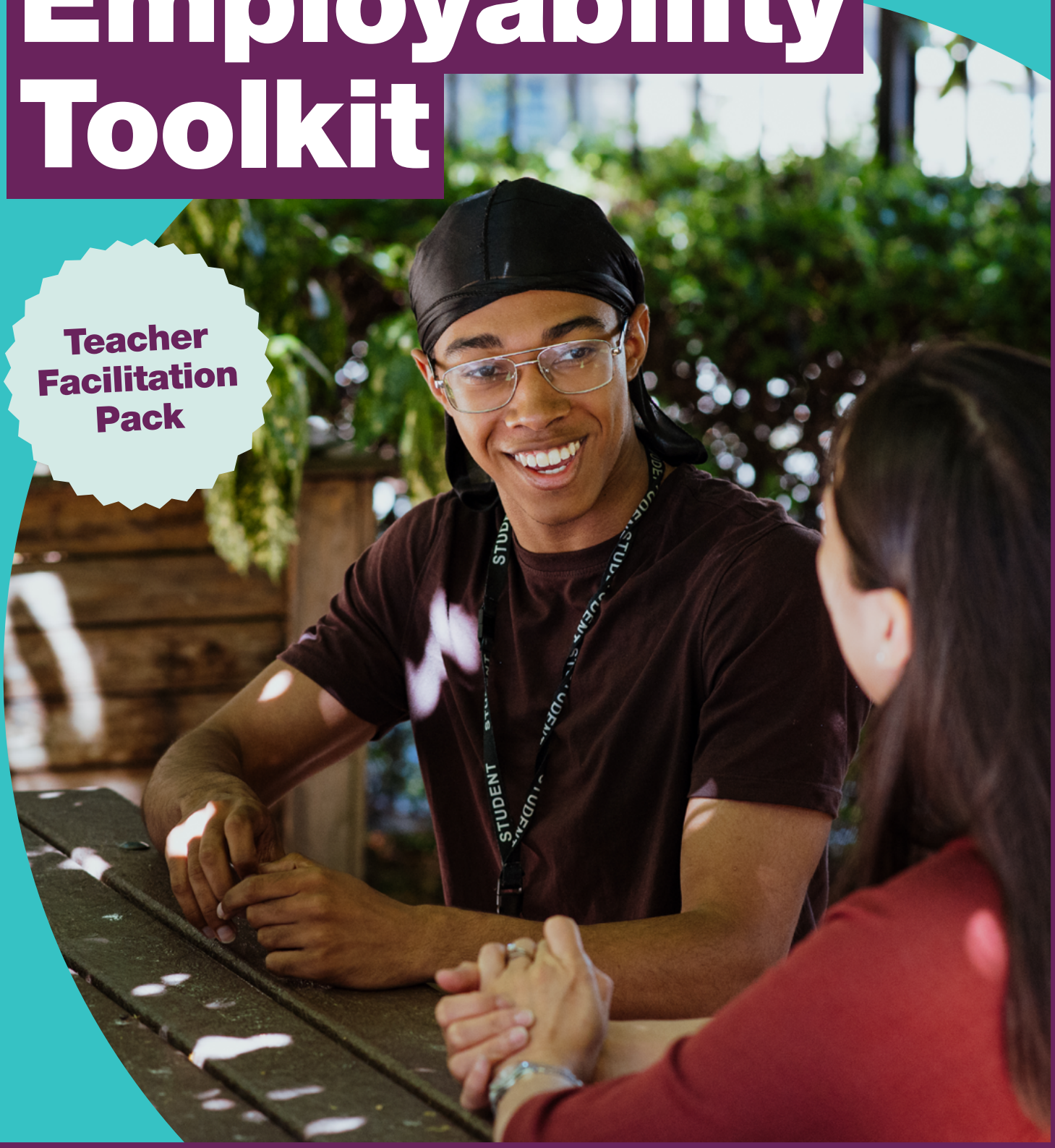
The Oracy for Employability Toolkit

Teacher Facilitation Pack



Contents

Introduction 4

Teacher guidance 6

Oracy for Employability: the big ideas 8

Workshop series overview 12

Workshop 1: Participating Voices 13

Workshop 2: Stories of Self 14

Workshop 3: Group Discussion 15

Workshop resources 16

Final word 18

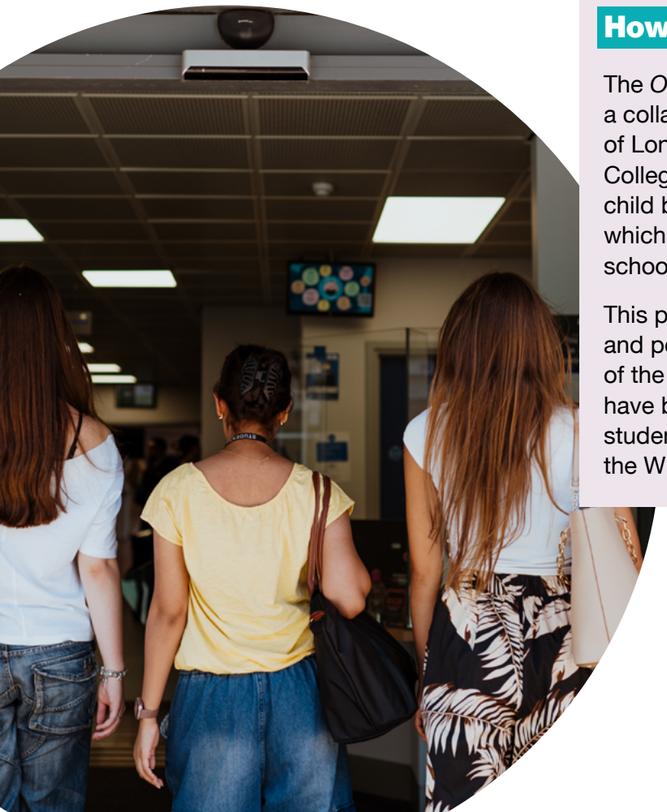
Introduction

Why has the Oracy for Employability Toolkit been created?

The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* has been designed to support provision for post-16 education and skills, and harness oracy to break down barriers to opportunity.

Employability and careers education are high on the agenda across the education sector. Recent publications emphasise the need to elevate careers education in secondary and post-16 settings. This includes: updates to the Gatsby Benchmarks[1]; the Post-16 White Paper[2]; NFER's The Skills Imperative 2035 Report[3]; OFSTED's Further Education and Skills Inspection Toolkit[4] and the Young People and Work: Interim Report[5].

Recommendations from the Curriculum and Assessment Review final report[6] seek to introduce a national framework for oracy. Oracy underpins each of the six Essential Employment Skills[7]; being able to communicate effectively in different contexts, with different audiences, and for different purposes is crucial for students to be able to navigate the world of work. Vocabulary ownership is an important part of oracy, however this is extremely variable in adolescents.[8] Teaching these vital oracy skills opens opportunities that may otherwise be out of reach for many students. If we want young people to leave school and college feeling confident and equipped to enter higher education and employment, oracy needs to be at the heart of what happens in schools and colleges across the UK.



How was it developed?

The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* is the product of a collaboration between Royal Holloway University of London, Voice 21, and the Windsor Forest College Group, who all share the vision that every child benefits from a high-quality oracy education, which enables them to use their voice to thrive in school, work and life.

This publication has been designed *for* secondary and post-16 settings, *with* post-16 settings: each of the workshops and corresponding resources have been co-developed with input from staff and students at Strode's College and Windsor College of the Windsor Forest College Group.

How do I use it with my students?

The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* includes:

1. **The Oracy for Employability Toolkit Overview**
2. **Teacher Facilitation Pack**
3. **Three workshop presentations, including facilitation notess**
4. **Student Learning Pack**
5. **Printable Resource Pack**
6. **A certificate of completion for students**

The oracy-focussed workshops have been designed to complement existing provision for careers education. Each workshop provides students with a range of opportunities to practice, reflect on, and develop a range of skills found in the Oracy Framework[9] through varied discussion-based activities.

The teacher pack supports staff to facilitate discussions within the familiarity of the classroom, allowing students to feel safe to experiment with new skills, take risks and build confidence over time before applying their learning in real-life contexts.

The student pack and resources can be shared digitally with your students (for example in a shared online work space such as Google Classroom), or use the resource pack to print specific resources as and when you need them.

What will students learn?

The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* supports students to:

Gain a deeper understanding of oracy: what it is, why it matters for employability, and how it is used in the wider world

Meet the Gatsby Benchmarks and think critically about their skills, experiences and aspirations

Prepare for the transition from college to higher education or employment

What to expect from this three-part workshop series:

Participating Voices

Explore the link between language and identity, and the choices we make in different talk contexts

Stories of Self

Reflect on how we tell compelling stories about ourselves and our experiences, and learn how to mobilise these skills in an interview context

Group Discussion

Discover what an effective exploratory group discussion sounds like, and how oracy skills can be strengthened through seminar-style discussions

Teacher guidance

This guidance is designed to support you to deliver each workshop with confidence.

Reflect on your intent

Before you start, reflect on your intentions for using the *Oracy for Employability Toolkit*.

Consider what you want to get out of this Toolkit:

- Will you simply use this as an opportunity for students to learn about oracy for employability?
- Will you use the toolkit to spark dialogue with colleagues about how oracy can support students' career-readiness in your setting?
- Will you encourage your students to extend this learning to hone their oracy skills in different contexts, for different purposes, for different audiences? How will you do this?

Create a safe culture for talk

Discussing careers and further education can be a challenging topic for many students. Take time to reflect on your understanding of your students and the actions you've taken to build a supportive classroom environment, where every student feels confident to contribute and every voice is valued. Use these reflections to inform your planning, ensuring you feel prepared to facilitate meaningful discussions in each workshop and adapt the activities to meet the diverse needs of your students.

You may wish to ask your students:

- What do you know about oracy already?
- What do the terms 'career-readiness' and 'employability' mean to you?
- How do you think oracy skills relate to employability?
- Which aspects of oracy and employability do you feel most/least confident in?



Establish Guidelines for Discussion

Guidelines for discussion support you to facilitate meaningful discussions with your students.

Our approach at Voice 21 is to create a safe climate for talk before beginning any discussion. All students should feel comfortable to speak and know that their contribution is valid and valued by their peers. Use these guidelines to set up the expectations for talk before each workshop. We encourage you to adapt these to suit the needs of your students.



Discuss openly
Share your ideas and opinions – there are no right or wrong ways 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?

Set students up for success

The student pack begins with a reflection task, 'Getting Started'. Use the activities as springboards to start the conversation around oracy for employability, perhaps noticing how your students respond to the prospect of talking about their futures. Understanding your students' thoughts and emotions before you start will help you to make adaptations as you go that meet your students' needs.

> **When talk is tethered to tangible outcomes, oracy becomes a lived experience, not just a lesson plan.**
>
> Nicola Hall (2025)[10]

Use your judgement

The three workshops in this toolkit have been carefully designed to meet key learning goals. Each session builds purposefully on the last to develop students' oracy skills. However, you know your students best, so adjust the content to reflect their experiences, strengths, and areas for development. The aim is to strengthen their oracy skills over time, helping them grow in confidence and prepare for future employment.

This toolkit was originally created for use during pastoral time. However, students build more confidence and deepen their understanding when they practise these skills in different situations, for different purposes, and with different audiences. We encourage you to look for opportunities in your current curriculum to harness oracy to elevate employment-connected learning.

Oracy for Employability: the big ideas

Before embarking on the workshops in *The Oracy for Employability Toolkit*, take time to reflect on the following big ideas with colleagues. Build a shared understanding of what oracy is and why it is important for careers education – this will support your delivery and facilitation of the workshop series.

What is oracy?

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

The Oracy Education Commission (2024)[11]

When you think of 'oracy', typically you might assume it is about public speaking: this is just one aspect of oracy. Academic Douglas Barnes – through much research and observation of classroom talk – identified two main types of talk: exploratory and presentational. Look at these definitions to think about oracy in its broadest sense.

Exploratory talk

'Exploratory talk, which is typical of the early stages of approaching new ideas, [...] is hesitant and incomplete because it enables the speaker to try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns.'

Presentational talk

'The difference between the two functions of talk is that in presentational talk the speaker's attention is primarily focused on adjusting the language, content and manner to the needs of an audience, and in exploratory talk the speaker is more concerned with sorting out his or her own thoughts.'

Douglas Barnes (1992)[12]

Building on Barnes' idea of *exploratory talk*, Professor Neil Mercer identified three types of talk that show how we often talk with each other: **disputational**, **cumulative**, and **exploratory talk**.

Disputational talk

- There is frequent disagreement which may not be supported with reasons
- Contributions are competitive rather than collaborative
- Nobody bridges the gap between ideas and opinions
- People hold onto their own views

Cumulative talk

- Contributions build on each other but go unchallenged
- Ideas may be repeated or elaborated upon
- Contributions are accepting and uncritical rather than questioning or challenging

Exploratory talk

- There is a sense of collaboration and purpose
- Contributions are treated with respect
- People offer reasons for their opinions
- People are not afraid to politely challenge, questions or probe each other's ideas

Neil Mercer (2004)[13]

Conversations don't usually fit into just one type of talk – often they combine elements of all three.[14] However, these definitions show us which types of talk are less helpful, and which we should encourage, especially when preparing students for further education and/or employment.

The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* has been designed to develop both exploratory and presentational talk skills.





Young people need to be given opportunities to develop their skills and apply their knowledge. Crucially they then need to learn how to present their skills, knowledge and experience professionally to an employer.

Employer, Gatsby roundtable

Oracy for employability

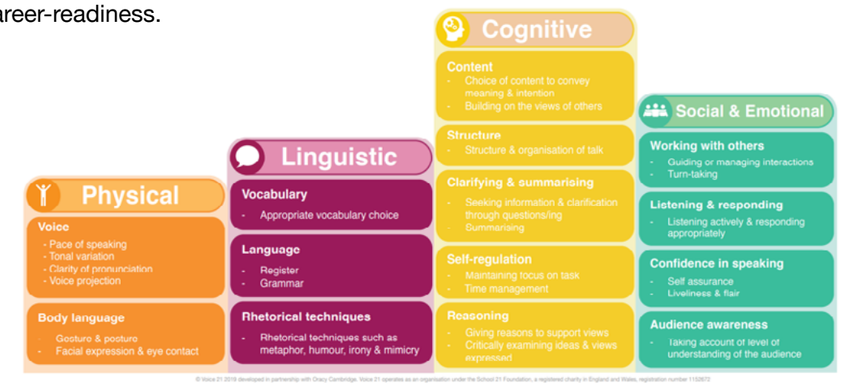
To engage in different types of talk, students need to learn about different oracy skills.

The Oracy Framework[15] outlines all the skills that encompass what we mean by 'oracy', and that we can choose to use deliberately in daily life. How we use the skills might change depending on the context, audience and purpose of speaking.

We draw upon skills from the Oracy Framework every day, whether we are conscious of this or not. Having a deeper understanding of oracy helps students to make deliberate and strategic choices about how and when to use these skills, improving their career-readiness.

TIP

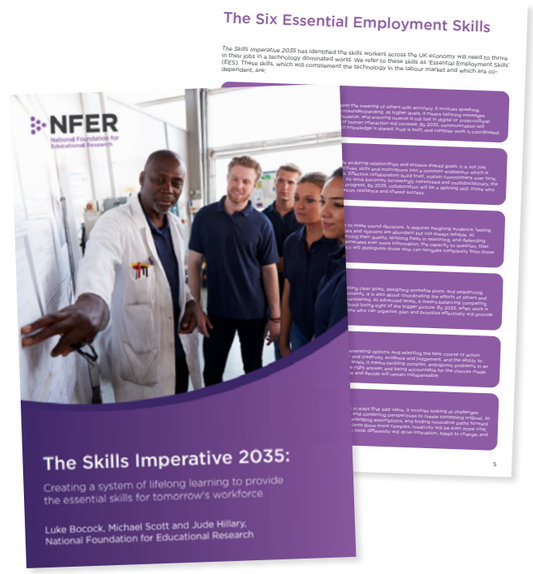
Have a copy of the Oracy Framework printed on tables for students to refer to throughout the workshops. You can find the printable resource in the resource pack.



Research from NFER and the University of Sheffield (2025)[16] identified six key Essential Employability Skills (EES):

1. **Communication**
2. **Collaboration**
3. **Information literacy**
4. **Organising, planning and prioritising**
5. **Problem solving and decision making**
6. **Creative thinking**

These crucial skills are transferable and complement technical skills. A high quality oracy education contributes to the development of each of these Essential Employment Skills.



Reflect

Look at the six Essential Employability Skills. What connections can you identify between these and the skills in the Oracy Framework?





People with higher levels of Essential Employment Skills earn more and are more likely to be in management positions, and have higher job and life satisfaction.

NFER, The Skills Imperative: Rethinking skills gaps and solutions

Workshop series overview

The *Oracy for Employability Toolkit* includes three workshops, including presentation slides to use with students and facilitation notes to support your delivery.

Workshop 1
Participating Voices

Workshop 2
Stories of Self

Workshop 3
Group Discussion

The workshop series is designed to help students to prepare for their next steps beyond school and college. To do this, students are introduced to a shared language and invited to take part in a set of experiences that will help them to explore the choices that they have about how to use their voice in different contexts. This invites students to consider 'employability' as a real and relevant part of their life, and to explore the agency they have in this space, rather than being taught a decontextualised set of 'employability skills'.

Within each workshop you will find a number of activities. They are organised sequentially, but you might choose to use the series either in whole or in part, perhaps spreading the learning across a term or year.



Workshop 1: Participating Voices

This set of activities is designed to provide a shared language and set of experiences that will help students to think and talk about how they want to speak and listen in different contexts, including employment contexts.

- ✔ **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?**

The key themes are:

- ✳ Language is an expression of our identity: how we speak says a lot about who we are, and also who we are choosing to be in a given context or situation
- ✳ There is no one right or wrong way to speak. We all draw on a wide repertoire of ways of speaking that we can use intentionally in different contexts to serve our purposes
- ✳ Experimenting with, and reflecting on the ways we speak to achieve different purposes, can help us to navigate a wide range of situations – both familiar and unfamiliar

This set of activities draws on the principle that students need to develop their linguistic repertoire in order to help them to navigate the range of experiences they will encounter outside of school. We can't know all the possible situations our students might find themselves in in the future, but we can ensure that they have the reflective tools they need to extend and apply their knowledge in any situation.

Top tips for facilitation

TIP

Step back and listen to students' contributions during moments of paired or group talk. This will help you understand their initial perceptions of what it means to use their voice, identify which oracy skills they already demonstrate confidently, and determine which skills may need more explicit teaching throughout the workshop series.

Workshop 2: Stories of Self

This set of activities is designed to provide a shared language and set of experiences that will help students to tell compelling stories of self in workplace contexts and when speaking to (unfamiliar) others.

Around 40% of Year 11s report they don't feel ready for interviews.

The Careers and Enterprise Company[17]

The key themes are:

- Listening skills are integral to oracy – without active listening, storytelling (and by extension dialogue more generally) cannot happen.
- We can reflect on our experiences and retell these as stories, for different purposes.
- These stories will differ based on their purpose. We can reflect on and plan for these differences using the Oracy Framework.
- Sometimes it is uncomfortable to tell stories of self – we can mitigate this with preparation and practice.
- There are conventional method for telling particular kinds of story – like the STAR methods for interview answers.

This set of activities draws on the principle that students can prepare for infrequent, high stakes talk opportunities (e.g. an interview) by drawing connections with their existing experiences and skill set. Whilst most people won't experience a high stakes interview everyday, we will experience lots of talk opportunities that help us to prepare – if only we knew it! The activities aim to help students with the language they need to have these reflective conversations or thoughts, as well as providing authentic opportunities for talk.

The questions students will explore:

- ✔ **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?**

Top tips for facilitation

TIP

Take time to develop a strong understanding of the Oracy Framework found in the resource pack. The more confident you are in using it, the more effectively you'll be able to help students identify, understand, and develop a range of oracy skills (including active listening).

Workshop 3: Group Discussion

This set of activities is designed to provide a shared language and set of experiences that will equip students with the building blocks for purposeful, exploratory group discussion. The learning students take away from these experiences is transferable, providing them with the tools they need to apply these skills in different contexts and for a variety of purposes – in college, at work, and in life.

The key themes are:

- Listening actively and responding appropriately are fundamental skills to be able to participate in a group discussion effectively.
- The Oracy Framework is a tool that can be used to understand and reflect on the hallmarks of effective exploratory discussion.
- We can make deliberate choices about how we participate in group discussions by drawing on a range of skills from the Oracy Framework. This includes having an awareness of the contributions we (and others) make in order to move the conversation forward.

The set-up for this workshop is based around a **Harkness Discussion[18]**. Harkness is a type of discussion in which students are encouraged to interrogate each other's ideas and build their understanding together. Prior to the discussion, students are assigned key reading to prepare to discuss an authentic open-ended question independently. The discussion is tracked to provide a visual record of students' contributions.

To learn more about Harkness, you could…

Watch this video

Read this article
Williams, Guy J. "Harkness Learning: Principles of a Radical American Pedagogy." *Philosophy and Religion, Wellington College*

The questions students will explore:

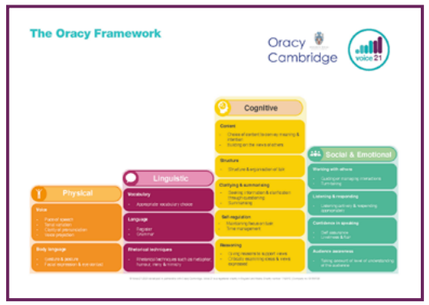
- ✔ **In which contexts might I engage in a group discussion?**
- ✔ **Which oracy skills can I use to engage in a group discussion effectively?**
- ✔ **How can I reflect on, and progress with, my oracy skills?**

Top tips for facilitation

TIP

For many students, engaging in a group discussion, and being invited to challenge the ideas of others or ask clarifying and probing questions, can feel intimidating. Take time to establish a supportive culture for talk, where students feel safe to share ideas and know that their voice is valued by everyone. You could make use of the Teacher Talk Tactics (found in the resource pack) to model the talk moves involved in group discussions.

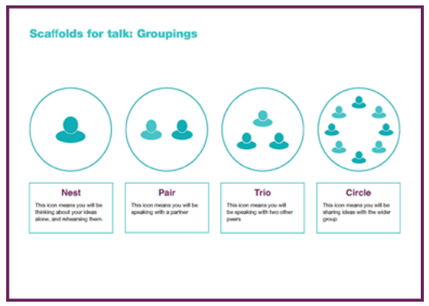
Workshop resources



1. The Oracy Framework

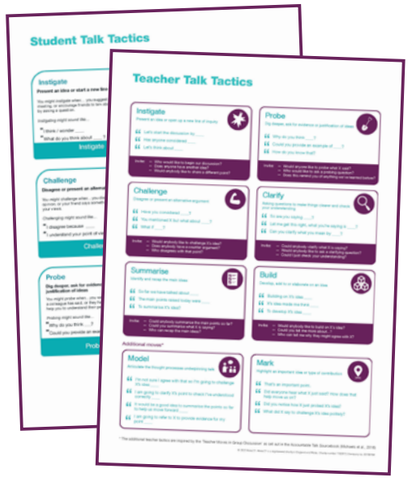
TIP
Have a copy of the Oracy Framework printed on tables for students to refer to throughout the workshops.

The Oracy Framework was developed in conjunction with Voice 21 and Cambridge University as part of an EEF pilot project. It outlines all the skills that encompass what we mean by 'oracy', and that we can choose to use deliberately in daily life. How we use the skills might change depending on the context, audience and purpose of speaking.



2. Scaffolds for talk: Groupings

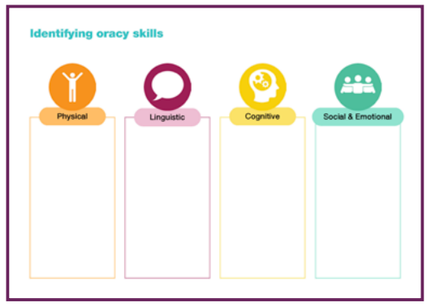
In life, we inevitably have to speak with different groups of people; sometimes the group is familiar to us (such as friends and family), and sometimes it is unfamiliar (such as colleagues or customers). Experiencing varied groupings help students to practise communicating with diverse audiences, building the skills they'll need to interact effectively in further education and the workplace. Throughout the workshop series, you will encounter the following groupings:



3. Scaffolds for talk: Talk Tactics

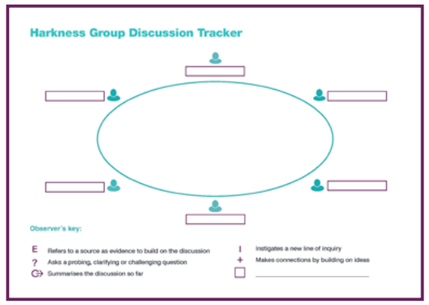
The Teacher and Student Talk Tactics are examples of 'talk moves' that can be made during discussion. They contain examples of when you might use these moves and include examples of what could be said. The aim is for students to participate in discussion naturally, so there is no need to 'prescribe' that students use these sentence stems exactly — they are simply scaffolds to show how someone could contribute if they weren't sure what to say or how to say it.

Talk Tactics were created by Voice 21, inspired by the following research: *Thinking Together* Classroom Dialogue Project[19] and The Accountable Talk Sourcebook[20].



4. Identifying oracy skills

Use this template to teach and appraise oracy explicitly. You could invite students to decide which skills to focus on within each workshop, and use these to give oracy-specific praise.



5. Discussion tracker

This resource is to support students to engage in seminar-style discussions. It is inspired by a 'Harkness' discussion: a type of discussion in which students are encouraged to explore each other's ideas and build their understanding together[21].

Use this tracker as a visual record of the contributions made. It can be as simple or as complicated as you like. When first starting out, less is more! This example is for a discussion with four people. The tracker can be used by both teachers and students.



Use the Printable Resources Pack included within this Toolkit to support each workshop.

Final word

3 top tips to integrate oracy into careers education

Opportunity

Identify existing opportunities for employer-connected learning, where students learn to engage in both exploratory and presentational talk.

Rehearsal

Provide time for students to prepare and practice using their oracy skills in varied contexts for talk, for different purposes, and for a range of audiences.

Reflection

Make time for students to reflect on their oracy skills, including how to give and receive oracy-specific feedback.

Student reflections

We asked students from Strode's College and Windsor College (who trialled the workshops) to share their thoughts and reflections on how the Oracy for Employability Toolkit has supported them:

Sharing ideas helped me see different perspectives, and listening to others often clarified my own thinking.

I felt heard and it felt good to voice my opinion.

I am now more aware of how to present myself professionally and collaborate effectively with others.

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

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

The activities have boosted my confidence so I can prepare for interviews in the future.

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

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