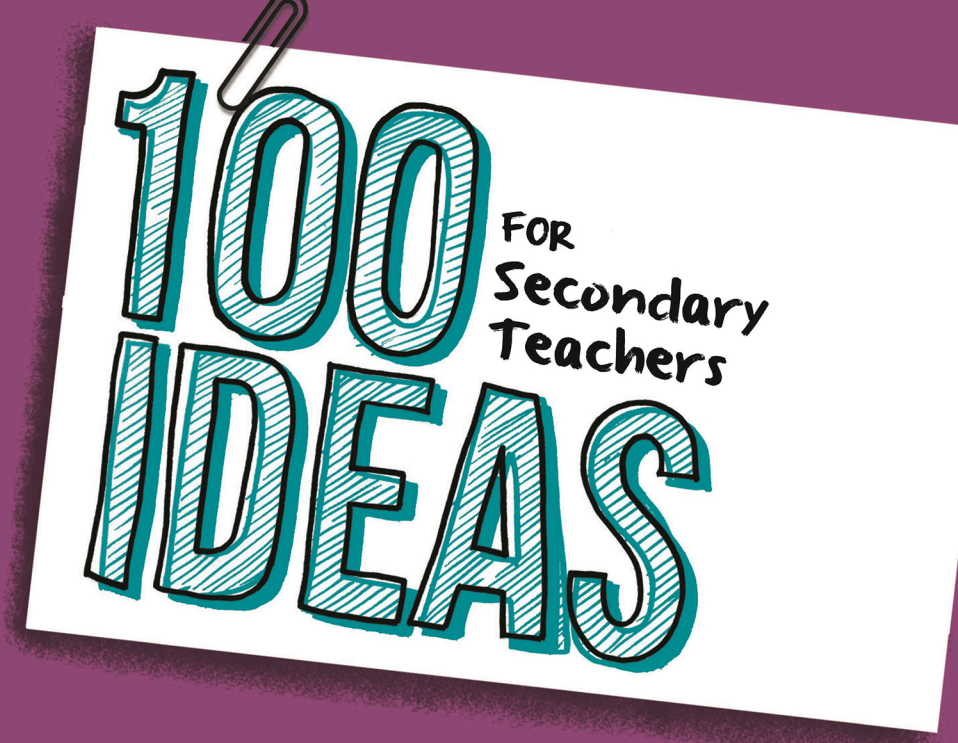


Oracy

Topsy Page and Alan Howe

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100 Ideas for Secondary Teachers:

Oracy

Topsy Page and Alan Howe

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Part 1

Teaching and practising oracy skills

IDEA 1

Exploratory talk

'Oracy has helped me return to my roots and reflect on who I wanted to be as a teacher when I first started.' *Oracy lead*

In exploratory talk, students listen to each other, thinking aloud together to make sense of things. They share thoughts that aren't always fully formed, give and ask for reasons and test out ideas in a collaborative atmosphere of trust and support. They only make decisions after all ideas have been considered.

Teaching tip

During reflection moments, invite each student to choose a goal to work on in their exploratory talk. This will often be related to one of the ground rules – for example, 'I'm going to ask clarification questions when something isn't clear.'

Taking it further

Exploratory talk is a critical element of learning through talk. Make it part of your pedagogy – try planning at least ten minutes every week for students to discuss a relevant talking point in groups using the ground rules.

Talking in a group to deepen understanding or solve problems is a really useful skill, which can help to make learning memorable. Support students to develop it by giving frequent practice opportunities. Introduce exploratory talk like this:

1 Give out ground rules (see Idea 2), and ask students to reflect and discuss in trios. Which will they find easy? Which are challenging?
2 Ask groups to discuss an engaging and relevant talking point (see Idea 52) – for example, 'The benefits of AI outweigh the risks.' Stop the task after five minutes, asking students to reflect again. How well are they applying the ground rules?
3 Complete the talking point discussion.
4 Randomly select someone to summarise their group's thinking to the class in one sentence. Then ask another group to build on this: 'How does that fit with what Kian's group concluded?'

Increase to groups of four when students become skilled in applying the ground rules. Change groupings periodically, so that students get used to hearing different perspectives and ways of saying things. As your students become more skilled in exploratory talk, you can pause and swap students between groups part-way through! (See also Idea 53)

Ground rules for discussion

'Our whole-school oracy agreement offers consistency and continuity for pupils in the classroom – it has given them the confidence to practise their oracy skills in a range of different settings and to know that this is not only appropriate but highly encouraged.' *Oracy lead*

To make sure that discussions are productive, establishing ground rules is a key first step. Revisit them regularly until they are embedded.

Possible ground rules (aim for around six):

- We give everyone a chance to talk.
- We consider everyone's ideas carefully.
- We ask everyone: 'What do you think? Why do you think that?'
- We show respectful listening to the person talking.
- We suggest alternative ideas.
- We ask each other for clarification.
- We challenge each other to think deeper.

Ways to embed ground rules:

- Use form time, citizenship or oracy lessons to get all students thinking about what makes a good discussion.
- Ask form reps or student councillors to help finalise or introduce the ground rules.
- Launch the new ground rules in a student-led assembly.
- Ask subject leaders to plan fortnightly discussion tasks using the new ground rules.
- Ask student council and staff oracy leads to review ground rules periodically.
- Ask students reflection questions, such as: 'Which of our ground rules is the easiest to do well?', 'Which is the most difficult?' and 'Which is the most important?'

Teaching tip

Display your ground rules throughout all discussion tasks and provide ongoing opportunities for students to reflect on them, including identifying which to prioritise in a given moment.

Bonus idea ★

Search online for 'discussion guidelines Oracy Cambridge' for some helpful resources.

IDEA 3

Learning to collaborate

'It's fun working with multiple people. One moment you're teaching someone and the next moment you're learning!' *Age 15*

Show your students the advantages of working with others rather than always on their own.

Teaching tip

When providing a shared resource, make it big enough for all to see. For example, copy worksheets onto A3 or use large flipchart papers.

Discuss these benefits of collaboration with your students:

- Get unstuck quickly – your next step might be obvious to someone else who's looking at the problem a different way.
- Share the workload and benefit from each other's strengths.
- Generate more and better ideas.
- Learn by hearing and observing others.
- Practise skills that you can use at home and at work.

Research suggests that collaborative learning approaches can lead to significant improvements in student academic achievement and social-emotional skills.

Practical ways to encourage collaboration:

- **Shared resources:** Set up tasks with only one worksheet, device or set of resources within the group, reducing the possibility of students working on their own.
- **Collaborative phrases:** Provide prompts such as 'Let me show you what I did…' or 'What do other people think?' (See also Idea 49.)
- **High expectations:** Expect students to be able to explain how each person contributed to the task once they have finished.
- **Praise:** Notice and celebrate when students collaborate effectively.
- **Reflection:** Give time for students to celebrate their own collaborative successes.

Bonus idea ★

Speed-dating: Students work on a series of questions, spending four minutes collaborating with each partner. Use a sound signal when it's time to move along to the next person; half the group moves and the other half remains where they are. This is a high-energy activity with no time for messing around!

Prompts and frames

'Students used to give short verbal responses, but by using prompts consistently, they are now giving longer, detailed responses.'
History teacher

Talk prompts and talk frames are great ways to scaffold students' talk. Eventually the words and phrases you provide become habits and will form a foundation for students to develop their own effective ways of talking.

- **Talk prompts:** Key phrases such as 'My opinion is…', 'I would like to offer an alternative view…' or 'The evidence suggests…' help students to start speaking and encourage them to use different types of talk.
- **Talk frames:** These are longer structures for speaking on a subject, perhaps reasoning something out: 'It seems from these sources that___ However, we could also consider___ But on balance, I think…'

Create prompts and frames relevant to your students' needs and your curriculum aims and make them readily available. Display them in your classroom, include them on slides, put them on each table or get students to keep them in their planners. Use your teacher talk to model them.

- **For metacognition and reflection:** 'I anticipate challenges with___ and plan to address them by…', 'I realise I need to adjust my approach because…'
- **Lesson-specific:** 'The main techniques used in this poem are…', 'Based on the results of the titration, we can conclude that…'
- **When students are stuck:** 'Can I work through this with someone else?', 'I feel confused about…', 'I understand this part, but I'm not sure about the next step…'

See also Idea 49 for group and pair talk prompts, and Idea 41 for prompts to express uncertainty.

Teaching tip

Visit **topsypage.com** for two free printable PDF talk prompts resources: a one-page collection of general prompts for classroom talk and an extensive list of metacognitive prompts called 'From thought to talk', building on the brilliant 'Thinking Moves A–Z' from DialogueWorks.

Taking it further

Talk prompts are a great starting point, but we don't want students to become robotic, always talking in the same way! As they gain skills and confidence, encourage students to expand their vocabulary and improvise.