

Progression in discussion texts

Purpose

- To present a reasoned and balanced over-view of an issue or controversy.

Discussion texts (both oral and written) usually involve carefully and strategically selecting and organising information - often as a two or more different 'views' or 'arguments' on an issue, each of which may require elaboration (explanation, evidence and/or examples) – with the specific intention of providing the reader with a reasoned overview. The writer may conclude by presenting his/her own view, or a more objective conclusion, but this will be reasoned on the basis of the balance of available evidence. In this, discussion contrasts with persuasion, which develops only one viewpoint (usually the writer's own) and may or may not be based on genuinely reasoned judgements. Discussion texts generally make use of formal and impersonal language to demonstrate objectivity. They can sometimes combine other modes of communication (e.g. visual images, diagrams) with written text in order to present the range of viewpoints and the evidence for them.

Discussion is not limited to controversial issues – although polarised views may make it easier to teach (e.g. completing a for-and-against 'skeleton' to bring issues from another area of the curriculum into literacy learning). In contrast, critically evaluative responses to a text may lead to a discussion of subtleties within it.

Like all text types, variants of discussion can occur and they can be combined with other text types. Discussion is not always necessarily a distinct text-type in its own right; elements of discussion writing can be found in many different texts, both on paper or on screen.

Audience

Children should listen to, speak, read and write explanation texts for a wide range of audiences, varying language features and text structures to suit the audience and purpose.

Generic text structure

The structure of a discussion text is often (but not always):

- statement of the issues plus a preview of the main arguments
- arguments for, plus supporting evidence
- arguments against [or alternative view(s)], plus supporting evidence [a variant would be arguments and counter-arguments presented alternatively, one point at a time]
- recommendation – summary and conclusion

Language features

The language features of a discussion text are often (but not always):

- written in simple present tense
- focused mainly on generic human (or non-human) participants using uncountable nouns, for example, *some, most*, category nouns, e.g. *vehicles, pollution* (nominalisation), *power* (abstract)
- constructed using logical connectives, for example, *therefore, however*
- a movement usually from the generic to the specific: *hunters' agree..... Mr. Smith, who has hunted for many years.....*

Knowledge for the writer

- you can turn the title into a question: *Should we hunt whales?*
- open by introducing the reader to the discussion – you may need to add why you are debating the issue
- try to see the argument from both sides
- make views sound more reasonable through use of modal verbs and words such as *often, usually*
- support views with reasons and evidence
- in your conclusion you must give reasons for what you decide
- if you are trying to present a balanced viewpoint, check you have been fair to both sides
- recognise that discussion texts can be adapted or combined with other text types depending on the audience and purpose

Progression is achieved through

- speaking and listening before reading and writing
- teacher modelling and scribing before children's independent attempt
- increased understanding by the children of the form and features of discussion writing and then increasing ability to manipulate elements of writing to present a balanced argument, with or without a personal conclusion
- increasing complexity, subtlety, challenge of task (for example, moving from simple for-and-against arguments to those with multiple viewpoints; moving from clear cut issues into those eliciting more subtle differences in views)
- increasing ability to recognise discussion and understand the devices used in the writing of others; in their own writing to discuss effectively as appropriate to their purpose and audience

Links to key aspects of learning

Units of work on discussion will involve children in using elements from many of the cross curricular, key aspects of learning explored in *Learning and Teaching in the Primary Years* - creative thinking, communication, empathy, enquiry, evaluation, information processing, managing feelings, motivation, problem solving, reasoning, self awareness and social skills.

In debating and writing discussion texts children will particularly use **communication** and

- self-awareness
Example FS: Give oral explanations (of) their... preferences
- empathy
Example Y1: Through talk and role play explore how others might think, feel and react differently from themselves and from each other
- reasoning
Example Y3: explore how different views might be... explained/justified
Example Y6: draw reasoned conclusions based on available evidence
- evaluation
Example Y4: begin to recognise which present a single (biased) viewpoint and which try to be more objective and balanced.
Example Y6: Recognise and understand the distinction between the persuasive presentation of a particular view and the discursive presentation of a balanced argument.

Cross curricular links

Across the age phases many opportunities for discussion occur in all other of areas of the curriculum. For example:

- **Geography/ knowledge and understanding of the world (FS)**
FS Stepping stone: Find out about their environment and talk about those features they like and dislike
KS1 POS: recognise how the environment may be improved and sustained
KS2 POS: (study) an issue arising from changes in land use
- **PHSE/ personal social and emotional development (FS)**
FS Stepping stone: Understand what is right, what is wrong and why
KS1 guidelines: to take part in a simple debate on topical issues
KS2 guidelines: to research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events

Guidance on curriculum choices which are supportive for bilingual learners is available in unit 3 of Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching with bilingual children in the primary years.

Children with Special Educational Needs and/ or Learning Difficulties/ Disabilities

Learning objectives should be chosen which are related to the aspect on which the whole class is working. If with appropriate access strategies and support a child can not work towards the same learning objective as the rest of the class, teachers may want to track back to an earlier objective. The structure and the new electronic format of the renewed frameworks for literacy and mathematics support **multi-level curriculum planning**, and allow teachers to easily track back through a progression strand to locate earlier learning objectives. It also makes direct links to a wealth of other useful materials which will help to plan teaching and children's learning. Further guidance and principles on tracking back can be found in *Including all children in the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson: management guide (Ref: 0465)*. Further useful references for children working significantly below age related expectations can be found in the QCA/DfES documents *Planning, teaching and assessing the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties (QCA/01/736 www.nc.uk.net/ld)* and the QCA DVD 'Using the P scales' QCA/05/1589.

Planning for individual children or groups of children based on assessment for learning will be informed by knowledge of their priorities. For the majority of the time it will be appropriate for children to work on objectives that are similar and related to the whole class. However, at other times you will also have to consider whether the children have other priority needs that are central to their learning, for example a need to concentrate on some key skills.

For further guidance on planning for children with SEN/LDD see the library section and *Learning and teaching for children with special educational needs in the primary years (ref 0302/2004 G)* *Teaching the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson in special settings.* *Teaching the daily mathematics lesson for children with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (ref: 0033/2003)*

Children who are gifted and talented

Children who are working well above the overall level of their class or group will benefit from planning that may:

- add breadth (for example enrichment through a broader range of content, tasks and resources)
- increase depth (for example extension through complexity)
- accelerate the pace of learning by tracking forward to later objectives within or across key stages

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For further guidance on planning for gifted and talented children see the library section and www.nc.uk.net/gt/general/05_environment.htm.

Children learning English as an additional language (EAL)

Children learning EAL must be supported to access curriculum content while also developing cognitive and academic language within whole-class, group and independent contexts. With the exception of children learning EAL who also have SEN, it is critical to maintain a level of cognitive challenge which is consistent with that of the rest of the class. Children who are /have become conversationally fluent will continue to require explicit attention to the development of the academic language associated with the subject and of specific aspects within the subject. Planning should identify the language demands of the objectives and associated activities and making sure EAL learners know and can use the language demanded by the curriculum content of the unit/lesson then becomes an additional objective. In order to identify the language demands, teachers and practitioners should consider the language children will need to understand in order to access this activity, and the language they will need to be able to produce, either oral or written, in order to demonstrate success in achieving the learning intentions.

Children learning English as an additional language may require support in developing:

- accuracy in subject-verb agreements and use of prepositions, appropriate use of modals and range of determiners
- the use of academic and technical language with abstract nouns and nouns made from other word classes
- impersonal style and passive voice

For further guidance on planning for children learning EAL see the overview of planning for each year group, the library section and also *Learning and teaching for bilingual children in the primary years: Unit 1 Planning and Assessment for Language and Learning and Unit 2: Creating the Learning Culture, Making it work in the classroom.*

Progression in discussion texts	
<i>This progression should be considered in relation to progression in narrative as the study of non-fiction and fiction recounts complement each other.</i>	
Foundation Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience and recognise that others sometimes think, feel and react differently from themselves. • Talk about how they and others might respond differently to the same thing (e.g. like a particular picture or story when someone else doesn't) • Give oral explanations e.g. their or another's preferences, e.g. what they like to eat and why.
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through talk and role play explore how others might think, feel and react differently from themselves and from each other. • In reading explore how different characters might think, feel and react differently from themselves and from each other.
Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through reading and in life situations, recognise, that different people (characters) have different thought,/feelings about, views on and responses to particular scenarios (e.g. that the wolf would see the story of the Red Riding Hood differently to the girl herself.) • Explore different views and viewpoints.
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through reading explore how different views might be expressed/explained/justified (e.g. the different view of characters in a particular book, the different view of people writing to a newspaper.) • Through role play and drama explore how different views might be expressed/explained/justified (e.g. the different view of characters in a particular book, the different view of people in a simulated 'real life' scenario.)
Year 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In exploring persuasive texts, and those presenting a particular argument (see Progression in Persuasion), begin to recognise which present a single (biased) viewpoint and which try to be more objective and balanced. • Continue to explore the expression of different views through discussion, role play and drama.
Year 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In exploring persuasive texts, and those presenting a particular argument (see Progression in Persuasion), distinguish and discuss any texts which seems to be trying to present a more balanced or reasoned view, or which explore more than one possible perspective on an issue. • Experiment with the presentation of various views (own and others, biased and balanced) though discussion, debate and drama.

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Year 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through reading, identify the language , grammar, organisational and stylistic features of balanced written discussions which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – summarise different sides of an argument – clarify the strengths and weaknesses of different positions – signal personal opinion clearly – draw reasoned conclusions based on available evidence • Recognise and understand the distinction between the persuasive presentation of a particular view and the discursive presentation of a balanced argument. • First explore orally and then write a balanced report of a controversial issue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – summarising fairly the competing views – analysing strengths and weaknesses of different positions – drawing reasoned conclusions where appropriate – using formal language and presentation as appropriate • Use reading to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – investigate conditionals, e.g. using if...then, might, could, would, and their persuasive uses, e.g. in deduction, speculation, supposition – build a bank of useful terms and phrases for persuasive argument, e.g. <i>similarly... whereas...</i> • Overall, help to build the ability to choose the appropriate style and form to suit a specific purpose and audience, drawing on knowledge of different non-fictional text types and adapting, conflating and combining these where appropriate.