

Listening and talking

Skills and progression.

Listening and talking are core skills for learning and are central to teaching and learning in all subject areas. In order to make good progress in these skills young people require frequent and varied experiences of listening and talking activities including:

- Active listening
- Group discussions
- Individual talk

Each of these experiences need to be at the right level of challenge and complexity to support learners to develop and extend these skills further.

A clear understanding of standards and expectations at each level in key listening and talking skills will support staff across subject areas to plan learning of appropriate challenge. It will also enable them to identify next steps for learners to ensure young people make continuous progress in these skills.

Progress and achievement within listening and talking will be evidenced as young people achieve across these key themes:

- engaging with a broad range of increasingly complex texts, including Scottish and Scots texts
- developing and applying knowledge and understanding of language
- finding, using and organising information, including developing critical literacy skills
- using listening strategies to understand, analyse and evaluate texts
- creating texts of increasing complexity using more sophisticated language.

The full professional learning paper and progression framework for literacy and English can be accessed on the National Improvement Hub.

Supporting the full range of listening and talking skills

The full range of listening and talking skills should be taught explicitly across subject areas as practitioners:

- support learners to build their subject knowledge and understanding through group discussion and collaborative activities or by listening / watching tasks
- support learners ' to improve group discussion skills
- allow learners to apply their learning through individual presentation.

The following guidance outlines how staff can model talking skills and support listening skills.

See appendix 1 – Supporting Listening and Talking

Reflective questions

Do staff have a shared understanding of skills young people should be developing to improve the quality of their talks and discussion?

How can staff in all subject areas make talking and listening skills more explicit to young people?

Are staff in all subject areas giving feedback to young people to support them to develop and extend their talking and listening skills?

How does the school use the four contexts of the curriculum to ensure young people have relevant, real life opportunities to develop and extend their listening and talking skills?

Group Discussion

The 3-18 Literacy and English Review identifies a need for group discussion skills to be taught in a progressive way in secondary schools:

“...supporting young people to improve skills such as asking relevant questions, clarifying and summarising points, and building on the contributions of others.”

Education Scotland’s professional learning resource for group discussion aims to support staff to plan for progression in group discussion skills.

The full group discussion resource

- Supports school leaders and literacy coordinators to evaluate and lead professional dialogue about teaching group discussion skills
- Exemplifies a range of group discussion experiences from first to third level, across the four contexts of the curriculum
- Provides links to further group discussion resources

The listening and talking diagram included in the resource outlines what progression looks like from early to fourth level.

Reflective Questions

Does the school have a coherent and consistent approach to developing listening and talking skills across contexts for learning?

Do staff have shared standards and expectations and do they apply these consistently whenever listening and talking is taking place?

Context for Group Discussion

Group discussion can offer learners rich opportunities to develop subject knowledge. Staff should offer a breadth of group discussion experiences across subject areas.

There are three different purposes for discussion identified in the Education Scotland group discussion resource:

- **Exploring ideas and developing knowledge**

This type of discussion allows learners to share and build knowledge of ideas or topics new to them.

Asking and answering questions and building on each other's contributions will help learners to expand upon their own ideas as well as allowing them to consider and assimilate the ideas of others.

Using effective questions and approaches to help structure the discussion promotes learners' understanding.

For example: Life and ethos of the school

A discussion focussed on the concept of sustainability and what steps the school can take to be more sustainable. This might involve exploring organisations such as the John Muir Trust or Keep Scotland Beautiful

- **Analysing and Evaluating**

This type of discussion allows learners to develop and use higher-order thinking skills in order to deepen their learning about texts or topics.

Employing higher-order questioning and challenging each other effectively will help learners to deconstruct, compare and contrast ideas.

Summarising allows learners to draw ideas together and make links between them.

The same skills allow learners to build detailed evaluations for example, when evaluating the effectiveness of a writers' language, judging the effectiveness or reliability of a text, or when assessing their own work or the work of others.

For example:

Social Subjects/ History

A group discussion in which learners analyse and evaluate a selection of historical sources related to a topic, for example World War One, Learners will question and challenge each other viewpoints of the reliability and relevance of the texts.

- **Debating different viewpoints and reaching conclusions**

This type of discussion allows learners to debate opposing viewpoints.

As with the other discussion types, questioning, challenging and building on others' contributions are vital to the success of this type of discussion.

Learners must also respond appropriately to each other, with respect for differing views.

Using language effectively and confidently, including the use of rhetorical devices, will help learners to effectively present their own viewpoint. Summarising key arguments will allow groups of learners to reach a shared conclusion.

For example:

Technologies:

A structured discussion on ethical hacking, which may include a focus on protest groups such as "Anonymous", can develop young people's understanding of

cybercrime and cybersafety and encourage them to extend their thinking and come to informed opinions about topical issues.

The following collection of stem phrases can be used to support learners to:

- Start a discussion
- Encourage others/ask questions
- Move the discussion on
- Make a contribution
- Develop points
- Build on contributions
- Clarify
- Challenge
- Summarise

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Documents/lit10-language-of-discussion-stems.pdf>

Individual Presentations

Individual presentation skills offer an opportunity for learners to demonstrate subject knowledge and understanding

Regular opportunities to develop these skills across subject areas also prepare young people to present to unfamiliar audiences in the wider world of life, learning and work.

The 3-18 Literacy review states:

'Where talking activities have a relevant and real-life context such as campaign speeches, enterprise pitches or persuasive talks, young people are applying their learning about language to give effective speeches and talks.'

As children and young people progress in these skills they will develop verbal and non-verbal communication skills, deepening their knowledge of language features such as:

- rhetorical devices
- tone
- word choice
- register

The following guidance outlines how staff can support learners to plan, create and deliver individual presentations.

Reflective Questions

To what extent are young people provided with relevant and challenging contexts to present their learning to others? What approaches do staff use to support learners to extend and develop their presentation skills?

How are staff developing their understanding of the standards to enable them to confidently give formative feedback to young people?

See appendix 2 – Supporting individual Presentation

Using listening and talking for assessment and effective feedback

Listening and talking activities offer opportunities for assessment to take place. As learners progress in group listening and talking skills and individual talk/presentation skills, the activities in which they engage will offer teachers a new context to assess learners

- Use content of individual presentations to assess subject specific knowledge and skills and to provide learners with detailed and meaningful feedback.
- Peer assessment is a form of evaluative group discussion – even if done in pairs the same skills are applied. Learners can provide one another with meaningful feedback which demonstrates that they can reflect and comment upon the work of others.

School wide opportunities to develop language and understand new knowledge and concepts.

Debate and public speaking

Discussion and debating activities develop higher order thinking and questioning skills. They also help to consolidate understanding and give learners the experience of responding to others as well as reframing their own knowledge for others which embeds the knowledge as they use their knowledge about language in a subject area.

Debating and public speaking resources can be found on the [National Improvement Hub](#).

Pupil councils and roles of responsibility

Using wider school contexts to offer listening and talking experiences gives learners the opportunities to evaluate and draw conclusions about their own thinking. As they do so, children and young people develop their language skills and make connections to relevant and real life contexts. Pupil councils offer an ideal context for development of these higher-order skills.

Some young people may also be given the opportunity to be selected for leadership opportunities which is an ideal context to use presentation skills.

Literacy in project work

Learners can develop their literacy skills in rich learning contexts. Projects offer opportunities for learners to use literacy skills and to connect their learning to real-life situations.

See pg 47 of [3-18 Literacy and English Review](#) – Inverclyde Academy

Appendix 1

Supporting Listening and Talking

Modelling talking skills

Staff should model quality listening and talking skills whenever they address groups of learners. By drawing learners' attention to the features of spoken language that they use in their own classroom talk, staff reinforce the importance of listening and talking skills which in turn supports learners apply these skills. This might be done in the following ways:

- Making it clear when speech is informal, when it is formal and why speech moves between the two registers
- Structuring explanations and instructions by introducing and summing up ideas clearly
- Indicating clearly when linking phrases are being used to direct the listener.

Supporting Active Listening

Listening skills also need to be made explicit to learners and can be taught through a variety of activities. As learners listen to teachers or each other, watch films or listen to media broadcasts, they engage in a range of skills including:

- understanding knowledge / concepts
- analysing and reconsidering thinking
- evaluating and drawing conclusions.

In order to develop their skills in listening activities, learners will require support which should be offered regularly and across all subject areas. Learners might benefit from structured support before, during and after listening. For example:

Before listening – when you know the topic	
What do I know?	Write down anything you know about the topic, before you listen
What does my partner know?	Talk to your partner –what do they know? Compare your ideas.
During listening...	
Is there any vocabulary which is new or unfamiliar to me?	Note down any words which you have not heard before or feel uncertain about. Don't worry about spelling! Just make a note you understand.
Have I learned anything new?	Make a note of any idea that is new to you
Any questions?	Make a note of any questions that come to you as you are listening.
After listening	
What did I know?	Look over the notes you made before listening - were any of your ideas accurate?
What have I learned?	Look over your notes and highlight information that is new to you.
Can I ask a question?	There will now be an opportunity for you to ask your teacher any questions about what you have heard .
Can we talk about it?	Talk to your neighbour about what you have listened to. Do you have a shared understanding?

External Speakers

Visits from external speakers can be highly engaging for learners, especially when they link learning in the classroom to real-life contexts. External speakers are also models of high quality talking skills and their visits can provide learners with further opportunities to apply their listening skills. To ensure that learners gain the most from engaging with external speakers practitioners could carry out the following activities with learners before and/or after visits:

- Research the speaker themselves or the topic that the speaker will be focussing on
- Watch or listen to other speakers on the same topic
- Develop questions which they might wish to ask the speaker after their presentation
- Create a display which highlights the main points made by the speaker and evidence of learning.

Appendix 2

Supporting Individual Presentation

Planning

When planning for presentations, both group and individual, learners should consider:

- the purpose of their presentation
- the audience
- use of appropriate tone, vocabulary and language to suit purpose and audience
- use of verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- creation of organised notes.

Learners require support in planning for talks. Opportunities for personalisation and choice in the range of options rather than giving one topic to all learners. This approach will broaden the learning experience for all learners, as speakers and listeners.

The following questions could be used to support learners in planning:

Planning your talk	
Choosing your topic – Which topic interests you the most?	The more interested you are in your topic, the more you will engage your audience.
Who is the talk for? What do they know already?	If your audience know very little you have to look for interesting facts and interest them in a new topic. If your audience already know something about the topic you need to look for a new angle or new ways to interest them.
Research and note making	You need to read as much as you can about your topic. You should then use your research and note making skills to choose the best information

Structure

Young people should be supported to develop the language to structure their talks in a clear and coherent way. Signposting 'language helps to direct the listener and ensures that the talk has a clear line of thought. .

For example:

- Openers to begin the talk in an engaging way
- Topic sentences to introduce a section, point or argument
- Linking phrases to move the line of thought on
- Words or phrases to introduce a contrast or change of direction
- Words or phrases to highlight or emphasise points
- Summarising statements
- Concluding points.