

Helping children find their voice

A practical guide for parents & carers • Early Years to Year 6

LISTEN • THINK • SPEAK • INTERACT

What is oracy?

Oracy is learning through talk — and learning how to talk well. It includes speaking, listening, thinking, questioning, explaining, discussion and adapting communication for different people and situations.

Why does it matter?

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) describes oral-language approaches as high impact for very low cost, with an average impact of +6 months' additional progress. The evidence is strongest when talk is purposeful and integrated with learning, vocabulary and discussion.

In the early years, communication and language approaches have a particularly important role in children's development. Rich back-and-forth interaction, stories, vocabulary and sustained conversations all help build foundations for later learning.

The DfE primary English curriculum includes spoken-language expectations such as listening, questioning, explaining and justifying, collaborative conversation, presentations, debates, considering viewpoints and adapting language for different contexts.

Our whole-school approach

We build oracy progressively through four connected strands:

SPEAKING Clarity • fluency • confidence • audience	LISTENING Attention • response • evaluation
DISCUSSION & INTERACTION Turn-taking • building • challenging	VOCABULARY & REASONING Precision • explanation • evidence

Our Core Non-Negotiables ✓

- Listen actively when others are speaking.
- Speak in complete sentences.
- Use curriculum-specific vocabulary.
- Take turns and respect different viewpoints.
- Ask questions to clarify understanding.
- Explain ideas using reasons and evidence.
- Speak clearly and audibly.
- Participate in partner, group and whole-class discussion.
- Build on the contributions of others.
- Present information appropriately for audience and purpose.

Our Aspirational Non-Negotiables ★

As children grow, we encourage them to speak confidently to unfamiliar audiences; use ambitious vocabulary spontaneously; lead discussions; challenge ideas respectfully using evidence; adapt language, tone and register; summarise and synthesise viewpoints; persuade through well-structured reasoning; ask thoughtful questions; evaluate arguments and evidence; and facilitate discussion.

Your year-group guide

You do not need to run lessons at home. The best opportunities are ordinary conversations: meals, journeys, shopping, cooking, stories, games, hobbies and family decisions.

EYFS • 3–4 — Build the foundations

- Describe what you see: “The tower is wobbling!”
- Expand what your child says: “Yes — a huge, fluffy dog.”
- Give thinking time; don’t rush to fill silence.
- Share stories every day and talk about pictures and new words.

RECEPTION — From talk to thinking

- Ask “why?”, “how do you know?” and “what might happen?”
- Ask your child to retell a familiar story or event.
- Model complete sentences and interesting words naturally.
- Use role play and let your child lead.

YEAR 1 — Make ideas audible

- Practise two-step instructions.
- Ask: “Tell me one thing you heard someone say.”
- Model: “I agree with you because...”
- Encourage precise vocabulary.

YEAR 2 — Reason with “because”

- Ask “Why do you think that?”
- Challenge: “Can you think of a second reason?”
- Model: “Adding to what you said...”
- Give genuine thinking time.

YEAR 3 — Explain, justify, challenge

- Ask: “What makes you think that?”
- Ask for an example.
- Teach respectful challenge: “I see it differently because...”
- Try a 60-second presentation about a hobby, recipe or news story.

YEAR 4 — Become a discussion expert

- Ask your child to summarise two main ideas.
- Compare arguments: “Which is stronger — and why?”
- Adapt: “How would you explain that to a 5-year-old?”
- Make links: “How does this connect to what you already know?”

YEAR 5 — Persuade with purpose

- Give a real choice and ask your child to persuade you.
- Ask: “What might someone who disagrees say?”
- Practise respectful refutation.
- Encourage precise, ambitious vocabulary.

YEAR 6 — Speak with authority — and adapt

- Ask: “Would you say it differently to a friend, teacher or younger child?”
- Synthesise: “What did they agree on? Where did they differ?”
- Use: claim → reason → evidence → counterargument → response.
- Let your child chair a family discussion and summarise the outcome.

10 talk moves to keep on the fridge

Try these instead of turning every conversation into a quiz. The aim is genuine back-and-forth talk.

Tell me more... invites elaboration	What makes you think that? asks for reasoning
Can you give an example? moves from idea to evidence	What do you mean by...? clarifies vocabulary
I heard you say... models listening	What happened next? supports sequencing and narrative
Do you agree? Why? encourages viewpoint + reason	Can you think of another reason? extends reasoning
How could you explain that to...? builds audience awareness	Does anyone see it differently? normalises respectful challenge
Remember: PAUSE. Children often need thinking time. A short silence is not a failure — it is thinking happening.	

Avoid the traps

✗ Correcting every error • ✗ asking question after question • ✗ doing all the talking • ✗ only discussing school • ✗ treating confidence as the only goal

Your 7-day family oracy challenge

One tiny talk habit each day. No worksheet. No special equipment.

DAY	TALK HABIT	TRY THIS
MON	EXPLAIN	How do you make your favourite snack?
TUE	RETELL	Tell the best bit of your day in order.
WED	REASON	Which is better — and why?
THU	VOCABULARY	Teach the family one new word.
FRI	CHALLENGE	Disagree politely and explain why.
SAT	PRESENT	Give a 60-second mini-presentation.
SUN	REFLECT	What made someone a great listener this week?

One thing to remember

**Be curious. Listen. Pause. Model good language. Ask your child to explain their thinking.
Enjoy the conversation!**

Evidence & further reading

Department for Education — National Curriculum: English programmes of study — Spoken language, Years 1–6.

Department for Education — Development Matters — Communication and Language; language-rich environments and interaction.

Education Endowment Foundation — Oral Language Interventions — evidence summary; average +6 months' impact.

Education Endowment Foundation — Communication and Language Approaches — early years evidence summary.

Education Endowment Foundation — Effective oral-language practice — purposeful, curriculum-integrated dialogue and discussion.

Thank you for helping our children find their voices!