

TIERS OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Developing strong academic discourse in your classroom takes time. Strong academic discourse has three components: students clarify and share their own thoughts, students engage with the thinking of others, and students critique and analyze others' reasoning.

When first introducing academic discourse into the classroom, teachers may choose to focus on one component at a time in order to build students' capacity for engaging in academic discourse.

Each component of academic discourse requires students to do different types of thinking and use different discourse strategies. Each discourse strategy should be modeled and reinforced. Teachers can also implement specific talk moves, or strategic ways of inviting students to participate in the classroom discussion. During academic discourse, students should be doing all of the heavy thinking, however, teacher talk moves are helpful in supporting and guiding student thinking.

TIER ONE: STUDENTS CLARIFY AND SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS

During this component of academic discourse, students use information from a problem to construct an initial claim and then share their ideas with others. Students think about their ideas in isolation and are not yet incorporating or refining their thinking based on others' ideas.

Key Student Discourse Strategies

- *Elaborate to support ideas:* Students provide evidence or examples to justify and defend their point clearly. (For example, including evidence from the text to support a particular point.)
- *Use vocabulary:* Students use vocabulary that is specific to the subject and task to clarify and share their thoughts. (For example, using text-specific and genre-specific vocabulary.)

Key Teacher Talk Moves

- *Anticipating student responses:* Teacher enters the discussion with an idea of what strategies and approaches students may use to solve the problem. This allows a teacher to target key understandings or anticipated misconceptions during a discussion.
- *Wait time:* Teacher gives students time to think and construct their own ideas in order to contribute productively. Enough wait time should be given to ensure that all students are prepared and able to

participate. (For example, giving students 45 seconds to think quietly about their reasoning before explaining to the class.)

- *Turn and Talk:* Teacher gives students time to talk through their ideas with a partner prior to participating in a whole-class discussion.
- *Re-voicing:* Teacher repeats some or all of what a student has said, and then asks the student to respond and verify that the teacher's understanding is correct. Re-voicing should be used when a student's thinking may have been hard to follow or may have been hard for other students to hear. Re-voicing may also be used to highlight a change in the discussion or to help promote and challenge the discussion.
- *Questioning:* Teacher prompts students to give more details or reasoning to support a particular claim.
 - Questions to help students determine that their thinking is incorrect: "How did you reach that conclusion?", "Does that make sense?", "Can you provide evidence that shows that?"
 - Questions to help students learn to reason: "Is that always true?", "Can you think of a counterexample?"
 - Questions to help students make connections between ideas and applications: "How does this relate to...?", "What ideas that we learned were useful in solving this task?"
- *Selecting student responses to feature:* Teacher uses student responses to choose which students to call on to share ideas. (For example, the teacher starts with a student response that is wrong in order to push students to analyze, critique, and correct the student's thinking or, the teacher starts with an answer that is correct but needs more elaboration to push students to practice elaborating on each other's thinking.)

Sentence Frames to Introduce:

To introduce evidence:

- According to _____, _____.
- The author states that _____.
- An example of _____ would be _____.

To explain evidence:

- _____ is an example of _____ because _____.
- It is clear that _____ because _____.
- Since _____, we _____.
- _____ illustrates _____.
- Because of _____ we can assume _____.

To share opinion:

- I like how the author uses _____ to show _____.
- I like/don't like _____ because _____.
- My opinion is _____ because _____.

TIER 2: STUDENTS ENGAGE WITH THE THINKING OF OTHERS

Students move beyond their own reasoning and begin to respond and interact with the reasoning of others.

Students are held responsible for listening to and learning from their peers and begin to refine and clarify their own thinking based on others' ideas.

Key Student Discourse Strategies

- *Build on a partner's ideas:* Students seek to genuinely understand what their peers are saying, and then build on. Ideas should not be random, disconnected, or replace a previous idea. Rather, ideas should zoom in on a particular idea that was said, make a connection between a previous idea and a new idea, or challenge a particular part of an idea.
- *Paraphrase to make meaning:* Students paraphrase what others are saying in order to keep track of the key ideas in a discussion. Paraphrasing involves listening carefully to a speaker, organizing the speaker's points, inferring which points are important, and then putting it all in one's own words.
- *Questioning and clarifying:* Students seek to clarify a particular point a student made by asking follow-up questions.

Key Teacher Talk Moves

- *Repeating:* Teacher asks students to repeat another classmate's ideas. This pushes students to listen carefully to what their classmates are saying in order to participate productively in the conversation. It is not meant to be used as a "got you," but rather as a way to push thinking and understanding. After a student has repeated an idea, the original speaker should confirm if their idea or reasoning was interpreted correctly.
- *Prompt for further participation:* Teacher asks questions to draw more students into the discussion. Potential questions include, "Would anyone like to add on?", "Does anyone disagree with this?"
- *Turn and Talk:* Teacher gives students time to talk through their ideas with a partner. Student talk should focus on students asking questions, clarifying, or paraphrasing their peer's response.

- *Sequencing*: Teacher decides on an order in which to call on students or to display particular tasks to scaffold and build understanding gradually.
- *Press for reasoning*: Teacher pushes students to explain their reasoning. Potential questions include, “Why do you think that?”, “What’s your evidence?”, “What convinced you that was the answer?”.

Sentence Frames to Introduce:

To build on a classmate's ideas:

- Another example is _____.
- I’d like to add something. I would say that _____.
- My idea is related to _____’s idea. I think _____.
- I would like to add that _____.

To question/clarify to fully understand classmates’ ideas:

- What I think you are saying is _____. Is that correct?
- Can you tell me more about _____?
- What do you mean by _____?
- What evidence do you have to support _____?
- I did not understand _____. Can you explain what you mean?

TIER 3: STUDENTS CRITIQUE AND ANALYZE THE REASONING OF OTHERS

Students take their understanding of a particular text and everything they have gathered from the discussion and begin to critique and evaluate the reasoning of others.

Key Student Discourse Strategies

- *Build on/challenge partner’s ideas*: Students challenge the thinking of their peers. Students may focus on a particular idea or example, and then explain why they disagree. Multiple students should be pushed to analyze and critique a particular line of thought.
- *Compare and contrast*: Students compare and contrast the effectiveness of two arguments.
- *Synthesize*: Students synthesize everything they heard into a coherent statement at the end of the discussion. The synthesis should hit on the key takeaways and learning of the discussion. This is to ensure that students walk away from the discussion with new or deeper understandings of the topic.

Key Teacher Talk Moves

- *Press for reasoning:* Teacher pushes students to apply their own reasoning to someone else's reasoning. Potential questions include, "Do you agree or disagree with X, why?", "What do you think about X argument, why?"
- *Turn and Talk:* Teacher gives students time to talk through their ideas with a partner. Student talk should focus on arriving at consensus or critiquing/defending a position.
- *Connecting:* Teacher pushes students to make connections between the ideas in different student responses.
- *Sequencing:* Teacher purposefully sets up a conversation with two disagreeing students by warm calling them both, then encouraging a whole-class discussion or debate.

Sentence Frames to Introduce:

To agree or disagree with a classmate's ideas.

- I agree because _____.
- I agree with _____, and in addition _____.
- I disagree with _____ because _____.
- That makes sense because _____.
- That's a good point, but I think _____.

To compare and contrast the effectiveness of different arguments:

- Similar to _____, _____.
- In contrast to _____, _____.
- Both _____ and _____.
- While _____ shows _____, _____ shows _____.

To revise thinking based on others arguments:

- I want to change my idea because _____.
- I want to revise my thinking. I think _____.
- At first I thought _____ but now I think _____ because _____.