

Discursive Frames

Discursive pieces often explore abstract ideas like *justice*, *power*, *freedom*, and *corruption*. A flexible metaphor or anecdotal **frame** can help you structure your ideas, engage your audience, and revisit the frame to strengthen your argument.

A frame is a structure—often a metaphor or short narrative—that:

- Helps introduce the topic in a creative or reflective way
- Provides a touchstone or image you return to throughout
- Can adapt to any theme by changing how you interpret the metaphor

Example Extended Metaphor Frame – *The Chessboard of Life*

Society often resembles a chessboard—its rules fixed, its pieces unequal, and its outcomes dependent not on fairness but strategy. Justice, in this metaphor, is not blind; it's a game where some are taught the rules from birth, while others are pushed onto the board with no training and told to survive. A king is protected at all costs. A pawn is dispensable. The judiciary may promise equality, but the lived reality for many resembles a predetermined match—those from marginalised communities are more often “checked” than protected. Just as a pawn must reach the other side to become powerful, justice often requires enduring systemic disadvantage. The chessboard, then, becomes a powerful metaphor for examining where justice fails—not in its intent, but in its execution.

- Returning to this image throughout a discursive response allows for reflection: are we reforming the game, or just moving the same pieces?

Example Narrative Frame – *Advice from a Grandparent*

When I was ten, my grandfather taught me to play cards. I thought winning meant slamming my hand on the table and shouting the final move. But he calmly reminded me: “Real power is knowing when not to use it.” I didn’t get it then, but I’ve never forgotten it. As I’ve grown older, I’ve watched people in positions of authority—teachers, politicians, even friends—use their power loudly, carelessly. It’s easy to dominate. Harder to lead. My grandfather’s voice returned to me years later during a school debate when my opponent fumbled. I could have gone in for the win, but I didn’t. I chose to pivot instead—and earned more respect. In discursive writing, stories like these ground abstract concepts in relatable moments.

For the following examples:

1. Choose 5 to represent visually (draw a picture).
2. For those 5, create your own starting/example sentence.
3. For TWO, outline how it could apply to a discussion of justice.

Extended Metaphor Frames for Discursive Writing¹

1. **The Library of Life**
"Some books are dog-eared with repetition—like the stories of power abused or justice delayed."
2. **The Garden Metaphor**
"Unchecked, corruption grows like weeds in the garden of democracy."
3. **The Map and Compass**
"In navigating freedom, the compass must be moral clarity, not political convenience."
4. **The Mask and the Mirror**
"Power wears a mask of confidence, but a mirror reveals its fear of being questioned."
5. **The Stage and the Audience**
"Justice must not just be performed, but believed by the audience watching from the back row."
6. **Life is a Highway/ Life is a Journey / Road Trip**
"Life may be a highway, but some are born in the fast lane and others spend miles trying to merge."
7. **Life is a Game / Chessboard**
"On the chessboard of society, some are born kings while others are told they're pawns."
8. **Life is a Classroom**
"Life is a classroom that offers no syllabus—just constant tests and unpredictable teachers."
9. **Life is a Mirror**
"Power reflects character the way a mirror reflects light—sometimes clear, sometimes distorted."
10. **Life is a Jigsaw Puzzle**
"Every decision is a puzzle piece—on its own, confusing, but part of something bigger."
11. **Life is a Stage**
"Justice often becomes a performance where the actors wear robes, and the audience leaves unconvinced."
12. **Life is a Book / Story**
"Some people get to write their own chapters—others spend a lifetime trying to escape the margins."
13. **Life is a Lottery / Gamble**
"Freedom shouldn't be a game of chance—but in many lives, it still is."
14. **Life is a Lock-and-Key**
"Some keys open doors; others are made to lock us in. Power is deciding which to use."
15. **Life is a Balancing Act / Tightrope**
"Walking the line between justice and revenge is a tightrope act that most of us wobble on."

¹ Examples collated and expanded using ChatGPT

Adaptable Narrative Anecdotal Frames

These narrative frames help anchor abstract concepts in human experience. They can serve as openings, recurring references, or conclusions.

1. **Advice from a Grandparent or Elder**

"My grandmother once told me, 'Never mistake silence for weakness.' I didn't understand then, but I do now."

2. **Opening an Old Letter, Drawer, or Trunk**

"I found a letter in the attic that made me rethink everything I thought I knew about fairness."

3. **Getting Lost on a Road or Hike**

"I took the wrong turn and ended up in the right place—eventually."

4. **The Schoolyard Lesson**

"In the playground, we were taught to share—but not everyone learned the same rules."

5. **The Birthday Candle**

"Every year, I blew out the candles and wished for the same thing: to be heard."