

What is oracy? In this guide, you'll learn about oracy, its place in the national curriculum, and why teaching oracy is essential.



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Oracy, coined in the 1960s by Andrew Wilkinson, refers to the ability to express yourself fluently and communicate effectively with other people. More than being grammatically correct, oracy is concerned about *how* you speak and *how* you express yourself.

Having strong oracy skills means that you have:

- 1. The ability to structure your thoughts in a way that makes sense to others*
- 2. The vocabulary to say precisely what you want to say.*

So, what is oracy? Ultimately and essentially, it's about being a strong and effective communicator.

This means that it also refers to the range of speaking and listening skills, behaviours, and language necessary for communicating and working with others so that it makes sense to them. Oracy, in other words, covers the physical, social and emotional, linguistic and cognitive aspects of learning.

These skills can include the following:

- 1. Determining your audience's level of understanding,*
- 2. Expressing your own ideas clearly and sharing them with others,*
- 3. Giving someone instructions which they can understand and follow correctly,*
- 4. Explaining facts or comprehensive information by using more straightforward terms, or*
- 5. Having a conversation with someone and actively listening and taking an interest in what they have to say.*
- 6. Listening to the people you're engaging with and responding appropriately.*

In the same way that literacy is essential for reading and writing, oracy is necessary for becoming a good speaker and listener.

One of the most critical parts of oracy is thinking carefully about the language you choose when you speak and tailoring it to a specific purpose, audience or subject. Language, in this case, doesn't just mean choosing English or Filipino, for example. It has more to do with the words you choose to use and whether they will be understood.

Speaking in Public

The words you use to give a speech in front of businessmen will be very different from those you deliver when speaking to a group of university students specialising in history.

For young learners, you'll notice them exercising their oracy skills every time they speak to their classmates or engage with their teachers.

With the former, they might use simpler words and sentence structures to make sure that what they're saying is clear and understood by the other person. When talking to their teacher, who has a greater vocabulary range, they're free to use more complex sentences.

Why are oracy skills necessary for children?

Being a strong and effective communicator is a great skill to have throughout your life, so why shouldn't children get a head start with their oracy skills? They should learn not only to communicate well with others but also why it's important to be able to do so.

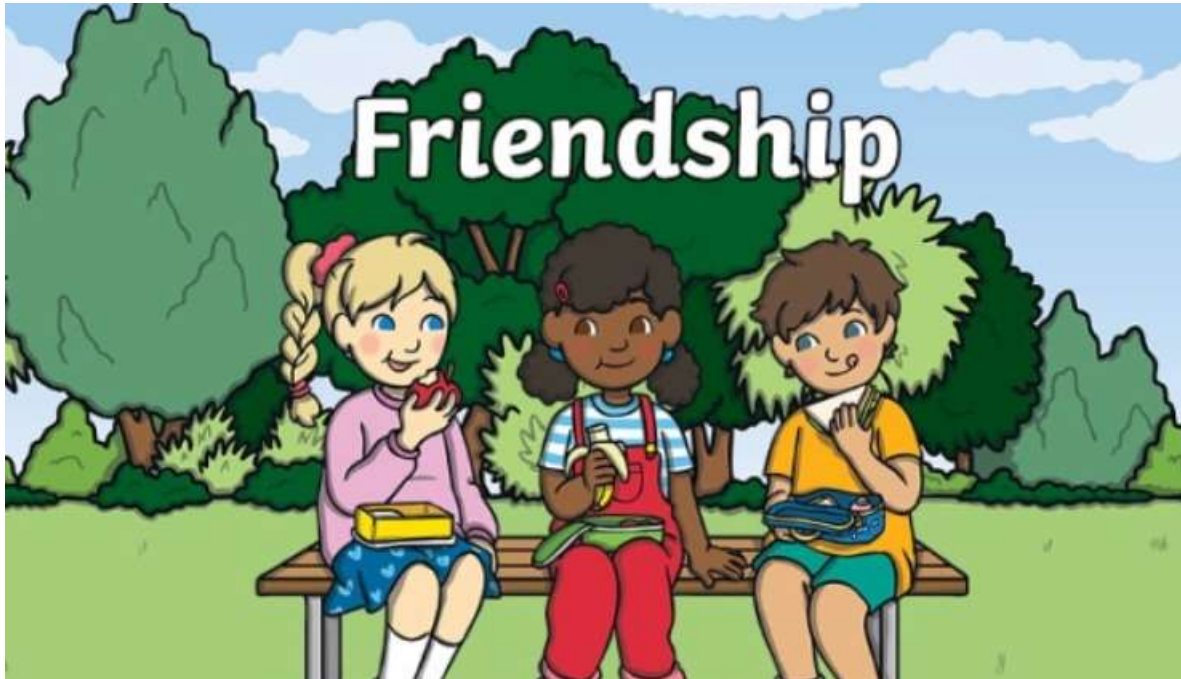


Good oracy skills can help children in every subject that they learn in school. It enables them to express their thoughts and opinions about what they're learning and interact with others thoughtfully and productively.

Communicating effectively also means that children will be able to express themselves when they don't understand something or perhaps need a little more support with a specific topic. With good oracy skills, they can reach out and explain what they're thinking and what they need help with.

But oracy skills aren't just crucial in subjects that directly relate to communication. They're also helpful in seemingly unrelated subjects such as maths or science, where children may need to explain to a classmate how they got their answer.

Having good oracy skills is vital for outside the classroom too. Building strong relationships depends on effective communication, so children will need to develop their oracy skills to form friendships with their peers and teachers.



These skills will also help them within these relationships. When they're upset or angry about something, for example, they'll be able to express their frustrations and talk about what's upsetting them, rather than lashing out or losing their temper because those around them can't understand what they're trying to say.

Teaching oracy at a young age means that children will have a greater chance of growing up into adults who can healthily express their feelings and be more capable of dealing with a range of emotions.

Oracy Skills in the national curriculum

While oracy isn't tested in the SATs, it's still a skill that feeds into all areas of the curriculum and can be beneficial for all children to work on.

Vocally discussing ideas with others before putting pen to paper can help children work through their thoughts and structure them before writing. This can boost children's writing, making it more structured and organised. Speaking and listening is also a brilliant way for children to learn from each other and their different ways of thinking.



The DfE's national curriculum for English says that the curriculum "reflects the importance of spoken language in pupils' development across the whole curriculum - cognitively, socially and linguistically." It also notes that "the quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak are vital for developing their vocabulary and grammar and their understanding of reading and writing."

Plus, one of its main aims is to "promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written word." When teaching oracy, you're helping children learn how to:

- explain their understanding and ideas clearly;
- discuss with others to deepen their learning and understanding;
- be competent in speaking and listening;
- make formal presentations;
- demonstrate skills and information to others;
- and participate in debates.

In short, oracy skills are a vital part of learning and are essential in meeting the aims of the national curriculum.

Teaching oracy skills in the classroom:

Most of the time, teaching oracy skills in the classroom is passive. In other words, students don't often attend a class on oracy in quite the same way they attend a maths class. Instead, children will hone their speaking and listening skills while learning about different subjects and topics, such as English, RE, PSHE or even science.

This can look like:

- *engaging in classroom discussion*

- holding structured debates
- teaching students how to do oral presentations
- allowing children to collaborate via group work

Teaching oracy skills at home:

Teaching oracy skills doesn't just happen in the classroom. It must be reinforced at home too. If you're a parent looking for some inspiration to help make your child a better speaker and listener, then the following ideas will help you teach your children the skills they need to become better at expressing themselves:

Read aloud to each other.

Perhaps the easiest way to build your child's vocabulary, get them used to bigger words and more complex sentences and encourage them to practise their oratory skills is to spend some time reading with them.

When you read a book together, make sure that you pronounce the words clearly, so your child can mimic you. And explain any words they don't know.

If your child knows how to read, why not take turns reading aloud? This way, children can develop their spoken skills and listening skills at the same time.

Depending on their reading skill, you could even swap roles in every sentence or every paragraph.



Ask your child about the book.

Once you've finished the book, there's more to be done!

Engage them in a discussion.

Ask your children questions. What do they like about the book? What do they not like about it? Do they agree with what the main character has done (or has not done)? Who was their favourite character, and why? What did they think about the ending?

These questions will give your children the chance to voice their ideas and thoughts.

You could even debate with them. If your child says that they don't think the book should've ended the way it did, act as the devil's advocate and offer a reason why you think the ending was perfect.

You might be surprised at how creative and yet logical your child could be.

Try activities that use instructions.

One way to improve your child's active listening skills is by giving them activities that require them to follow instructions. Baking is one such activity where, if your children don't do as they're told, they don't get the results they expect.

Talk, talk, talk.

Oracy skills are all about speaking and listening. What better way is there to do both of these than by having a conversation?

When your child finishes school, try asking them more specific questions to avoid the typical 'I can't remember' answer. Ask them what games they played at lunchtime or what they thought about a particular lesson they had that day. Questions such as 'What did you do today?' can be too open-ended. It's best to narrow it down, so children know where to start when sharing their thoughts.

In fact, some parents engage in pillow talk with their children during bedtime. This is a kind of conversation that connects parent and child at a heart-to-heart level. Here are a few questions you could ask:

1. *What was your best memory today?*
2. *What are you most proud of yourself for?*
3. *When do you feel misunderstood, and why?*
4. *What was your favourite part of the day?*
5. *Who did you play with today?*
6. *What made you sad/happy/angry?*
7. *What are you looking forward to tomorrow?*