

Collaborative Conversations

Speaking and listening standards ensure that students can communicate effectively and build on one another's ideas.

Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey

Increasing the amount of time that students spend using academic language has been a priority for decades. (See Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008.) Simply said, students need practice with academic language if they are to become proficient in that language: they must learn to speak the language of science, history, mathematics, art, literature, and technical subjects if they are to become thinkers in those disciplines. From the time that there have been education standards, speaking and listening have been included. That is not new. What is new is the role that student-to-student interaction plays in the Common Core State Standards. Although a great deal of attention is paid to the reading and writing standards, we believe that instructional leaders should also attend to the increased demands of the speaking and listening domain, especially anchor standard one, which states that students should

prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief

State School Officers, 2010, p. 22)

There is much to note in this standard, which applies to students across the grade levels. First, students are expected to come prepared to discuss, but instructional leaders who spend time in classrooms know that is rarely the case. More often, students are expected to work collaboratively with no preparation and no expectation that they are prepared for the interaction.

Second, students are expected to collaborate with diverse partners, which will require changes in instructional routines and procedures. In essence, the standard for speaking and listening sets the expectation that students should be able to engage effectively with a wide range of people, not just their friends and people they choose to interact with—which is, of course, the reality of most workplaces. Instructional leaders will need to be on the lookout for opportunities for students to interact with a wide range of their peers and provide teachers with assistance in forming groups and partnership activities.

Third, students are expected to maintain a conversation and continually build on others' ideas instead of simply sharing their own



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Watch the Video

See examples of student conversations at www.nassp.org/PL0413frey.



ideas or understandings before the conversation moves to the next person. And finally, they need to be able to do so by expressing their ideas clearly and persuasively.

Anchor standard one in the speaking and listening domain of the Common Core represents increased expectations for students. The way this is operationalized in different grades is presented in figure 1, where we have bolded words and phrases that did not appear in the previous grade to highlight the instructional components of each grade. For example, students in ninth grade are expected to “summarize points of agreement and disagreement,” language that did not appear in the standards for eighth grade. This one change is significant as most students are already skilled at sum-

marizing points of agreement but are rarely asked to summarize the points of disagreement. Analyzing the differences by grade level, known as vertical alignment, is essential if teachers are going to develop teaching points that align with the standards.

Instructional Implications

The most obvious instructional implication for meeting this standard relates to the use of time. Students need time every day in every class to practice their collaborative conversations. That’s not to say that teachers should simply turn over their classrooms for students to talk, but rather that there are expectations established for student-to-student interaction and that students will be held accountable for those interactions. An easy way to

do this is to use a conversation roundtable. Students can simply fold a piece of paper like the one in figure 2. As they read a selected piece of text, they take notes in the upper left quadrant. Then they take turns discussing the text and recording the content that their peers share in the other quadrants. At the end of the conversation, they can summarize their understanding of the text, identify the theme, or ask questions (depending on the task that was assigned by the teacher) in the area in the center.

It’s also important to provide students with instruction in how to engage in a collaborative conversation. They may need sentence starters at first to begin using argumentation in their discussions. For example, Karen Jessop gave her students the following frames when they wanted to offer a counter claim:

- I disagree with _____ because _____.
- The reason I believe _____ is _____.
- The facts that support my idea are _____.
- In my opinion, _____.
- One difference between my idea and yours is _____.

In addition, students need to be taught the rules of a conversation (Blyth, 2009), which include:

1. Avoid unnecessary details
2. Don’t ask another question before the first one has been answered
3. Do not interrupt another while he or she is speaking
4. Do not contradict, especially if it’s not important
5. Do not do all the talking
6. Don’t always be the hero of your story (but have a hero)
7. Choose a subject of mutual interest
8. Be a good listener

Figure 1 Speaking & Listening Anchor Standard 1

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- SL.CCR.1** Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly **and persuasively.***
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- SL.11–12.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Grade 11–12 Students:**
- Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
 - Work with peers **to promote civil, democratic** discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and **establish** individual roles as needed.
 - Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that **probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue;** clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; **and promote divergent and creative perspectives.**
 - Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; **synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.**
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- SL.9–10.1** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Grade 9–10 Students:**
- Come to discussions prepared, having read **and** researched material under study: explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence **from texts and other research** on the topic or issue to **stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.**
 - Work with peers to set rules** for collegial discussions and decision-making (**e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternative views**), **clear** goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
 - Propel conversations** by posing **and responding** to questions that **relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.**
 - Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement,** and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views **and understanding and make new connections** in light of the evidence **and reasoning** presented.

Figure 1 CCR Speaking & Listening Anchor Standard 1

SL.8.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 8 topics, texts, and issues</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
Grade 8 Students:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion. Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed. Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas. Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.
SL.7.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 7 topics, texts, and issues</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
Grade 7 Students:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion. Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed. Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed. Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.
SL.6.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 6 topics, texts, and issues</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
Grade 6 Students:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion. Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed. Pose and respond to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text, or issue under discussion. Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

* Words and phrases in bold are standards that do not appear in the previous grade.

Source: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common core state standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Retrieved from the Common Core State Standards Initiative website: www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSJ_ELA%20Standards.pdf

- 9. The conversation should be in harmony with the surroundings
- 10. Do not exaggerate
- 11. Do not misquote
- 12. Cultivate tact.

These 12 aspects of conversation could become the focus of curricula across the content areas as schools prepare students to engage in the 21st century skill of communication. As we have noted, speaking and listening have been part of content standards for decades, but they have not received much instructional attention. Perhaps this time they will, especially if the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers or

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium develop assessments that gauge students' ability to interact with other human beings in the ways outlined in the standards. **PL**

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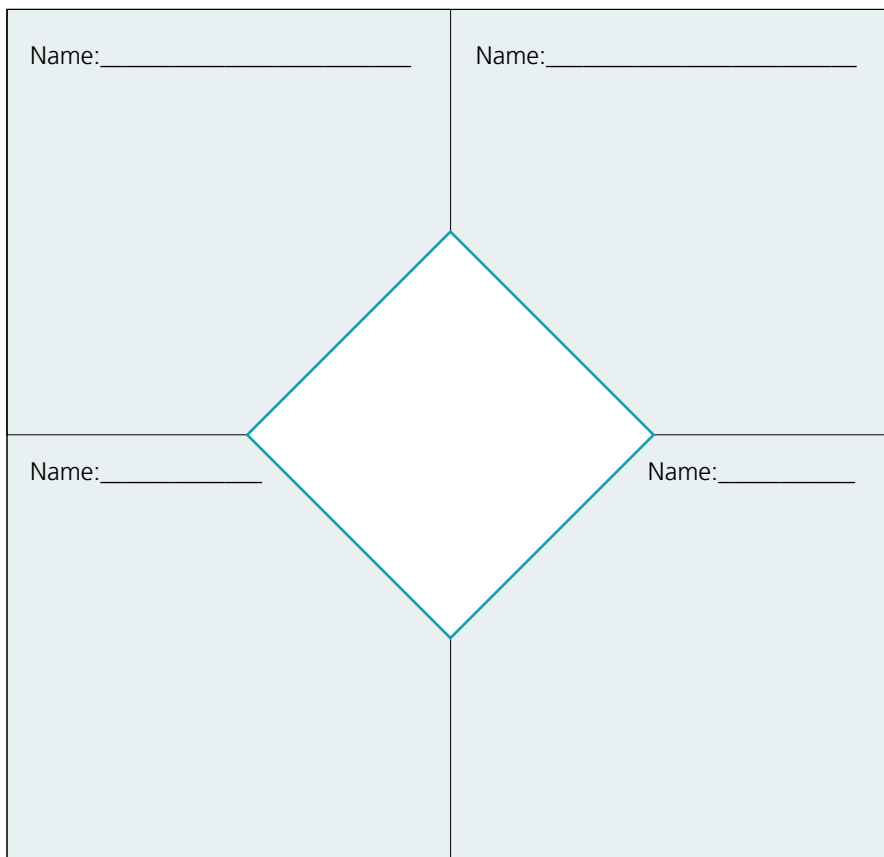
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Figure 2 **Conversation Roundtable**



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