

Elaborate & Clarify

Questions to Elaborate & Clarify

"Tell me more about..."

"Can you elaborate on..."

"That's true, but how..."

"And how can we connect that to..."

"What do you think about..."

"Why do you think that is?"

Opinion Continuum

Pick three or four two-sided issues about which students could have opinions. Create continuums using the template provided. Give half of the students a continuum sheet. Students with sheets meet with nonsheet students, and the nonsheet students share their opinions with their partners. The sheet holder asks questions to clarify the nonsheet student's opinion. The nonsheet student elaborates and justifies his or her opinion with examples. The nonsheet student signs his or her name on the continuum at the point that matches his or her opinion. Students should not be directly in the middle. Students then rotate to new partners. After gathering three or more signatures, or when you indicate, each sheet holder must sign his or her name on the continuum and provide elaboration and justification to a nonsheet partner. If there is time, sheet students can share out what their partners argued and whether they were swayed by the conversations. If there is time, you can start over, with the nonsheet partners becoming sheet students.

Support Ideas with Examples

Conversation Planning Form

Writing down what they will talk about forces students to sort out the relevant from the irrelevant and to organize their thoughts before they share them with a partner. It provides some silent thinking and language practice before the actual conversation. Students can then use the notes, if needed, during the conversation. Writing might take the form of two-column notes, Venn Diagrams, quick paragraphs, charts, semantic maps, drawings and so on.

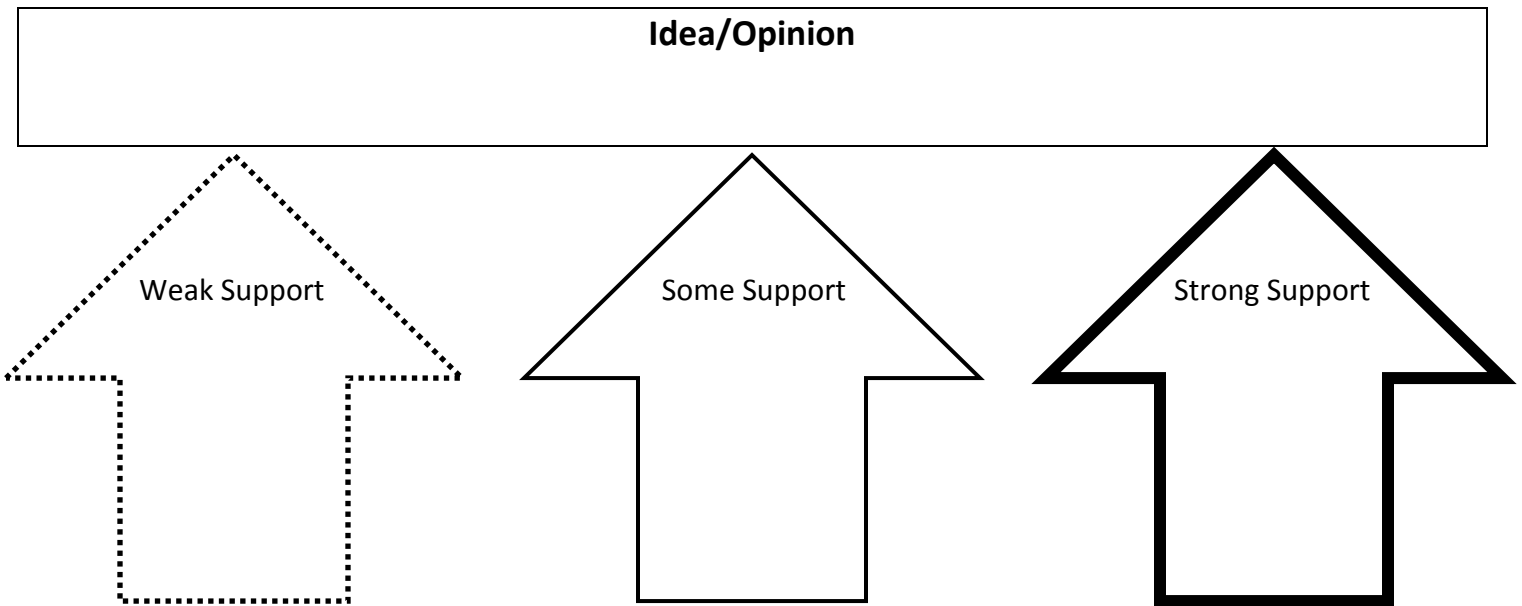
Students might even fill out a conversation form. This form helps students to generate and organize their thoughts before they converse. They can fill it out individually or together. Planning on paper also shows students the importance of organizing ideas in conversations.

Evaluating the Support of Examples

Teachers sometimes ask the question, "Is that a strong example?" This is an important question and one that all students should ask themselves and one another, but it is not easy to answer without some extra teaching. How do we know if an example is helpful or not in supporting an idea? In any society, and in each

discipline, there is an amorphous set of values that students must learn in order to evaluate the support of ideas in a discipline. Student must learn to judge the value of each idea and example as they read, listen, and talk. For example, in social science, students must learn that the data from a few convenient people is likely less valuable than data from a random sample of many people.

Students can practice evaluating the support values of examples in conversation using the graphic organizer shown below. First, write an idea of opinion in the top box. This could relate to a theme, interpretation, hypothesis, or inference. Second, as a class, generate a list of examples and put them below the arrow boxes or off to the side. Third, model and discuss with the class the level of support or weigh that each example gives, and writing in in the corresponding arrows.



Supportive Examples Practice

This activity offers students a chance to quickly generate examples that support an idea, perspective or argument. You and/or the class provide an idea of theme statement, and students tell each other examples from the text, other texts, media, their live, the past, the present and the future. They can also generate counterexamples. Finally, students can discuss whether the theme is valid or not, based on the strength of the examples.

Students can use a graphic organizer to organize and spark their generation of examples. Students can also use the following starters:

*For example,
According to
To illustrate
Another example
Such as*

*As stated in
The author stated
For instance
A salient example
Consider*

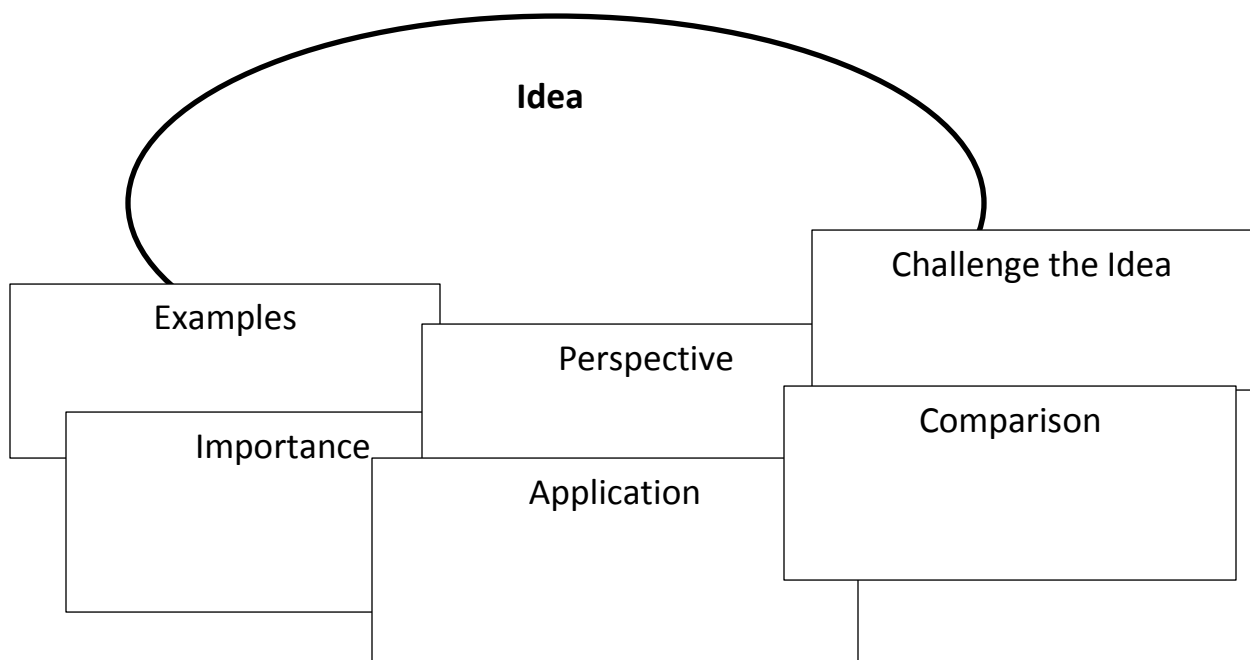
*In fact
The text shows
As evidence of
Specifically
Let us take the case of*

Build On/Challenge a Partner's Idea

Idea Building

This activity trains students to build on the previous idea mentioned in a conversation. Students use small slips of paper as “bricks” to build up the idea. The graphic organizer shown below can be used for this activity. For example, if one student brings up the idea that humans are causing global warming, write that big idea in the oval. Students should then fill in bricks that support, relate to, question, or add on to that idea. Bricks that don't relate well should be placed to the side.

As they share their bricks, students should use appropriate idea-building language, such as *I would add that...*, *To piggyback off your idea about...*, *I also have an example of that...*, *Some people might say that this...*, *This is important because...*, and *Yet some might argue against this because...*



Conflicting Texts and Quotations

Choose two or more texts that contradict one another. These might be opinion articles, historical accounts, interpretations of scientific data, and so on, on the same topic. Or they might be quotations that conflict. For example, in history class you might give two quotations that contradict one another from the same person. Abraham Lincoln had several, and John Smith told the story about his capture by Pocahontas's tribe two different ways at different times in his life. Many folds offer conflicting reviews of novels, films, and current events.

Have students converse about the conflicting texts and come to a consensus on what they mean or why they conflict. Each student can take a text and argue for it. Or both can work together to build up the most reasonable interpretation for the clash.

Two-Minute Opinion Share

With students in pairs, assign one student to be A and one to be B. Describe a controversial issue and have students think about their opinions for one minute. Then call a letter and have the person assigned that letter begin, describing his or her opinion for one minute, backed by examples and evidence. The other student must take the opposing side of the issue. Students could challenge one another's evidence, solicit examples, and ask for elaboration. They can try to come to a consensus in the third minute.

Paraphrase

Paraphrase Cards

This activity serves several purposes. It teaches equity of voice, paraphrasing, and organization of ideas. Partner A holds five or six blank sharing cards for Partner B. When Partner B share an idea, Partner A write down a paraphrased version of the message and puts it down in front of them. They can organize the cards later, if needed. If one partner share too much, it will be obvious, and the partner who shared less will need to share more.

Interview Grids

Another way to practice and develop paraphrasing skills is to have students quickly answer questions and have partners paraphrase the answers on paper, preferably in small boxes. The interview grid is a matrix used by students as they go around the room talking to each other. On the top are academic questions that should require long-ish answers, which make them better for paraphrasing.

This is an example used in middle school science. Notice the prompts (compare, explain, argue) require thinking.

Name	Compare bird and insect adaptations	Explain how crocodiles have adapted	Argue why dinosaurs became extinct
Silvia	Birds and insects can escape by flying	Fast in water; sharp teeth	Meteor started an ice age
David	Some bugs smell bad; other can sting you	They eat everything; camouflage	Smoking
Safiye		Very tough skin; they look like logs	They got diseases and ran out of food

Synthesize Conversation Points

Parking, Promoting, Pruning Ideas

Parking Distracting Thoughts – Train students to write down thoughts that might be useful later, or to “park” them (Nichols, 2006).

Promoting – Some brilliant ideas never get shared. Teach students to promote ideas.

Pruning – Students also need to discard (prune) thoughts that are likely to be unhelpful.

Pair-Plus-One

Have students practice in “pair-plus-one” groups. The third person is an observer who provides feedback and extra support as the partners converse. Eventually, students practice in pairs and self-monitor.

Connect-The-Word Cards

This activity (adapted from Zwiers 2008) challenges students to see and verbalize relationships between important vocabulary terms. It becomes a visual way to make connections and remember the words for a long time. Main content words (bricks) go on rectangular cards and connection descriptions (mortar terms) go on diamond-shaped cards.

To model the activity as a whole class, put words on the rectangular cards (put their meanings on the back of the cards, if needed) and think aloud to describe the connections between the key words. Write connection notes on the diamond cards. Give a connect-the-words organizer to student pairs. Have students identify the most important word or phrase in a section of the text and put it in the center oval. IN pairs, students should find other important words and write the in the rectangles at the outer corners. They can move the cards around, if they want. Pairs can ask one another, How does that word relate to this word? How does this word relate to the central word? Pairs can share their connections with other pairs. If there is time, have students create a written summary.

