Planning tools and thinking routines

1.1: Scoping an issue

This planning tool is aimed at scoping your issue, including understanding and summarising different viewpoints and evidence. This protocol was originally developed to be used with students to demystify issues but is included here as a way of supporting teachers to ‘scope’ an issue, and to explore the topic, arguments and underlying values to consider teaching implications for that issue. This planning tool is adapted from Clark’s (2006) four-step classroom strategy.

Step 1: What is the issue about?

* Is the issue connected to values? That is, the ways things ‘should’ be?
* Is the issue a debate about the ‘truth’? Is the debate about the significance or meaning of something?
* Who are the main stakeholders for the issue?

Step 2: What are the arguments?

* What are the different perspectives?
* Why is there a difference in perspectives?
* What evidence supports these perspectives?
* How sound are these arguments?

Step 3: What is assumed?

* What values, beliefs or assumptions underpin these arguments?
* How has the media influenced perspectives and arguments?

Step 4: How are the arguments manipulated?

* Are the arguments manipulated through creating scapegoats, black and white (polarised) thinking or false analogies?
* Are there emotional appeals?

Note: These questions are about the issue and the arguments, rather than ‘who’ is making these arguments. This can help to depersonalise an issue but can also reinforce misconceptions if the third step is not completed coherently.

1.2: Planning for teaching a contemporary issue

Use this tool to help plan for teaching a contemporary issue.

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| Issue | Students |
| * Describe the issue.
* What are key perspectives on this issue?
* Where can I find case study materials for this issue?
* What parts of this issue are challenging, contested or controversial?
 | * How is this issue relevant to my students?
* What are my students interested in?
* What prior knowledge do they have about this issue?
* What learner characteristics should I consider when planning?
* How can I embed a student perspective into the topic?
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| Curriculum | Learning activities |
| * Achievement standard
* Content descriptions
* Relevant vocabulary
* Capabilities
 | * Describe the teaching idea/approach that connects the issue to the curriculum.
* What conversation-based activities will support dialogue around this issue?
* What literacy and media literacy strategies will help students to evaluate information about this issue?
* How will students demonstrate or apply their knowledge in assessment and/or the real world?
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1.3: Planning for debate-style activities

This guide aims to provide some additional guidance for conversation-based learning activities, including debates. It explores some of the characteristics of three popular approaches to civic discourse and identifies ‘things to think about’ to help with planning these activities. This tool supports the learning covered in Module 4 of this resource.

Three types of civic discourse activities

* Traditional debate – This will be familiar to teachers with experience with school debating. Students are given a contentious statement and assigned to either ‘affirmative’ or ‘negative’ teams. Teams of three students take turns to debate each other for a nominated amount of time and then a judge or adjudicator decides a winner. This type of activity is valuable later in a learning sequence as students need to independently apply skills and knowledge during the preparation and debate.
* ‘Four corners’ or ‘vote with your feet’ activity – For these activities, students are given a contentious statement then asked to move to a point in the room. This can either be a straight line (continuum) ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree or four corners indicating different perspectives (such as agree, disagree, not sure and in the middle). From these positions students share their reasoning and ask questions of each other, and they can move around the room depending on how their thinking changes. This activity is less structured than a formal debate and allows more teacher input to facilitate. This makes it a good choice for earlier in a learning sequence.
* Consensus building – This is an umbrella term for many activities that ask students to explore an issue, seek to understand different perspectives and evidence, and then work through a series of structured steps to develop a shared synthesis of the issue. These activities demand that all students understand the issue and can negotiate a fair outcome. The steps can seem complicated at first so it may take scaffolding to support students to succeed in these activities. The steps can, however, facilitate deep thinking about an issue and the development of a variety of critical and creative thinking skills.

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| Activity style | Pros | Cons |
| Traditional debate | * Highly engaging and popular with students due to the competitive nature
* Students can be assigned a perspective to prepare for that may challenge their preconceived ideas
* Students can rehearse their key arguments during preparation time and anticipate counterarguments
* Students get to work collaboratively in teams
 | * Takes time to plan
* Can be very stressful for less confident students
* Promotes polarisation of perspectives
* Focuses on winning rather than clarity
* Can convince students of a particular perspective, even an inaccurate one, through the process of preparing and arguing for it
* The rebuttal process can be very challenging for many students due to limited thinking time
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| ‘Four corners’ or ‘vote with your feet’ activity | * Allows students to physically move around the room
* Supports students to change their minds in the face of new evidence or arguments
* Is quick to plan and implement
* The teacher can moderate the conversation to support questioning, use of evidence and respectful civic dialogue
 | * Is minimally structured so student may not prepare as rigorously as for the other two styles of activities
* As students are moving, they may not have notes and evidence to hand to support or record the discussion
* Students can see where other students are standing to indicate their position, which can have a strong influence on their decisions
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| Consensus decision-making | * Supports students to change their minds
* Is highly structured to support deep thinking
* Ensures all students have input into the issue
* Encourages pluralistic approaches to civic issues
 | * Takes time to plan
* Can create a situation where compromise is seen as the final goal of all civic discourse
* It can be challenging to navigate these activities when some perspectives held by students are illegitimate or discriminatory
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Things to think about

* How are you assessing this activity and what skills are you rewarding? Are you encouraging the most polarised and passionate debaters or are you encouraging those students who might be more reserved or need time to organise their thinking?
* What role does respect play in these classroom conversations?
* It is often helpful to provide sentence stems for civil discourse, for example, ‘I’m interested in what (James) said about (electric cars), I’m wondering if you could share your evidence for this perspective’ rather than telling James that he ‘made it all up’.
* Give students time to build confidence around conversation structures, content and vocab in small groups and pairs before embarking on whole group debates.
* Decide – Does a traditional debate, with its polar opinions and focus on defeating your opponent, suit the issue? Is the type of conversation-based activity suited to the issue? Sensitive topics – for example, topics related to Indigenous Australian cultures, gender and sexuality, or disability – might be more effectively addressed with activities that model civic collaboration, consensus building and an inquiry approach.
* Preparation and practice are important to support students to be successful when engaging in rigorous conversation activities (this is sometimes called ‘substantive talk’).
* Students can be appointed to record perspectives and questions as well as reflect on the process.

1.4: Thinking routines for Civics and Citizenship

To support deep thinking when exploring contemporary issues in Civics and Citizenship, the table below shares six effective thinking routines from Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Project Zero (2022).

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| Thinking routine | Why we think it is useful |
| [Step in – step out – step back](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/step-in-step-out-step-back) | * A routine for nurturing a disposition to take social/cultural perspective responsibly
* This is useful as it helps students to be curious about other perspectives
* This activity can help to build self-awareness
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| [The 4Cs](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/the-4-cs) | * A routine for structuring a text-based discussion
* Can be used for analysing media texts or perspectives on an issue
* Includes the prompts of connections, challenge, concepts and changes to guide students to read deeply into the text and structure notetaking or annotations to support discussion
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| [Creative Questions](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/creative-questions) | * A routine for generating and transforming questions
* This is a creative activity that can be used to guide research around an issue or to help to suggest solutions
* It is an example of a thinking routine to support divergent and creative thinking
* Builds awareness of how important the framing of questions is to the ways we understand an issue
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| [How else and why?](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/how-else-and-why) | * A routine for cultivating a disposition to communicate across difference
* Asks students to generate different ways of communicating
* This routine can be used as a specific activity or a sentence stem/habit in the classroom to encourage students to use respectful, specific and thoughtful language
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| [Ways things can be complex](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/node/773309) | * A guide for organising one’s understanding of a topic through concept mapping
* Rather than summarising and simplifying a topic, this activity seeks to discover nuances and details. This process can help students to see ‘shades of grey’ rather than just ‘black and white’ when considering contemporary issues
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| [Circle of viewpoints](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/circle-of-viewpoints) | * A routine for exploring perspectives
* This activity encourages students to think about a topic from a particular perspective. This helps them to understand the topic more deeply while simultaneously building awareness of how our experiences, backgrounds and other factors influence our viewpoints and opinions
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A great description of how some of these thinking routines work in action is provided in [How to be a global thinker](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/how-to-be-a-global-thinker) from ASCD (Boix-Mansilla 2016).

References

Boix-Mansilla V (2016) [How to be a global thinker](file://vcaafs01/Curriculum%24/SOSE/Humanities/2021%20Gerry/2.%20F-10/Civics/4.%20Civics%20Project/10.%20SEV%20Resource/Deliverables/Editorial%20review/Batch%202%20queries/How%20to%20be%20a%20global%20thinker), ASCD website, accessed 30 June 2022.

Clark P (2001) [Teaching controversial issues: a four-step classroom strategy for clear thinking on controversial issues](https://greenteacher.com/teaching-controversial-issues/), Green Teacher website, accessed 30 June 2022.

Harvard Graduate School of Education (2022) [Project Zero’s Thinking Routines Toolbox](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines), Project Zero website, accessed 30 June 2022.