Higher-Order Thinking through Daily Academic Discussion

Tools and Practices for Supporting Overage Under-Credited Adolescents in Learning

A School Redesign Model based on the work at Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

NYC
Department of Education

An initiative of the
New York City Transfer School Common Core Institute

C ollaborative academic discussion can transform a classroom. Indeed, research indicates that when students regularly speak and listen to their classmates about the meaning of complex texts, the result is improvement in higher-order reading and writing skills as well as increased academic engagement. *Speaking & Listening: Higher-Order Thinking through Daily Academic Discussion* presents a set of instructional practices and tools that have enhanced the literacy skills of students who were once lagging behind in high school. The tools were developed through the innovative work of Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School during that school's participation in the New York City Transfer School Common Core Institute, a professional development initiative for schools serving overage, under-credited students who have struggled to find success in school.

Overview of This Monograph

This monograph describes the four instructional tools and tips for using them to greatest effect so that educators in other settings may adapt Metro's successful approach to get the better results for struggling students.

Chapter 1 provides a rationale for the focus on speaking and listening skills as a lever for boosting students' mastery of the Common Core standards.

Chapters 2 through 4 introduce each of four tools along with steps for using them effectively and annotated samples. The last chapter closes the monograph with an overview of the key elements needed to lay the groundwork for successfully putting these practices in place.

An appendix provides blank copies of the tools for other schools to use or modify.

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ACKNOWLDEGMENTS

The New York City Transfer School Common Core Institute

The New York City Transfer School Common Core Institute is a unique professional development model. It was launched in 2012 to build the capacity of teachers and schools to help students who have struggled in public schools to master the Common Core standards. From 2012 to 2015, all participating schools exclusively served students who are overage, under-credited and had fallen behind in high school in the past. Schools were selected through a competitive process that involved identifying clear goals, crafting action plans, and creating teacher and administrator teams to support the work.

Once admitted, schools were provided three years of job-embedded coaching and technical assistance by the Department of Education and its professional development partners, reDesign and Eskolta School Research and Design. Together, this team of partners collaborated to simultaneously strengthen instructional practices and transform systems and structures to support these new practices. This occurred through two core components:

- **Job-embedded coaching and capacity-building.** The work launched with site-based strategic planning to support individual schools as they refined their Common Core focus and created a plan for participation in the Institute for the year. Teachers, principals, and instructional teams at each school then worked with partners on their Common Core alignment efforts, collaborating for approximately 20 days, over the course of each year.

- **Communities of practice.** Inter-school collaborative opportunities that enable school teams to learn from one another occurred throughout each year of involvement in the Institute, through a mix of hosted site visits, full-day Saturday Symposiums for cross-school sharing and planning, and Leadership Sessions for school principals.

A Customized Approach: Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School's Focus on Speaking & Listening

Metro principal Meri Yallowitz and her faculty have sought to help students meet the expectations outlined in the CCSS and arm them with the skills to succeed in college and careers. They decided to focus their work with TSCCI on developing instructional practices that enhance students' speaking, listening, writing, and metacognitive skills. To support this effort, they designed a set of tools to scaffold and monitor student mastery of skills in these related domains. The tools help them track student progress in each skill area, tailor group instruction, and inform ongoing lesson and unit planning.

How do you deepen learning?

Teachers at Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School determined that if students spent more time every day engaged in academic discussions with one another about texts, experiments, and mathematical problems, this academic dialogue would set off a cascade of growth. And it did. Over three years, **more engagement in speaking and listening led to deeper reading and writing skills, which, in turn, led to improved scores on the state's high-stakes Regents exams.** Through academic discussion, Metro's students had become scholars.

Over this three-year period, the Metro faculty worked together to make structured, text-based discussions a central part of coursework in every department. By focusing on speaking and listening skills, teachers could help students better understand what they were reading while also enhancing important critical thinking skills, such as analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing complex texts. Students practiced these skills in discussions with peers and then applied them to their argumentative writing across subject areas. As they mastered these skills, they began to show more ownership of their learning.

Teachers noticed students who had once been reluctant writers and reticent speakers now eager to improve their discussion and writing skills. Students began viewing these as essential to their success in high school and beyond.

In 2013, Metro used its participation in New York City's Transfer School Common Core Institute (TSCCI) to launch a multiyear effort to develop schoolwide, student-centered instructional practices with the goal of improving students' higher-order thinking skills.

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Located in the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn, Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School (Metro) currently serves 198 students, 95% of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

Metro is a place where students who once struggled to fit into the norms of "school" can finally feel part of a community. Walking the halls, a visitor sees bulletin boards filled with samples of exemplary student work. Creating these elaborate displays can take hours out of a teacher's already jam-packed schedule, but the pride students feel makes that effort worth it.

That's the type of school Metro is. The entire staff, from the principal to the teachers, goes above and beyond for their students.

"Everyone wants the students to succeed," explains one teacher. "We chose to work with this population because we believe that we can have a positive impact and make a difference."

The Impact of Daily Academic Discussion

Metro staff have witnessed remarkable growth in student performance over the three years since they set out to engage students in daily text-based discussions. Students have also shown marked improvements on their Regents exams. Since 2012, the proportion of Metro students who passed the Regents exam increased in all subject areas. In English language arts, the overall pass rate increased from 86 percent to 93 percent, and in U.S. History from 80 percent to 96 percent.

"We knew that if our students could speak about a topic, they would be able to write more critically about that topic," says Assistant Principal Judy Caputo.

"The tools and strategies we developed and piloted through TSCCI (Transfer School Common Core Institute) have ensured that our students become stronger readers, writers, and thinkers."

Metro students report being able to transfer the speaking and listening skills they have honed in class to other aspects

MAKING INFERENCES
- "IF___, THEN…"
- "THIS COULD MEAN…"
- "I INFER…"
- "MY GUESS IS…"
- "I ASSUME…"
- "I THINK THIS REPRESENTS…"

MAKING CONNECTIONS
- This relates to…
- I already know that…
- I'm remembering…
- This is relevant to my life because…
- This reminds me of [ANOTHER TEXT] because…
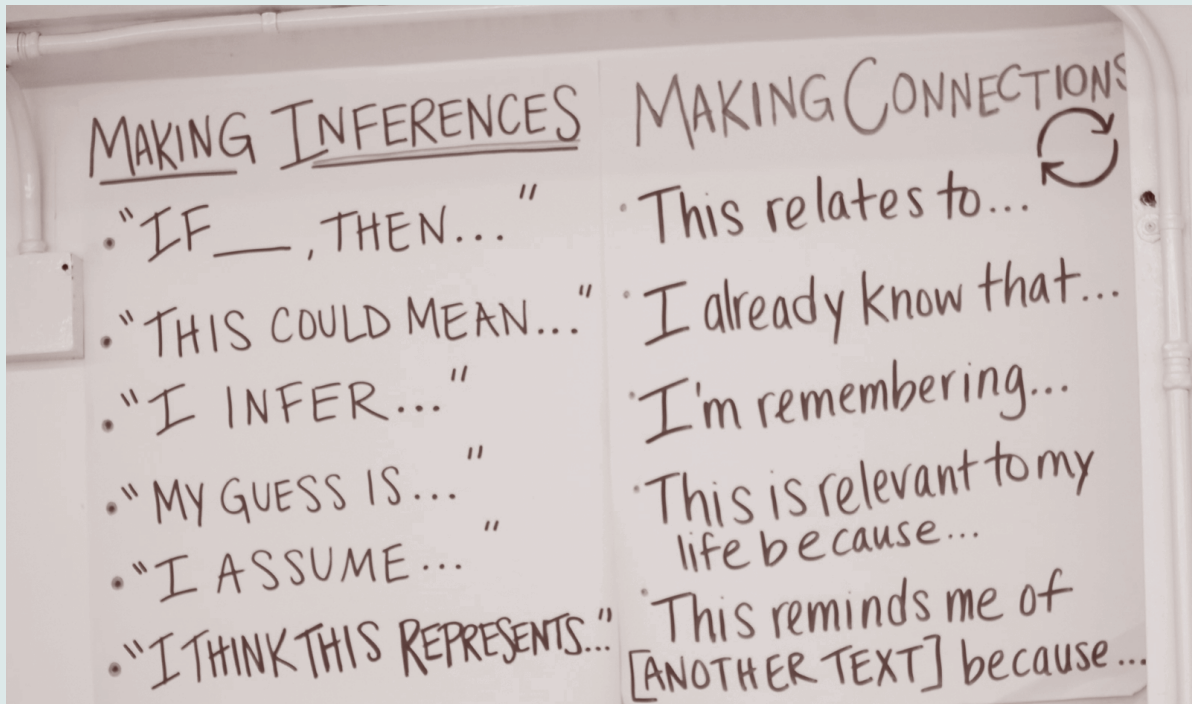
of life. "I went on job interviews at Staples and McDonald's. The way I spoke made them ask me if I was older than I was," one student remarked, adding that over time engaging in thoughtful academic discussion "comes more naturally. It's not just a rule in school. It's something that actually does help you in your everyday life."

These new tools have led to a sea change at Metro, reshaping instructional practices across all subject areas. Being able to track each student's progress on specific skills has allowed teachers to move away from using whole-group instructional structures, such as lectures, and instead create differentiated stations where groups of four or five students work on honing target skills while the teacher circulates and monitors student learning.

Metro principal Meri Yallowitz notes a corresponding shift in the professional culture at Metro. "Our teachers feel safe to try new instructional approaches, visit each other's classrooms, and give each other feedback," she says. "This is a result of the trusting relationships that have been nurtured and, in turn, this has [further] empowered students to think more deeply and take ownership over their learning process."

"The tools and strategies we developed and piloted have ensured that our students become stronger readers, writers, and thinkers."

1 | Deeper Thinking through Daily Academic Conversations

Engaging in thoughtful classroom discussion can be particularly powerful for students, like those at Metro, with a history of academic disengagement. Students who struggle to understand complex texts independently can benefit from structures that allow them to think aloud and surface questions in a risk-free environment.

When students participate in daily, purposeful text-based conversations, they develop important critical thinking skills. Too often, though, such conversations are teacher led. Teachers may present deeper themes or connections in texts, but only a small percentage of learners will absorb and synthesize these concepts through lectures and direct instruction.

When teachers instead put students at the center of discussion—providing frequent opportunities for them to discuss texts, concepts, and their own thinking processes with each other—students' learning accelerates, consolidates, and becomes more visible to everyone. In this way, academic discussion acts as both a teaching strategy and a formative assessment that informs thoughtful ongoing differentiation (Thomlinson & Moon, 2014). Educational research increasingly points to collaborative discussion as a powerful means of boosting students' higher-order thinking, classroom engagement, and overall academic performance (Applebee et al., 2003; Barkley et al., 2014).

The Common Core State Standards similarly emphasize skills like listening actively, building on others' ideas, and expressing one's own ideas clearly and persuasively. The standards further suggest that students should have ample opportunities to engage in a variety of rich, thoughtful, content-based conversations in order to be college and career ready.

Engaging in thoughtful classroom discussion can be particularly powerful for students, like those at Metro, with a history of academic disengagement. Students who struggle to understand complex texts independently can benefit from structures that allow them to think aloud and surface questions in a risk-free environment. When students can see and hear themselves making connections and asking

questions, and when they know this is valued as part of a thinking process rather than seen as a sign of misunderstanding, they gain a deeper understanding of their own learning processes. This self-awareness—or metacognition—contributes to a range of important academic behaviors that research links to better outcomes in high school, college, careers, and beyond (Conley, 2010).

Importantly, instruction that prioritizes speaking and listening can help shift teachers' and students' focus from what has been taught to what students have actually learned, as evidenced in their discussions. The first step in creating such a shift at Metro was to define the speaking and listening skills involved in productive academic conversations and connect those skills to related skills used in analytical writing in a new set of schoolwide *Speaking and Listening and Writing Rubrics* (Chapter 2). The rubrics provide consistent language to anchor academic discussion, while setting clear expectations across classrooms. A set of *Student-Led Discussion Stems* (Chapter 3) help students practice using the language of academic discourse to express ideas, build on the thoughts of others, and make their thinking visible.

Metro's *Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet* (Chapter 4) is the next step in the process, supporting students to take responsibility over their learning through reflection and self-assessment (Gagnon & Collay, 2001). During discussions, students use the tool to set goals, monitor their thinking process, and reflect on questions they still have or skills they want to develop further with their peers.
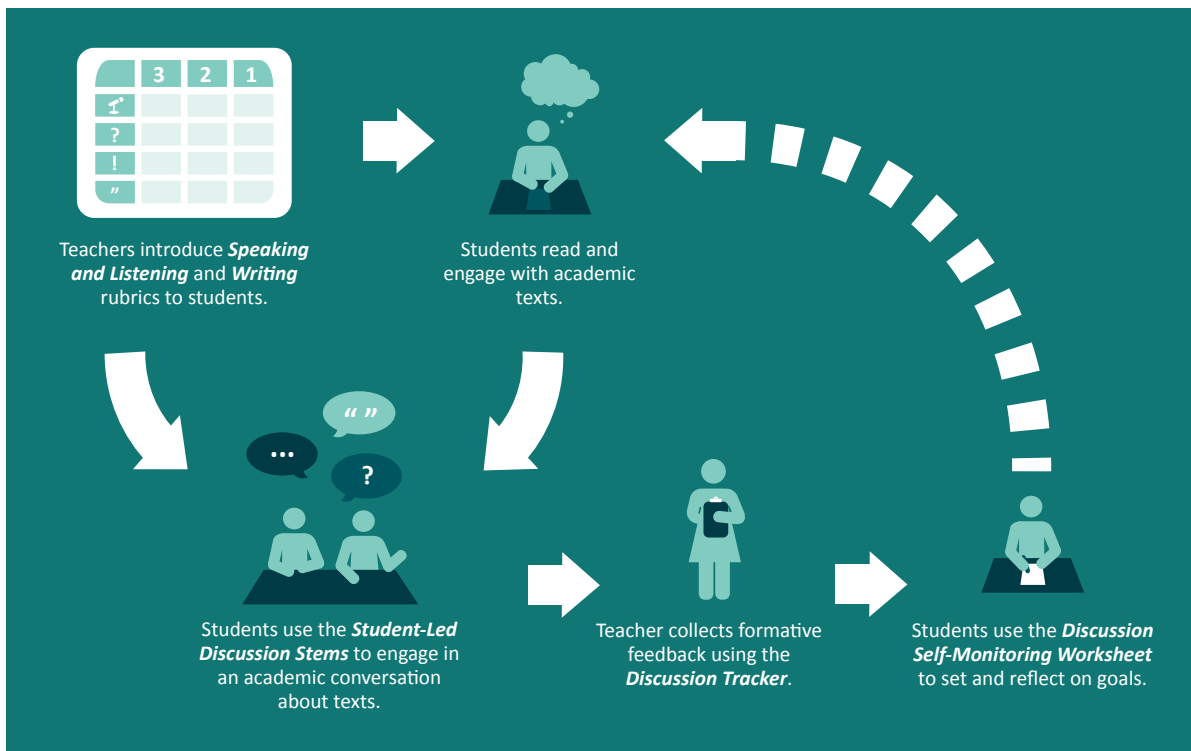
The last link in this instructional chain is formative assessment. Text-based discussion provides teachers with an opportunity to quickly assess students' content understanding and skill development. The *Teacher Discussion-Monitoring Worksheet* (Chapter 5) allows teachers to track the skills students use in discussion groups to provide immediate feedback, rearrange small-group learning stations based on need, and tailor discussion formats to help students build target skills. The result is a classroom environment that provides each student with the differentiated learning experiences and targeted support they need to master rigorous standards.

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Higher-Order Thinking through Daily Academic Discussion

A series of inter-related practices enable the work described in this monograph

Teachers introduce *Speaking and Listening* and *Writing* rubrics to students.

Students read and engage with academic texts.

Students use the *Student-Led Discussion Stems* to engage in an academic conversation about texts.

Teacher collects formative feedback using the *Discussion Tracker*.

Students use the *Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet* to set and reflect on goals.

2 | Common Expectations: Speaking and Listening and Writing Rubrics

How the ***Speaking and Listening*** and ***Writing Rubrics*** are put to use	**Purpose:**	To define essential skills, set expectations for learning, and provide feedback on writing as well as speaking and listening skills
	Who uses them:	Teachers and students
	When they are used:	During lesson planning, feedback conferences, and assessment
	Where they are used:	Displayed in classrooms and in students' folders

METRO TEACHERS USE THE *SPEAKING AND LISTENING* AND *WRITING RUBRICS* to define essential skills for academic conversation and constructive argumentation in any discipline. The rubrics provide consistent language to anchor classroom discussion, set high expectations, and create a bridge between skills developed through discussion and writing.

The pair of rubrics, both aligned to the Common Core standards, are most effective when used in tandem. The skills included on the *Speaking and Listening Rubric*—such as "developing a claim" and "using evidence"—help students construct knowledge and verbalize their thinking. Thus, academic conversation becomes more than just stating an answer or asking a clarifying question, but rather a dynamic way to analyze ideas and develop arguments. These skills are mirrored in the *Writing Rubric*. Together, the rubrics provide a coherent map for students to develop higher-order thinking skills in multiple modes.

At Metro, the rubrics are integrated into daily classroom culture across all departments. They are displayed on bulletin boards, kept in all student folders, and included on assignments and lessons. This consistency ensures that academic expectations are always easily accessible to students. The tools are also valuable for giving written and verbal feedback to individuals. Having the rubrics on hand during one-on-one conferences helps students reflect on their progress and set specific goals.

Speaking and Listening Rubric
Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Skill	EXCEEDS	MEETS	APPROACHING	NO EVIDENCE
Questioning	☐ **Propels conversation** by posing and responding to **questions that probe reasoning and deepen understanding** ☐ Initiates **new topics** of conversation using **open-ended questions**	☐ **Propels conversation** by posing and responding to **clarifying questions** or asking for **additional evidence** ☐ Questions are **unsolicited contributions** to the conversation	☐ Asks relevant questions for **clarification**, but only when solicited ☐ Uses **prompts** posted in the classroom to structure questions	☐ **Rarely asks** or responds to **questions** ☐ Asks questions that are **irrelevant and off-topic**
Support and Respect (Norms)	☐ Conveys active listening and engagement through appropriate **body language** and **wait time** ☐ Demonstrates **openness** to differences or **changes in opinion** ☐ Politely **moderates** and actively **incorporates others** in the discussion	☐ Makes **eye contact** and maintains a respectful **tone and language** ☐ Remains **focused** by not succumbing to distractions ☐ **Invites comments** from classmates ☐ Comes to discussions prepared by having **read and annotated the text**	☐ Maintains a respectful tone and **rarely interrupts** classmates ☐ Sometimes is distracted, but **makes an effort to re-focus** ☐ Comes to class **unprepared** for discussion, but **still contributes**	☐ Does not communicate with a respectful tone or language ☐ Is **easily distracted** during discussion ☐ Comes to class **unprepared** and **does not contribute**
Building on and Paraphrasing	☐ **Reflects on** what others say ☐ Paraphrases to **build understanding** together ☐ **Explores the topic** more deeply together if both sides agree	☐ **Reiterates** and **adds** to what others say ☐ Paraphrases to **show understanding** of others' claims	☐ **Repeats** points others make, but often due to inattention ☐ **Restates** the same points **rather than adding on** to previously raised points	☐ **Does not paraphrase** what others say or add to the conversation
Synthesis and Developing a Claim	☐ Refers back to **previous parts of the conversation** as additional evidence ☐ Keeps track of what **other people say** (real-time thinking) ☐ **Makes connections** among concepts or previous knowledge	☐ Uses evidence to **establish a claim** ☐ Shows evidence of a **new understanding** based on the conversation ☐ Incorporates **counterclaims** (if appropriate to discipline)	☐ Expresses an opinion without evidence ☐ Shows **understanding of the main topic** ☐ **Does not include a counterclaim** successfully	☐ Claims or opinions are **not clearly stated** ☐ **Does not demonstrate an understanding** of the conversation ☐ **Does not include a counterclaim** successfully
Use of Evidence	☐ Includes specifics of **where evidence was found** ☐ **Make new connections** in light of evidence and reasoning presented in the discussion	☐ Includes evidence of text using **active reading strategies** from multiple sources ☐ Refers to evidence from **texts and other research** ☐ Makes connections to **previously learned content**	☐ **Rarely supports claims** with evidence ☐ Evidence tends to be from **personal experience** rather than from texts ☐ Focuses on the **topic at hand** rather than connecting ideas to previously learned content	☐ Claims are **not supported** by evidence ☐ **Any evidence** used bears little relevance to the topic
Content Knowledge	☐ Consistently uses **academic vocabulary** ☐ Uses **domain-specific** and **precise** language	☐ **Incorporates academic vocabulary** into speech ☐ Uses **domain-specific** language	☐ **Rarely uses academic vocabulary** ☐ **Explains domain-specific** content, but rarely uses appropriate language	☐ **Does not use academic vocabulary** or domain-specific language

Writing Rubric (Aligned to CCLS W.1 and MoSL)

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Skill		EXCEEDS	MEETS	APPROACHING	NOT YET
Claim / Position		❑ Establishes a precise and convincing claim while **acknowledging the limitations and complexity of the issue/ topic**	❑ Establishes a **precise and credible claim**, grounded in evidence and reasoning ❑ Addresses **all aspects of the task**	❑ Establishes a **general claim** ❑ Responds to the task	❑ **States a claim** ❑ Does not completely address the task
Use of Evidence	**Elaboration**	❑ **Thoroughly explains reasons** why evidence supports claim ❑ Uses words, phrases, and clauses to **create cohesion** between claims, reasons, and evidence ❑ **Consistently** refers to sources when appropriate	❑ States **how evidence supports claim** ❑ Uses words, phrases, and clauses to **clarify the relationship** between **claims, reasons, and evidence** ❑ **Refers to sources** when appropriate	❑ **Cites evidence** with little to no **explanation** of how it supports claim ❑ Uses words, phrases, and clauses to **link evidence to reasons,** but lacks clarity ❑ **Rarely** refers to sources	❑ Uses **very little evidence** ❑ Evidence is **irrelevant** or **does not support the claim** ❑ Mentions, but **does not cite sources**
	Analysis	❑ Analyzes evidence to **draw out new meanings and understandings** ❑ **Analyzes counterclaims** to explain why the claim is stronger	❑ Analyzes evidence to **infer author's meaning and purpose** ❑ Discusses counterclaims	❑ **Analyzes ideas** from the texts and begins to interpret the meaning and purpose ❑ **Makes note** of a counterclaim	❑ **Summarizes ideas** from the text ❑ Demonstrates **awareness of a counterclaim**
Quality of Evidence		❑ **Summarizes, paraphrases, and quotes relevant evidence** from the text to support claim ❑ **Incorporates a variety** of evidence from **multiple types** of sources	❑ **Paraphrases and quotes** relevant **evidence** from the text to support claim ❑ Incorporates evidence from **more than one type of source**	❑ **Summarizes relevant evidence** from the text ❑ Incorporates evidence from **one type of source**	❑ **Restates relevant evidence** from the text ❑ Incorporates **little evidence** from one type of source
Organization and Structure		❑ Develops strong introduction, body paragraphs, and a **conclusion that strengthens position** ❑ **Orders ideas** logically using **transitional phrases** to clarify the reasoning of the argument	❑ **Develops introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion** ❑ Orders ideas using transitional phrases to **allow the reader to follow the argument**	❑ Groups ideas through a **basic five-paragraph structure** ❑ Conclusion simply **restates the position**	❑ **Demonstrates little evidence** of five-paragraph structure and **illogical organization** ❑ **Conclusion confuses** the position
Tone and Audience		❑ **Consistently** maintains an objective tone and formal voice ❑ Uses appropriate language and tone in a style that **engages the audience**	❑ Maintains an **objective tone and formal voice** ❑ Uses **language appropriate to** audience and purpose	❑ Uses language and tone **generally appropriate to the audience** and purpose with minor lapses	❑ Uses **basic language and uneven tone** with some improper usage of words and phrases
Content Knowledge		❑ Exhibits **thorough** and accurate understanding of content ❑ **Consistently** uses academic vocabulary and domain-specific language ❑ When appropriate, **acknowledges author's bias or point of view**	❑ Exhibits **accurate understanding** of content ❑ Uses **academic vocabulary and domain-specific language**	❑ Exhibits **basic understanding** of the content ❑ Uses academic vocabulary and domain-specific language with **minor errors**	❑ Exhibits an **incomplete understanding** of the content ❑ **Rarely** uses academic vocabulary or domain-specific language

* *A marking of "No Evidence" refers to students who were absent or who have not exhibited any evidence of these skills.*

Using the *Speaking and Listening* and *Writing Rubrics*

| Introduce Rubrics to Set Expectations | Select Focus Skills | Use Rubrics to Guide Lesson Planning | Use Rubrics to Give Feedback |

Rubrics can do more than simply deliver a grade: when used as guideposts for learning, they provide a way for students and teachers to create a shared understanding of what skills look like in practice and how to improve them. Metro teachers use rubrics at four points in the learning process to support the development of crucial skills.

1 Introduce rubrics to set expectations.

To ensure that students see rubrics as proactive tools, introduce them at the beginning of the school year and explain that they will be used during every unit. Communicate to students that by using the rubrics to understand what skills look like in action, they will become stronger readers, speakers, and writers.

It can help to highlight where skills complement one another on both rubrics. For instance, the criteria for "Use of Evidence" on the *Speaking and Listening Rubric*, which asks students to "refer to evidence from texts and other research," is reinforced on the *Writing Rubric*, where students "state how evidence supports claim."

Quick Tip: Use Rubrics for Self and Peer Assessments

Self- and peer-evaluation provides an opportunity for students to better familiarize themselves with the skills they are expected to master while empowering them to take a lead role in their learning.

Engage students in collaborative groups by having them review rows from the rubrics together. Then, ask them to review their own assignment and their peers' to identify strengths and areas for growth.

"Last year I wrote an essay… off the top of my head and didn't do well. But for this first marking period I had [a friend] grade the work using the rubric. I made changes based on their assessment and got a 4."
—Metro student

2 Select focus skills gradually increasing complexity.

Choose one or two skills (i.e., rows on the rubric) for each lesson or assignment. This makes learning more accessible and manageable for students and teachers alike. Prior to teaching a class that will include academic discussion or a writing assignment, identify the skills that will be the appropriate focus of that class. Include the row(s) of the rubric that correspond to those skills on lesson handouts or display it on the board as a reference.

At the beginning of each trimester, Metro teachers uniformly focus on supporting and respecting norms in discussion (Speaking and Listening, row 2) and on establishing a claim in writing (Writing, row 1). As their courses progress and students become more adept with these entry-point skills, teachers sequence skills that successively build in complexity. After testing different sequences of lessons, Metro teachers have found that teaching skills in the following sequence has helped students get the most out of discussions:

- Support and Respect (Norms)
- Building On and Paraphrasing
- Questioning
- Synthesis and Developing a Claim
- Use of Evidence

How Did Metro Staff Develop Their Rubrics?

When they first set out to design a schoolwide *Speaking and Listening Rubric*, Metro teachers asked themselves, "What does a productive academic conversation really look like?" To answer this question, the full staff analyzed an academic discussion modeled by two teachers. Then, in pairs, staff members continued the conversation, reflecting on all of the skills they themselves were activating during the discussion.

From there, the group brainstormed a list of communication and literacy skills essential for a successful academic conversation. Once they had compiled this list, they knew they would need to narrow it down. To do so, a group of six teachers across subject areas examined and unpacked Common Core Standard SL.1 for grades eleven and twelve by identifying all the skills embedded in the standard. They then cross-referenced those skills with the ones in their original list to identify areas of overlap, which helped them zero in on six key skills.

Using the language of the standard, teachers then asked themselves, "What does this skill look like when a student meets the standard?" The group drafted specific criteria for the highest levels of the rubric and worked backward to define what the skill would look like at each level.

Metro teachers used this same process to develop the *Writing Rubric*: they analyzed exemplar essays, drew from experience and the *Speaking and Listening Rubric*, unpacked Common Core Writing Standard 1 (argumentative writing), looked for overlapping skills, and fleshed out each level of the rubric. After a few rounds of revisions, they were ready to pilot their rubrics in classes.

Educators in other schools can replicate this process to design their own rubrics and develop deep staff understanding and ownership of the skills within.

3 Use sequenced skills to guide lesson planning.

When designing a unit, use the rubrics as a guide to plan a set of lessons that lead up to completing an argumentative essay or a whole-class Socratic seminar. Lessons leading to an argumentative essay might include mini-lessons on developing a claim, identifying and paraphrasing relevant evidence from texts, and analyzing evidence. The introduction would be followed by a discussion in which students practice stating a claim, explaining their reasoning, or citing relevant evidence to support a claim. That lesson would culminate in a short written assignment in which students apply the same skill. By sequencing lessons in this way, students have time and guidance to practice increasingly complex skills related to building an argument. In each lesson, they get a chance to apply those skills in discussion before transferring them to writing.

4 Use rubrics to give feedback.

At Metro, all teachers set aside one day a week—"Focus Fridays"—to give students an opportunity to work on a targeted in-class writing assignment while they conduct one-on-one conferences. Teachers include language from the corresponding row of the Writing Rubric on the assignment itself. Then, during conferences, teachers and students reference the rubric, circling their rating and looking at specific subskills to improve.

When using the rubric to confer with struggling students, it is important to provide specific examples from the students' writing that demonstrate rubric criteria as well as examples of how a student might push that example to the next level. This makes the feedback actionable and tightly linked to a learning target.

3 | Discussion Scaffolds: Student-Led Discussion Stems

How the ***Student-Led Discussion Stems*** are put to use	**Purpose:**	To provide a scaffold for building higher-order thinking skills in speaking, listening, and writing
	Who uses it:	Students and teachers
	When is it used:	During daily academic discussion at the beginning of the year and as needed for in-class writing assignments
	Where is it used:	Taped to desks and displayed on walls in all classrooms

THE *STUDENT-LED DISCUSSION STEMS*
help students practice using the language of academic discourse while building a deeper awareness of their thinking. Metacognition— the awareness and understanding of one's own thought process—plays a crucial role in building higher-order analytical skills. When students practice metacognition, they become more aware of how they learn, how they extract evidence from texts, and how they engage with ideas as learners. When their thinking becomes visible, they are better able to transfer new skills to other contexts and use them independently.

The *Student-Led Discussion Stems* serve as a guide for building metacognitive awareness through three types of sentence starters:

- **Accountable talk stems**—such as "I agree with_____ because_____" and "The basic idea here is_____"—help students enter a text-based discussion by not only stating whether they agree or disagree with a classmate, but by explaining why. These stems push students to use evidence to support their ideas and to ask the same of their classmates. Introduce and use them in the first four to six weeks of class.

- **Metacognitive stems**—such as "I infer..." and "What this means to me is..." as well as questions such as "I want to question whether..."—help students make sense of a text, grapple with complex ideas, and develop their own meaning by encouraging them to pay attention to how they are using common learning strategies

(e.g., visualizing, inferring, making connections). When they use these stems, students make their own thinking visible to themselves, their teacher, and their classmates. Use these after students have gained comfort with accountable talk, around the middle of a term or year.

- **Wrap-up stems**—such as "A conclusion I'm drawing is..." and "This could be more effective if..."—help students reflect on the thinking they have done. They can use these sentence starters to share conclusions they have drawn and consider what might make future discussions more productive. Use these toward the end of a term or year, as students have gained comfort with the other two.

At the beginning of the year, Metro teachers tape the list of sentence stems onto students' desks, explaining that students will use it in conjunction with the *Speaking and Listening* and *Writing Rubrics* (see Chapter 2) whenever they engage in classroom discussion. The stems can be used in various discussion formats and writing assignments. As students become more accustomed to the phrases, they begin to view them only as a formula for articulating ideas, but more importantly as a way to construct knowledge verbally and in writing. As the year progresses, students internalize the stems to use academic language independently.

Student-Led Discussion Stems
Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

ACCOUNTABLE TALK STEMS

Agreement
- ❑ "I agree with_____ because…"
- ❑ "I like what _____said because…"
- ❑ "I agree with _____, but on the other hand…"
- ❑ "Based on my evidence, I think…."
- ❑ "I want to add to what_____ said…."

Disagreement
- ❑ "I disagree with _____because…"
- ❑ "I'm not sure I agree with _____because…"

Summarizing
- ❑ "The basic idea here is….."
- ❑ "The key information is….."
- ❑ "In summary, this says that…"
- ❑ "First….Next….Then….Finally"
- ❑ "To expand on what _____said….."

Clarifications
- ❑ "Could you please repeat that for me?"
- ❑ "Could you explain a bit more, please?
- ❑ "I'm not sure I understood you when you said ………. Could you say more about that?"
- ❑ "What's your evidence?"
- ❑ "Something that is still not clear is…."
- ❑ "To understand better, I need to know more about…"
- ❑ "I'm guessing this means_____, but I need to…"
- ❑ "I'm confused by….."

Metacognition: Thinking about our thinking. Or, telling people how we formed ideas so that they understand our thinking.

METACOGNITIVE EXTENSION STEMS

Inferring/Predicting
- ❑ "If _____, then……"
- ❑ "This could mean…"
- ❑ "I infer……"
- ❑ "My guess is……"
- ❑ "I assume….."
- ❑ "I think this represents…."

Making Connections
- ❑ "This relates to…"
- ❑ "I already know that…"
- ❑ "I'm remembering…"
- ❑ "This reminds me of [ANOTHER TEXT] because…"
- ❑ "This is relevant to my life because…"

Monitoring for Meaning
- ❑ "I need to reread the part where….."
- ❑ "I know I'm on the right track because…"
- ❑ "I got confused here because…"
- ❑ "The idea I'm getting is…."
- ❑ "What this means to me is….."
- ❑ "Now I understand why…"

Synthesizing
- ❑ "I'm beginning to think…"
- ❑ "I used to think_____, but now…"
- ❑ "I'm changing my mind about…"

Visualizing
- ❑ "I can picture…"
- ❑ "In my mind, I picture…"
- ❑ "I can feel…see….smell….taste….hear….touch…"

Determining Importance
- ❑ "One thing we should notice is…"
- ❑ "It's interesting that…"
- ❑ "What's important here is…"

Asking Questions
- ❑ "I have a question about…"
- ❑ "I want to question whether…"
- ❑ "One question we haven't thought about or considered is…."
- ❑ "Why…."
- ❑ "What if….."
- ❑ "I still have this question about…"

WRAP-UP / EXIT-TICKET STEMS *(during last 10 min.)*

Reflecting and Relating
- ❑ "A conclusion I'm drawing is…"
- ❑ "So the big idea is…"
- ❑ "This is relevant to my life because…."

Evaluation
- ❑ "I like/don't like_____ because…"
- ❑ "This could be more effective if…"
- ❑ "The most important message is…"

Developed by Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Using the *Student-Led Discussion Stems*

| Introduce Norms to Establish a Safe Learning Environment | Explicitly State the Purpose of the Stems | Introduce Stems in Paired Discussion | Gradually Remove Scaffolds | Deepen Discussion |

Discussion stems serve as a useful scaffold to help students become more confident and skilled in academic discussions. Metro teachers introduce the stems in stages, getting students comfortable with this new way of interacting through low-stakes discussions. After four to six weeks, most students use the stems without prompting. The stems create consistency as the class progresses through increasingly complex discussion structures.

1 Introduce norms to establish a safe learning environment.

The first step in preparing students for academic conversations is to set discussion norms. The norms listed on the *Speaking and Listening Rubric* help illustrate the features of a culture in which every participant's learning and ideas are respected. As a teacher, model and reinforce the norms, helping students see that the classroom is a safe environment to explore texts and wrestle with ideas.

At Metro, teachers start with the norms listed on the rubric and ask students to generate additional, class-specific norms in response to the question: "What does it look like to have a successful classroom discussion?" Once norms are finalized, teachers display them on a large poster and refer to the list regularly. This process helps students feel responsible for creating a safe and comfortable classroom environment.

2 Explicitly state the purpose of the stems.

Introducing the stems at the beginning of the school year helps set the expectations for daily discussions. At the start of each discussion, take two minutes to remind students that they can use the language on the Student-Led Discussion Stems sheet to help them express ideas, make sense of reads, and propel discussion. Remind students that the stems enhance not only their speaking and listening skills, but also their reading and writing skills. Moreover, the stems will arm them with communication and self-advocacy skills that will be useful in college and the workplace. When teachers continually connect the stems to this larger purpose, students come to appreciate the value of classroom discussion.

What do students at Metro say?

"Instead of saying, 'Because…' I now say, 'The big idea is that…'"

"Metacognitive stems help us understand passages more clearly."

"At first I was confused on how to start sentences, but once I started using [the stems] I passed my test that I had previously failed."

3 Introduce stems in paired discussions.

Beginning the year with paired discussions helps students gain confidence with speaking, setting the stage for whole-class discussions later in the school year. Paired discussions also allow teachers to quickly assess student comprehension of a text. While students are engaged in discussions, circulate about the room, listening carefully for signs of understanding. Intercede occasionally to asks students to provide a summary, paraphrase an author's main point, or ask a question that connects the text to prior knowledge. If it becomes clear that a large proportion of students do not understand the text or have developed a misconception, pause the class and conduct a quick mini-lesson to clarify (but if you find yourself going this too often, consider larger changes so as not to impinge on student-led discussion). If only one or two students are struggling to understand, take a few minutes during independent practice or during one-on-one conferences to offer individual support.

The following two discussion structures are helpful approaches in pairs:

Think-Pair-Share: This structure gives students time to prepare ideas individually and with just one other classmate before opening up to a larger discussion.

1. Pose a text-based question for students to grapple with for 2–3 minutes on their own. Ask students to write their own answers, referring to the text.

2. Ask students to turn to a partner for 3–5 minutes, using the discussion stems to share ideas and identify places where they agree or disagree.

3. Bring the full class together and ask each pair to share one or two highlights with everyone else.

Speed Share: This activity helps students refine their own ideas while learning from classmates.

1. Place desks in two rows so that each student sits facing one classmate.

2. Pose an open-ended question based on a short text they have just read, giving students 2–3 minutes to write their response. (Alternatively, you can prompt students to write a claim or identify a piece of evidence that best supports a claim.)

3. Put 30–60 seconds on a timer. Student A in each pair shares their answer while Student B silently listens and takes notes.

4. Reset the timer and prompt Student A to listen silently while Student B shares.

5. For two to three subsequent rounds, one row of students shifts one seat so that students discuss their answers to the same question with someone new.

Tips for Using Student-Led Discussion Stems:

- **Use one stem group at a time** to give students a chance to practice, rather than overwhelming them with the whole set.

- **Provide opportunities to practice using the stems in pairs** so students gain confidence in their speaking skills before participating in a class-wide discussion.

- A**sk students to choose a stem to start with**. As they learn to use that stem more naturally, prompt them to move on to using other stem groups.

4 Gradually remove scaffolding.

As students practice using the stems in paired conversations, they gain confidence in their ability to participate in whole-group academic discussions. As they gain comfort, you can refer to the stems less frequently and applaud students for using the language independently. Then, move on to introducing more sophisticated discussion skills. You will need to invest time up front with each new set of stems, providing frequent opportunities to practice using them.

5 Deepen learning through Inner-Outer Circle activity.

As students gain more comfort in paired discussion, teachers can begin to transition to whole-group discussion structures. The Inner-Outer Circle engages students in a structured group dialogue. When determining whether to introduce this activity, consider whether the majority of students are approaching or meeting skills on the *Speaking and Listening Rubrics* such as:

- Poses and responds to clarifying questions.

- Builds on another person's comments.

- Uses evidence from other texts/research.

If the class is ready, engage in the activity:

1. Ask half of the class to sit with their desks in a small circle facing one another.

2. The other half of the class sits around the outside. Match each student on the outer circle with one student on the inner circle.

3. Begin the discussion with a student-generated question. (See Chapter 4 for more information about supporting students to set goals for discussion.)

4. Students in the inner circle discuss the question, using discussion stems, while students in the outer circle take notes about their partner's points and the discussion overall.

5. Walk around the outside, monitoring student performance (see more in Chapter 5) and interjecting only if the discussion stalls or to redirect if it goes off topic.

6. After 10–12 minutes, pause for halftime. Partners on the inner and outer circles huddle to reflect on their goals so far, generate new ideas to pose to the group, or come up with additional questions.

7. The discussion resumes for another 10–12 minutes. At the end, partners meet to reflect on their goals and set new goals for the next discussion.

4 | Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet

How the *Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet* is put to use	Purpose:	To help students set goals and self-assess their performance during a discussion
	Who uses it:	Students
	When is it used:	At the beginning and end of in-class discussions
	Where is it used:	In classrooms in hard-copy form

THE *DISCUSSION SELF-MONITORING WORKSHEET* was developed to help students set learning goals and reflect on their success before and after a discussion. By encouraging students to focus on one or two speaking and listening skills at a time, the tool heightens their awareness of moments when those skills become useful. The worksheet also supports students to become more aware of their own thought process, particularly their use of higher-order reasoning and analytical skills.

The worksheet is most effective when used in conjunction with the other tools in this monograph. Before a whole-class academic discussion or paired discussion activity, a teacher asks students to use the *Speaking and Listening Rubric* (Chapter 2) to identify a specific goal. The goal should be based on either skills highlighted in the day's lesson or an area they know they need to strengthen as evidenced by prior performance. For example, if the lesson's focus is "Building On and Paraphrasing," a student may set the goal: "I will paraphrase what other people said to show that I understand their claims."

Next, students refer to the Student-Led Discussion Stems (see Chapter 3) to identify clusters of sentence stems that can help them practice their focus skill. For example, a student working on paraphrasing might get the most out of the "summarizing" and "clarification" stems.

After the discussion has ended, students reflect on the goals they had set and assess their contributions to the discussion to understand the extent to which they are meeting standards.

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Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Name: _____

> **Speaking & Listening Standard 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.*

TODAY'S FOCUS SKILLS:

- ❑ *I will use a respectful **tone** and appropriate language*
- ❑ *I will **wait** for other people to share their ideas and will **not interrupt** them*
- ❑ *I will demonstrate active listening by making eye contact and using appropriate **body language***
- ❑ *I will **paraphrase** what other people said to show that I understood their claims*
- ❑ *I will **use evidence** to support a claim*

My goal for today is to:

My goal for today is to paraphrase what other people said to show that I understood their claims.

Self-reflection:

What did you do well during the discussion? During my speed share, I paid attention to whether my partner agreed or disagreed and said it back to them.

Were you able to achieve your goal?

Yes I was able to reach my goal.

What is one skill that you want to build on for the next discussion?

— Use evidence to support a claim more

Exit Ticket / Feedback
What are 2 things you learned today from your partner (s) during the discussion? — Vertical farming can be expensive → lights, temperature and food. — One negative impact of vertical farming is pollution.
"So the big idea is…" / "I used to think _____ but now…" / "A conclusion I'm drawing is…because…" I used to think it's a good idea but now I see it's very expensive & increases carbon dioxide

Using the *Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet*

| Introduce Worksheet | Students Identify a Learning Goal | Students Mentally Monitor | Students Self-Reflect |

The *Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet* provides another opportunity to be explicit about the skills students are working to master. Furthermore, it helps students to monitor their own development, building skills of metacognition, communication, and analysis. As students use the worksheet over time, they internalize these skills.

1 Introduce worksheet at the start of discussion.

Remind students of the norms for respectful speaking and listening as well as the speaking and listening skills they have been working on together. Hand out the worksheets and explain that each student will be using their own worksheet to monitor their performance in the upcoming discussion. The top of the worksheet provides a checklist for students to regularly remind themselves of these basic norms.

2 Students identify a learning goal.

Ask students to take three minutes to identify a particular speaking and listening skill that they would like to improve. Students may identify a skill that is directly aligned to the day's lesson (highlighted in the "Do Now") or select a skill on which they previously have received feedback.

Honing in on one achievable goal helps students stay focused during the discussion and in their reflection afterward. To make their goal tangible, students can use the *Speaking and Listening Rubric* to identify what the subskill would look like when demonstrated at a high level (see Chapter 2).

Ask students to write their goal at the top of their worksheet. Circulate to make sure that students select meaningful goals, gently redirecting if you have previously noted that they are struggling with a particular skill or are ready to push themselves to the next level.

Best Practices for Using the Self-Monitoring Worksheet:

• Include an exit ticket at the bottom of the worksheet asking students to list one or two takeaways from the day's lesson or feedback for the teacher.

• Collect worksheets at the end of each discussion so you can keep track of students' goals and ensure they are building toward higher-level skills.

• Update class-wide focus skills and norms regularly to move toward more challenging questions and goals.

• Push students to reach a higher level of thinking by asking them to share their goal with a peer and set new, more challenging goals.

3 | Students (and teachers) mentally monitor.

Remind students that they are responsible for monitoring their thinking during the discussion. Encourage them to be mindful of the actions they are taking to meet their goal. You may also encourage students to take notes during the discussion to help them keep track of their thought processes for later reflection.

4 | Students self-reflect.

TIn the last ten minutes of class, ask students to assess the extent to which they met their goal during the day's discussion, using the worksheet to record what they noticed. As students are reflecting, take a few minutes to walk around the room again to see how they assessed themselves. This will help you determine where students may need additional support in the form of a follow-up mini-lesson, a focused discussion activity (e.g., speed share), or a one-on-one conference.
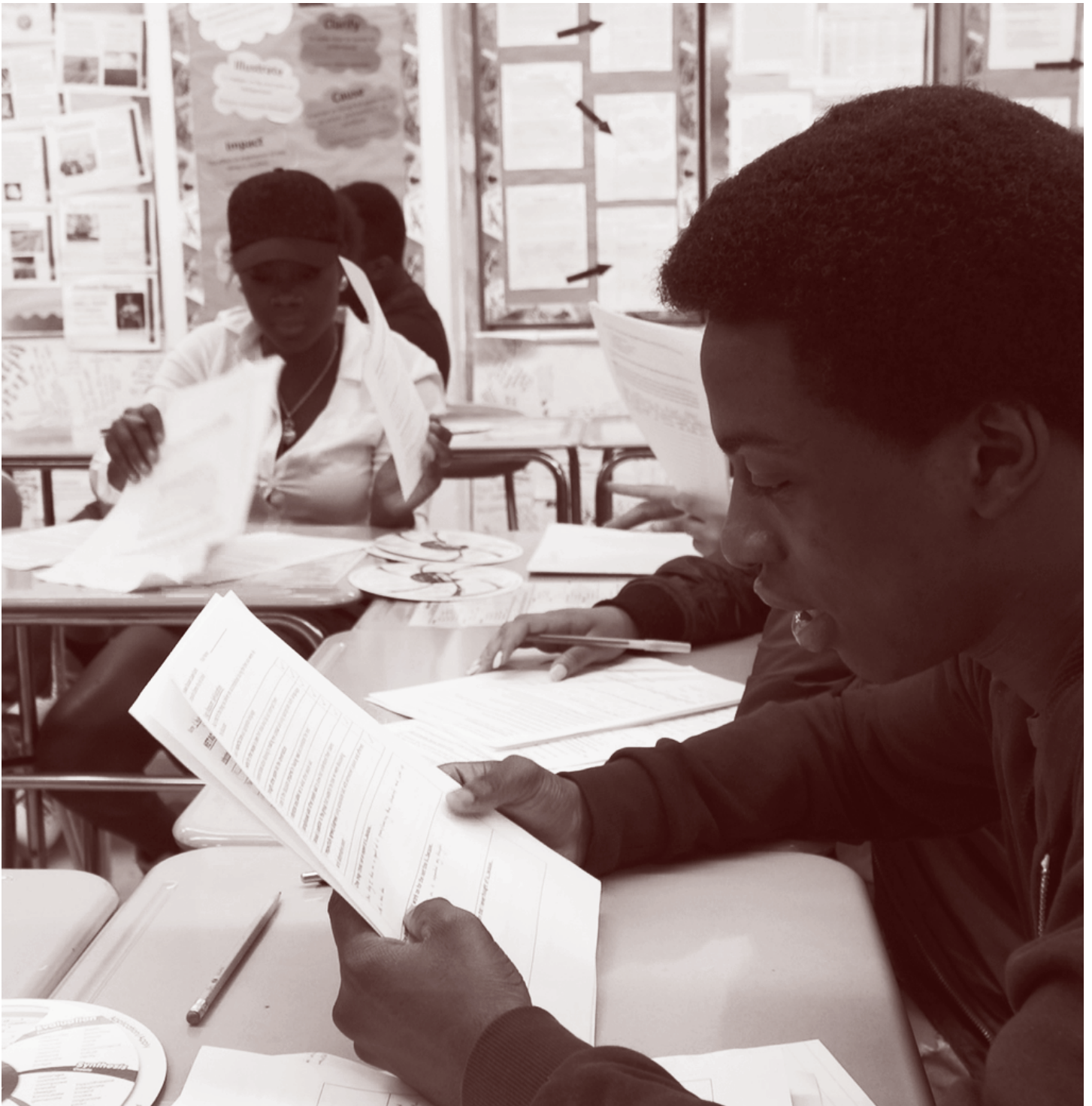
5 | Formative Assessment: Teacher Discussion Tracker

How the *Discussion Tracker* is put to use

Purpose:	To monitor students' demonstration of speaking, listening, and higher-order thinking skills
Who uses it:	Teachers
When is it used:	As part of daily lessons and feedback conferencing
Where is it used:	In classrooms during instruction and in one-on-one student conferencing

TEACHERS USE THEIR OWN *DISCUSSION TRACKER* to keep track of students' engagement in classroom discussions and their demonstration of speaking and listening skills. Unlike most forms of assessment—which are typically administered after a discussion and captured in writing—the worksheet makes it easy for a teacher to formatively assess speaking and listening skills throughout the class period, to record this data so that it can become a meaningful part of student grades, and to use this information to provide focused feedback to students. Without such a tool, even the most well-intentioned teacher can have difficulty keeping track of student learning; with it, teachers have the timely information they need to support differentiated, student-led discussions that engage students at their current level and push them to master higher-order speaking, listening, and thinking skills.

Discussion Tracker

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Teacher: _____   Date: **3-19**

Skill: Support and Respect (Norms) Building + Paraphrasing

Student Name	Used a respectful tone and appropriate language	Waited for other people to share and did not interrupt others	Made eye contact and used appropriate body language	Was prepared by having read and annotated the text	Used evidence to support a claim	Paraphrased to show an understanding of others' claims / Attempted to incorporate a counterclaim	Notes on Quality of Comments
1. Sabrina	✓	✓	✓	✓			
2. Jayla	✓	✓	✓	✓			
3. Hisham	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Follow up about counterclaim, not sure it understanding
4. Christian			✓	✓		✓	Almost interjected — waited her turn
5. Heidy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Asked Q about photosynthesis ⊕
6. Charlotte	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
7. Jaedon	✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓	Excellent use of quotes
8.							

Note: To add specificity to your grading, use a numerical scale.
3 = Exceeds 2 = Meets 1 = Not Yet

Using the *Discussion Tracker*

| Select Focus Skills | Introduce Skills to Students | Identify Group to Monitor | Take Notes During Discussion | Review Worksheets to Guide Feedback | Differentiate with Small Group Stations |

The *Discussion Tracker* provides teachers with meaningful, actionable data about students' mastery of skills. It is meant to be used in conjunction with the other tools presented in this monograph and can help facilitate meaningful discussions with students about their learning. Monitoring students' progress on speaking and listening skills allows teachers to make informed instructional decisions, shaping differentiated lessons and student groupings that maximize learning.

1 Select focus skills.

Prior to teaching a class that will include academic discussion, identify one to two skills from the *Speaking and Listening Rubric* (see Chapter 2) that will be an appropriate focus. Using the "meets" column on the rubric as a guide, add the details in the column headings of the worksheet. For example, the skills for "Support and Respect (Norms)" would be: "makes eye contact," "maintains a respectful tone and language," and "invites comments from classmates."

If this is the first time introducing the skills with this group of students, begin with one or two introductory skills in the rubric, such as "demonstrating support and respect" or "paraphrasing." Then, move sequentially through the skills in the rubric, adding in higher level skills such as: "propels conversation by posing and responding to clarifying questions" or "paraphrases to show understanding of others' claims." As the unit progresses, your focus skills should build on those that students mastered earlier, including increasingly higher-order skills.

2 Introduce skills to students.

The *Discussion Tracker* is one tool for making your focus skills more transparent to yourself and students. After using the worksheet to determine the skills you will monitor, there are several ways you can introduce (or reintroduce) the skills to students:

- take three minutes at the start of class to remind students about the skills they are practicing, including norms for respectful discussion;

- make sure to include the same focus skills on any student-facing materials used during the discussion;

- ask students to take turns reading aloud the sub-skills before starting the discussion;

- provide students with copies of the *Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet* (and rubric, if needed) so they can monitor their own performance.

3 Identify a group of students to monitor.

Monitoring every student in one class discussion would be overwhelming. Rather than trying to watch the entire class at once, identify a small group of students (four to eight) who need support on a common set of skills prior to beginning an academic discussion. Review worksheets from previous discussions to identify, for example, which students still need support with paraphrasing, summarizing, or building on the ideas of others. Then, list their names on the rows of the worksheet. They will be the focus of your observations during the upcoming discussion.

For the next discussion, you will move to a different group. This rotation from small group to small group makes it easier to collect data on students at varying skill levels, to identify trends, and to offer differentiated support as needed. In some cases, you may want to return to a group of students who have been struggling to provide extra attention.

4 Take notes during discussion.

As students engage in academic discussion in pairs or as a whole group, keep the worksheet on a clipboard and quickly record evidence whenever a student in the group you have selected to monitor exhibits one of the focus skills. You can simply put a check mark in the appropriate box when the student demonstrates the skill at the "meets" level described in the *Speaking and Listening Rubric*. You may also jot down quotes from students as examples in the "notes" box. Some teachers use additional notations: for example, adding a "+" to their check marks if students demonstrate skills at an "exceeds" level or a "-" if the student continues to struggle with a skill.

5 Review worksheets to guide feedback.

Use accumulated worksheets to determine when students are ready to move on to more challenging skills and when they need additional support in the form of a mini-lesson, a focused speed-share discussion (see Chapter 3), or one-to-one conferencing. To get the most out of this data in an ongoing way, store the sheets in binders where they can easily be referenced or input the assessments into your gradebook at least once a week.

If conferencing individually with a student, take a few minutes to review past worksheets or the converted grades. Use the worksheets to identify specific skills that appear as strengths and those that remain weaknesses. By grounding the feedback conversation in specific examples, you can help students become more reflective about their current skills and trajectory of growth.

6 Differentiate with small-group stations.

You can use the data you have collected from the *Discussion Tracker* to create small-group stations—clusters of four or five desks where students work on particular skills from the rubrics (see Chapter 2) that you have noted as areas in need of growth. These small-group stations can help you differentiate instruction for students who need additional support with particular skills or who are ready to advance to higher-level skills. One station might ask students to practice using evidence to support a claim, while another prompts students to summarize. Students at each station use the Student-Led Discussion Stems (see Chapter 3) for their discussion.

Take It One Step Further

If you want to help some students stretch further, offer new higher-level scaffolds, such as question stems at various levels of Webb's Depth of Knowledge framework, to create new questions that propel the discussion and help them practice their focus skills.
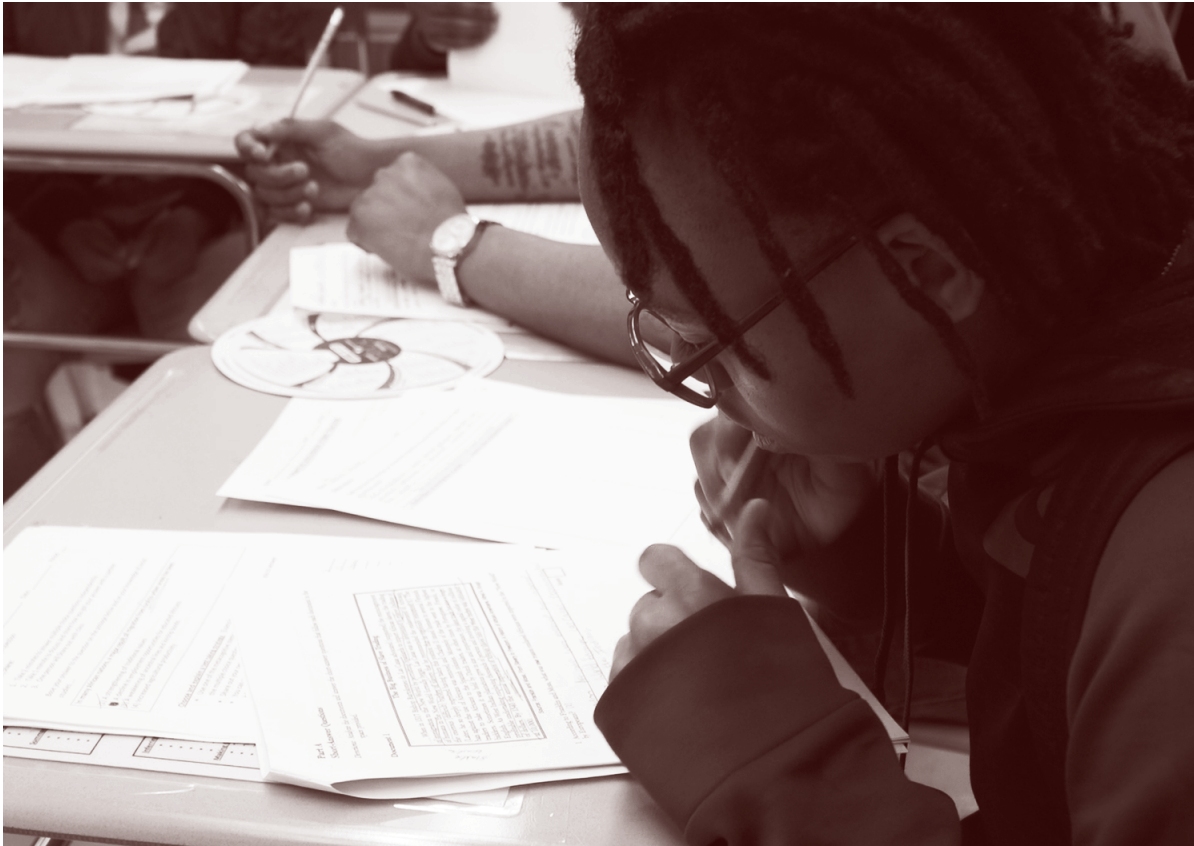
Conditions that supported success

A strong culture of putting students first is at the heart of Metro's success. The work described in this monograph required developing a unified community that nurtures students while rigorously demanding academic engagement. Four other aspects of the school culture proved critical:

1 **Teacher teams engage in meaningful, productive work.**

The school schedule makes effective teacher collaboration possible by dedicating 90 minutes each week to cross-departmental groups of six to eight teachers to meet. Throughout the year, teacher teams analyze student work, collaboratively design tools, and reflect on the implementation of their ideas. Metro teachers entered these meetings with a foundation of respect, which deepened as they learned from one another's experiences.

2 **School leadership fully supports the work.**

Metro principal Meri Yallowitz played a central role in this work. First and foremost, she made a concerted effort to connect the academic discussion practices to broader school goals and professional development initiatives. She set aside uninterrupted time for teachers to plan together, encouraged teachers to learn from one another during the school's inter-visitations or "learning walks," and frequently attended teacher team meetings to stay abreast of successful practices teachers were testing.

Elements that help lay the groundwork for success:

❑   High expectations for students

❑   Teacher teams and collaboration

❑   Support from school leadership

❑   Ongoing exploration of new ideas

❑   Instructional coherence

3 **Leadership encourages the exploration of new strategies and ideas.**

Yallowitz encouraged staff to identify and pilot new ideas. A culture in which teachers were expected to test new strategies without a fear of failure enabled teachers to take an inquiry-based approach to identifying and addressing student needs. Indeed, Metro teachers regularly proposed new ideas and best practices at department meetings and in full-staff professional development sessions. They attended conferences to learn from other schools, bringing back what they had learned to share with colleagues and pilot strategies with their own students.

4 **Instructional coherence is a top priority.**

The tools described here might not have had the impact they did if they were not part of a broader schoolwide strategy. At Metro, teachers were asked to implement the same speaking and listening practices in all classrooms so students always knew what to expect, had multiple opportunities to practice new skills, and could transfer skills across the content areas. Reading and writing were an ongoing schoolwide focus, a consistency that enabled efficient and effective sharing of practices across classes, grades, and disciplines.

Appendix

Speaking and Listening Rubric

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Skill	EXCEEDS	MEETS	APPROACHING	NOT YET
Questioning	☐ **Propels conversation** by posing and responding to **questions that probe reasoning** and **deepen understanding** ☐ Initiates **new topics** of conversation using **open-ended questions**	☐ **Propels conversation** by posing and responding to **clarifying questions** or asking for **additional evidence** ☐ Questions are **unsolicited contributions** to the conversation	☐ Asks relevant questions for **clarification**, but only when solicited ☐ Uses **prompts** posted in the classroom to structure questions	☐ **Rarely asks** or responds to **questions** ☐ Asks questions that are **irrelevant and off-topic**
Support and Respect (Norms)	☐ Conveys active listening and engagement through appropriate **body language** and **wait time** ☐ Demonstrates **openness** to differences or **changes in opinion** ☐ Politely **moderates** and actively **incorporates others** in the discussion	☐ Makes **eye contact** and maintains a respectful **tone and language** ☐ Remains **focused** by not succumbing to distractions ☐ **Invites comments** from classmates ☐ Comes to discussions prepared by having **read and annotated the text**	☐ Maintains a respectful tone and **rarely interrupts** classmates ☐ Sometimes is distracted, but **makes an effort to re-focus** ☐ Comes to class **unprepared** for discussion, but **still contributes**	☐ Does not communicate with a respectful tone or language ☐ Is **easily distracted** during discussion ☐ Comes to class **unprepared** and **does not contribute**
Building on and Paraphrasing	☐ **Reflects on** what others say ☐ Paraphrases to **build understanding** together ☐ **Explores the topic** more deeply together if both sides agree	☐ **Reiterates** and **adds** to what others say ☐ Paraphrases to **show understanding** of others' claims	☐ **Repeats** points others make, but often due to inattention ☐ **Restates** the same points **rather than adding on** to previously raised points	☐ **Does not paraphrase** what others say or add to the conversation
Synthesis and Developing a Claim	☐ Refers back to **previous parts of the conversation** as additional evidence ☐ Keeps track of what **other people say** (real-time thinking) ☐ **Makes connections** among concepts or previous knowledge	☐ Uses evidence to **establish a claim** ☐ Shows evidence of a **new understanding** based on the conversation ☐ Incorporates **counterclaims** (if appropriate to discipline)	☐ **Expresses an opinion** without evidence ☐ Shows **understanding of the main topic** ☐ **Does not include** a counterclaim successfully	☐ Claims or opinions are **not clearly stated** ☐ **Does not demonstrate an understanding** of the conversation ☐ **Does not include a counterclaim** successfully
Use of Evidence	☐ Includes specifics of **where evidence was found** ☐ **Make new connections** in light of evidence and reasoning presented in the discussion	☐ Includes evidence of text using **active reading strategies** from multiple sources ☐ Refers to evidence from **texts and other research** ☐ Makes connections to **previously learned content**	☐ **Rarely supports claims** with evidence ☐ Evidence tends to be from **personal experience** rather than from texts ☐ Focuses on the **topic at hand** rather than connecting ideas to previously learned content	☐ Claims are **not supported** by evidence ☐ **Any evidence** used bears little relevance to the topic
Content Knowledge	☐ Consistently uses academic vocabulary ☐ Uses **domain-specific** and **precise** language	☐ **Incorporates academic vocabulary** into speech ☐ Uses **domain-specific** language	☐ **Rarely uses** academic vocabulary ☐ **Explains domain-specific content,** but rarely uses appropriate language	☐ **Does not use** academic vocabulary or domain-specific language

* Students who were absent or who have not exhibited any evidence of these skills may recieve a marking of "No Evidence."

Writing Rubric (Aligned to CCLS W.1 and MoSL)

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Skill			EXCEEDS	MEETS	APPROACHING	NOT YET
Claim / Position			☐ Establishes a precise and convincing claim while **acknowledging the limitations and complexity of the issue/topic**	☐ Establishes a **precise and credible claim**, grounded in evidence and reasoning ☐ Addresses all aspects of the task	☐ Establishes a **general claim** ☐ Responds to the task	☐ **States a claim** ☐ Does not completely address the task
Use of Evidence			☐ **Thoroughly explains reasons why** evidence supports claim ☐ Uses words, phrases, and clauses to **create cohesion** between claims, reasons, and evidence ☐ **Consistently** refers to sources when appropriate	☐ States **how evidence supports claim** ☐ Uses words, phrases, and clauses to **clarify the relationship** between **claims, reasons, and evidence** ☐ **Refers to sources** when appropriate	☐ **Cites evidence with little to no explanation** of how it supports claim ☐ Uses words, phrases, and clauses to **link evidence to reasons**, but lacks clarity ☐ **Rarely** refers to sources	☐ Uses **very little evidence** ☐ Evidence is **irrelevant** or **does not support the claim** ☐ Mentions, but **does not cite sources**
Quality of Evidence	**Elaboration**		☐ Incorporates a variety of evidence from **multiple types** of sources ☐ Summarizes, paraphrases, and quotes relevant evidence from the text to support claim	☐ Incorporates evidence from **more than one type of source** ☐ Paraphrases and quotes relevant evidence from the text to support claim	☐ Incorporates evidence from **one type of source** ☐ Summarizes relevant evidence from the text	☐ Incorporates **little evidence** from one type of source ☐ Restates relevant evidence from the text
	Analysis		☐ Analyzes evidence to **draw out new meanings and understandings** ☐ **Analyzes counterclaims** to explain why the claim is stronger	☐ Analyzes evidence to **infer author's meaning and purpose** ☐ Discusses counterclaims	☐ **Analyzes ideas** from the texts and begins to interpret the meaning and purpose ☐ **Makes note** of a counterclaim	☐ Summarizes ideas from the text ☐ Demonstrates **awareness of a counterclaim**
Tone and Audience			☐ Uses appropriate language and tone in a style that **engages the audience** ☐ **Consistently** maintains an objective tone and formal voice	☐ Uses **language appropriate to audience and purpose** ☐ Maintains an **objective tone and formal voice**	☐ Uses language and tone **generally appropriate to the audience and purpose** with minor lapses	☐ Uses **basic language** and **uneven tone** with some improper usage of words and phrases
Organization and Structure			☐ Orders ideas logically using **transitional phrases** to clarify the reasoning of the argument ☐ Develops strong introduction, body paragraphs, and a **conclusion that strengthens position**	☐ Orders ideas using transitional phrases to **allow the reader to follow the argument** ☐ Develops introduction, body **paragraphs, and conclusion**	☐ Groups ideas through a **basic five-paragraph structure** ☐ Conclusion simply **restates the position**	☐ Demonstrates little evidence of five-paragraph structure and **illogical organization** ☐ Conclusion confuses the position
Content Knowledge			☐ Exhibits **thorough** and accurate understanding of content ☐ **Consistently** uses academic vocabulary and domain-specific language ☐ When appropriate, **acknowledges author's bias or point of view**	☐ Exhibits **accurate understanding of content** ☐ Uses **academic vocabulary and domain-specific language**	☐ Exhibits **basic understanding of the content** ☐ Uses academic vocabulary and domain-specific language with **minor errors**	☐ Exhibits an **incomplete understanding of the content** ☐ **Rarely** uses academic vocabulary or domain-specific language

Students who were absent or who have not exhibited any evidence of these skills may recieve a marking of "No Evidence."

Student-Led Discussion Stems
Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

ACCOUNTABLE TALK STEMS

Agreement
- ❑ "I agree with_____ because…"
- ❑ "I like what _____said because…"
- ❑ "I agree with _____, but on the other hand…"
- ❑ "Based on my evidence, I think…."
- ❑ "I want to add to what_____ said…."

Disagreement
- ❑ "I disagree with _____because…"
- ❑ "I'm not sure I agree with _____because…"

Summarizing
- ❑ "The basic idea here is….."
- ❑ "The key information is….."
- ❑ "In summary, this says that…"
- ❑ "First….Next….Then….Finally"
- ❑ "To expand on what _____said….."

Clarifications
- ❑ "Could you please repeat that for me?"
- ❑ "Could you explain a bit more, please?
- ❑ "I'm not sure I understood you when you said ………. Could you say more about that?"
- ❑ "What's your evidence?"
- ❑ "Something that is still not clear is…."
- ❑ "To understand better, I need to know more about…"
- ❑ "I'm guessing this means_____, but I need to…"
- ❑ "I'm confused by….."

Metacognition: Thinking about our thinking. Or, telling people how we formed ideas so that they understand our thinking.

METACOGNITIVE EXTENSION STEMS

Inferring/Predicting
- ❑ "If _____, then……"
- ❑ "This could mean…"
- ❑ "I infer……"
- ❑ "My guess is……"
- ❑ "I assume….."
- ❑ "I think this represents…."

Making Connections
- ❑ "This relates to…"
- ❑ "I already know that…"
- ❑ "I'm remembering…"
- ❑ "This reminds me of [ANOTHER TEXT] because…"
- ❑ "This is relevant to my life because…"

Monitoring for Meaning
- ❑ "I need to reread the part where….."
- ❑ "I know I'm on the right track because…"
- ❑ "I got confused here because…"
- ❑ "The idea I'm getting is…."
- ❑ "What this means to me is….."
- ❑ "Now I understand why…"

Synthesizing
- ❑ "I'm beginning to think…"
- ❑ "I used to think_____, but now…"
- ❑ "I'm changing my mind about…"

Visualizing
- ❑ "I can picture…"
- ❑ "In my mind, I picture…"
- ❑ "I can feel…see….smell….taste….hear….touch…"

Determining Importance
- ❑ "One thing we should notice is…"
- ❑ "It's interesting that…"
- ❑ "What's important here is…"

Asking Questions
- ❑ "I have a question about…"
- ❑ "I want to question whether…"
- ❑ "One question we haven't thought about or considered is…."
- ❑ "Why…."
- ❑ "What if….."
- ❑ "I still have this question about…"

WRAP-UP / EXIT-TICKET STEMS *(during last 10 min.)*

Reflecting and Relating
- ❑ "A conclusion I'm drawing is…"
- ❑ "So the big idea is…"
- ❑ "This is relevant to my life because…."

Evaluation
- ❑ "I like/don't like_____ because…"
- ❑ "This could be more effective if…"
- ❑ "The most important message is…"

Developed by Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Discussion Self-Monitoring Worksheet

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Name: _____

Speaking & Listening Standard 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.*

TODAY'S FOCUS SKILLS:

❑ *I will use a respectful **tone** and appropriate language*
❑ *I will **wait** for other people to share their ideas and will **not interrupt** them*
❑ *I will demonstrate active listening by making eye contact and using appropriate **body language***
❑ *I will **paraphrase** what other people said to show that I understood their claims*
❑ *I will **use evidence** to support a claim*

My goal for today is to:

| |
| |
| |

Self-reflection:

What did you do well during the discussion?

Were you able to achieve your goal?

What is one skill that you want to build on for the next discussion?

Exit Ticket / Feedback
What are 2 things you learned today from your partner (s) during the discussion?
"So the big idea is…" / "I used to think _____ but now…" / "A conclusion I'm drawing is…because…"

Discussion Tracker

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School

Teacher: _____ **Date:** _____

Skill: _____

Student Name	Used a **respectful tone** and **appropriate language**	**Waited** for other people to share and **did not interrupt** others	Made **eye contact** and used **appropriate body language**	Was **prepared** by having **read and annotated the text**	Used **evidence** to **support a claim**	**Paraphrased** to show an **understanding of others' claims**	Attempted to **incorporate a counterclaim**	Notes on **Quality of Comments**
1.								
2.								
3.								
4.								
5.								
6.								
7.								
8.								

Note: To add specificity to your grading, use a numerical scale.
3 = Exceeds 2 = Meets 1 = Not Yet

Developed by Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School in collaboration with Eskolta School Research and Design and NYCDOE Office of Postsecondary Readiness