



Crafting an Argument

Organized, Well-Supported, Convincing


Students need to know how to state facts and express their opinions effectively so that they can positively contribute to classroom conversations and so that their classmates seriously consider their ideas. To present information and ideas well—and to craft them into an effective argument—students have to use a number of skills and do so in concert, as they do in this scene from a first grade classroom.

The students have just read a classic fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel. Their discussion reveals that many children think the stepmother and the witch acted cruelly. Wanting to push their thinking a little further, the teacher asks, “What about the father?” She gives them time to think and then has them share with a partner while she circulates to listen in and coach as needed.

One of the students she observes, Shauna, is asserting a strong point of view: “I believe the father did a bad thing. He should have told the stepmother ‘no.’ It doesn’t matter how much the stepmother pestered him. He’s supposed to take care of his kids. He is a grown-up. He didn’t have to do what she said. My father would never do that to me!” Her partner Arianne nods her head, clearly struck by Shauna’s argument.

Shauna’s skills in presenting her argument—identifying what she was saying as her opinions (“I believe”) and then backing up her opinions with references to the text and her own experiences—are no doubt impressive for a first grader. But it’s important to remember that all children can learn how to present information and opinions effectively.

Shauna’s teacher deliberately taught her class these skills. With careful teaching, even students as young as Shauna and her classmates can become capable speakers.

 **In this chapter,** you’ll learn about the skills students need to present information and assert their ideas respectfully—organizing their thoughts, distinguishing fact from opinion, supporting their opinions, and then putting all of these together to form persuasive arguments. You’ll also learn concrete ideas for how to teach these skills, ways for students to practice them, and tips for supporting students on their road to proficiency.

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Why These Skills Matter

Presenting information and ideas effectively is critical to students' success in academic conversations and beyond because these skills:

- **Boost students' critical thinking abilities.** Teaching students to organize what they say, recognize if they're asserting a fact or an opinion, and support what they say with reasons and evidence helps students clarify their thinking, a key to academic success.
- **Lead to higher-level conversations.** When students can provide new information and insights, be assertive yet respectful, and offer persuasive arguments when appropriate, academic conversations are enriched and everyone benefits.
- **Support success in all subject areas.** The skills in this chapter can help students succeed in language arts, science, social studies, and math. For instance, students who can state a clear position and build a logical case for it in conversation are much more likely to be able to write an effective argument.
- **Prepare students for more formal speaking situations.** Although this chapter primarily addresses academic conversation skills, learning these will also enable students to create more effective presentations and speeches—and deliver them more skillfully.
- **Help deepen and strengthen students' relationships.** Children who can articulate their thinking clearly and, when appropriate, persuasively, will be better equipped to discuss issues that arise in social settings. Doing so capably will also make classroom relationships stronger—and the stronger those relationships, the richer children's learning.



Common Core Connections

Speaking and Listening Standards Supported in Chapter Four

<p>Kindergarten</p>	<p>SL.K.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about kindergarten topics and texts.</p> <p>SL.K.1a: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking).</p> <p>SL.K.4: Describe familiar people, places, things, and events and, with prompting and support, provide additional detail.</p> <p>SL.K.6: Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.</p>
<p>1st Grade</p>	<p>SL.1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts.</p> <p>SL.1.1a: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time).</p> <p>SL.1.1b: Build on others' talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.</p> <p>SL.1.4: Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.</p> <p>SL.1.6: Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation.</p>
<p>2nd Grade</p>	<p>SL.2.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts.</p> <p>SL.2.1a: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening with care, speaking one at a time).</p> <p>SL.2.1b: Build on others' talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.</p> <p>SL.2.2: Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.</p> <p>SL.2.4: Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.</p> <p>SL.2.6: Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation.</p>

Speaking and Listening Standards Supported in Chapter Four

3rd Grade

SL.3.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts.

SL.3.1a: Come to discussions prepared.

SL.3.1b: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time).

SL.3.2: Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats.

SL.3.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

SL.3.6: Speak in complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.

4th Grade

SL.4.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts.

SL.4.1a: Come to discussions prepared.

SL.4.1b: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.

SL.4.2: Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats.

SL.4.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

SL.4.6: Differentiate between contexts that call for formal English and situations where informal discourse is appropriate; use formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

Speaking and Listening Standards Supported in Chapter Four

5th Grade

SL.5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts.

SL.5.1a: Come to discussions prepared.

SL.5.1b: Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.

SL.5.1d: Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions.

SL.5.2: Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats.

SL.5.4: Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

SL.5.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

6th Grade

SL.6.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues.

SL.6.1a: Come to discussions prepared.

SL.6.1b: Follow rules for collegial discussions.

SL.6.1d: Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

SL.6.2: Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.


SL.6.4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

SL.6.6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

How to Teach the Skills

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you teach students how to state information convincingly and respectfully:

- **Point out when you use the skills.** Students learn speaking and listening skills from their parents, teachers, and other adults in their lives. From time to time while you teach, briefly but explicitly tell students when you're organizing your thoughts, telling fact from opinion, or using reasons and evidence.
- **Consider children's developmental stages.** This chapter covers a wide variety of skills, some of which are quite advanced. Have high but realistic expectations for your students. For instance, first graders can organize their thoughts with a main idea and a few supporting details, but they'll need much more practice and support in differentiating between a fact and an opinion than a fifth grader would.
- **Keep in mind children's cultural backgrounds.** If you're teaching skills that might conflict with a child's home culture, remember to explain that they can support success in school, college, and the workplace, and be patient as students develop them.
- **Teach skills progressively.** Begin with the ones that students need to use during the first weeks of school—typically, recounting events or experiences in an organized and sequential way. Once students gain competency with those, start adding skills based on what your students need next, depending on your grade level and curriculum.

 Four skills crucial to crafting an argument

- ✓ **Speaking in an organized way**
- ✓ **Distinguishing facts from opinions**
- ✓ **Presenting evidence**
- ✓ **Persuading others**

→ **Connect to academics frequently.**

Whenever possible, combine instruction in these speaking skills with your academic lessons, such as when you're teaching younger students how to write opinion pieces or older students how to write effective arguments.



For a suggested timeline of when to teach academic conversation skills throughout the school year, see page 191.

SPEAKING IN AN ORGANIZED WAY

Students often need to speak about topics at some length. For example, they may be called on to recount personal or academic experiences or describe people, places, things, or events. To be comprehensible, students need to organize what they want to say as if they were making mini-presentations. Here are the specific skills they need to learn:

→ **using main ideas and supporting details**

→ **sequencing ideas logically** (first this happened, then this, and so on)

Using Main Ideas and Supporting Details

Introduce the skill. Because clearly stating a main idea and including relevant details does not come naturally to most children, they need to be taught this skill. One way to do this is to use Interactive Modeling (page 172).

→ **State the learning goal** to be sure students understand the point of what you're about to demonstrate.

“Today, as part of science, you’ll present information about your solar system topic to a small group. It’s important to do this in an organized way so that listeners can understand you. I’m going to show you one way to organize information. Watch and see what I do.”

→ **Demonstrate with a simple example.**

“I’d like to share some interesting facts about Mercury. It’s the closest planet to the sun, but it’s still 36 million miles away! It’s very hot on the side that faces the sun and really cold on the other side. Its year is only 88 days compared to 365 on Earth. Mercury is less than half the size of Earth.”

→ **Guide students to point out key aspects** of what you demonstrated. Begin with an open-ended question.

“What did you notice about how I organized my information?”

If students do not point out your use of a main idea and supporting details, prompt them:

- “What did I say first? How did that sentence help you as listeners?” (main idea)
- “What sorts of facts did I share about Mercury?” “About how many?” “Why is it important to choose only a few key details?” (supporting details)

Use what students noticed in this discussion to make an anchor chart for their reference in future discussions. (See the opposite page for a sample chart.)

→ **Invite a student to demonstrate** using a main idea and supporting details. After he or she models the skills, ask students what they noticed, prompting them as needed. Then place students in small groups and let each share in the same way about their solar system topic.

Practice the skill. Because using a main idea and supporting details is so foundational for students’ academic work, give them many opportunities to present information with this same “main idea first—supporting details later” format.

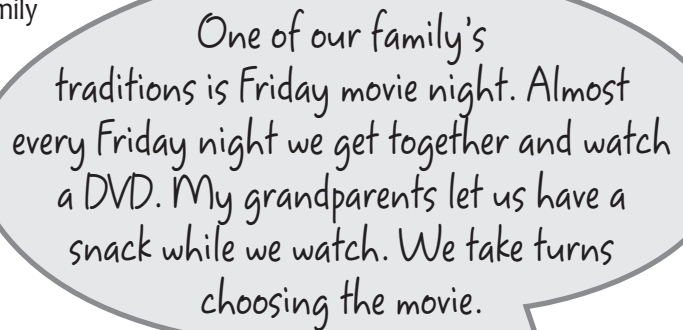
For instance, students could:

→ **Present a brief book summary.** Invite a few students at a time to give “book talks”—brief summaries of a book they read recently and why they liked it—to give other students ideas for what they might want to read next.

→ **Preview their writing during writers' workshop.** Have students conduct a brief conversation with a classmate in which they lay out the main topic and supporting details about a piece of writing they're working on.

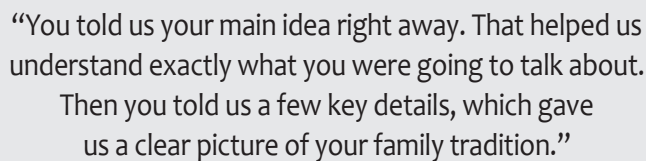
→ **Share personal news during a morning meeting.**

For instance, invite students to share about a special family tradition, reminding them about using main ideas and supporting details.



One of our family's traditions is Friday movie night. Almost every Friday night we get together and watch a DVD. My grandparents let us have a snack while we watch. We take turns choosing the movie.

After students share, point out what the sharers did well:



"You told us your main idea right away. That helped us understand exactly what you were going to talk about. Then you told us a few key details, which gave us a clear picture of your family tradition."

Provide ongoing support.

Because these skills can be challenging to learn, support students as they practice so that they'll encounter little successes along the way to mastery. Here are some tips:

→ **Post an anchor chart.**

Keep this chart handy for times when students will be speaking at greater length and add to it as their skills progress.



Using Main Ideas and Supporting Details

- * Present your main idea first.
- * Give important details next (at least two, no more than four).
- * Use who, what, when, where, how, and why details.

→ **Have students use notes.** For certain assignments or for additional support for some students, have them bring notes of their main idea and key details to the conversation. During a weather unit, for instance, students might bring notes on their reading about different types of severe weather to help them briefly present to a small group as shown in the example below:

Main Idea: Tornadoes are powerful storms.

Details: * powerful rotating cylinder of air

* result from unstable mixture of warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico and cool, dry air from Canada

* can occur anywhere in the U.S., but more common in Midwest and South

* cause much damage to property and can be deadly

→ **Provide concrete reminders.** Younger students and even some older ones may benefit from tangible ways of remembering how to organize their thoughts. For instance, I give kindergartners four linking math cubes before they speak. The first, a different color from the other three, represents the main idea. The next three, all the same color, represent the details. As children speak, they put the cubes in front of them to help them remember how to use a main idea and supporting details (and to remind themselves how much to say).

→ **Have students practice ahead of time.** With students who find public speaking situations especially daunting or for those just learning English, have them practice with you ahead of time. Or have them practice with a classmate, student in an upper grade, or family member at home.