Speak-Up Stems

What is it?

A tool that encourages students to speak up during classroom conversations by providing them with a list of options for what they might say (e.g., "I agree with your position because___," "That seems similar to ___," or "Have you considered the possibility that ___?")

What are the benefits of using this tool?

The Common Core Speaking & Listening Standards stress the importance of involving students in a variety of rich and structured conversations. In order for students to reap the benefits of these conversations, however, they must be active and engaged participants—participants who express and defend their positions, ask and answer questions, develop what others have said, and evaluate/synthesize ideas (Standards 1 and 3). This tool prepares students to fulfill these and other productive conversation criteria by teaching them simple moves for speaking up in class. These moves come in the form of sentence stems that highlight language students can use to get involved in classroom conversations.

What are the basic steps?

1. Share the goal of this tool (to encourage students to participate productively during classroom conversations) and its value (active participation facilitates learning).

2. Distribute and review the list of Speak-Up Stems on p. 107. Shorten and/or modify the list as needed.

3. Prompt students to use these stems during whole-class or small-group discussions. ("We haven't heard from you yet, Tamia. Can you add something to the conversation? Use the list of stems if you need help.")

4. Clarify that the stems are only there to help students, and that they can use their own words if they prefer.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

✔ To promote active participation and engagement during classroom conversations
✔ To develop critical speaking and listening skills

🎧 Teacher Talk

➔ This tool is similar to the Participation Techniques tool (pp. 97–98) in that both are designed to encourage productive contributions to classroom conversations. The difference is that Participation Techniques presents general strategies for participating (e.g., ask a question or state a position), whereas this tool provides specific suggestions about what to say (a more scaffolded approach). Ideally, the tools should be used together so that students are exposed to both general strategies and specific options for implementing them.