

LEADING METALINGUISTIC TALK ABOUT WRITING

One way to create rich and exploratory metalinguistic talk about writing is to become more aware of how you lead a **sequence** of talk, rather than just thinking about questions to ask. We have been privileged to watch many lessons where teachers have been trying to extend students' thinking about the choices they, or other writers make, and we have observed that very often a great initiating question is asked, but then the talk is not extended with further questions or invitations to respond. These are missed opportunities for stimulating real thinking about how language is working in a particular piece of writing. From these observations of lessons, we have been able to collect examples of skilful management of a sequence of talk and to identify some of the talk moves these teachers used. We call them **talk moves** because they are critical in moving on the thinking in a sequence of talk.

The table on the next page lists the talk moves that we saw teachers using and offers an example of a question or invitation which exemplifies that move. There is no expectation that every talk sequence will use all of these moves, they are simply ways of thinking about how you move students' metalinguistic thinking forward. Try them out!!

TALK MOVE	EXPLANATION OF THE MOVE	EXAMPLE QUESTION OR INVITATION
Initiating	A question or elicitation which opens up a line of thinking about a language choice	<i>Why do you think the author chose to put a short sentence right in the middle of that paragraph?</i>
Elaborating	An invitation to a student, or a peer, to expand on their answer, offering a fuller explanation of their metalinguistic thinking	<i>Could you tell me more about why you think the short sentence has impact. What do you mean by impact?</i>
Justifying	An invitation to a student, or a peer, to justify their metalinguistic response with reasons or evidence	<i>So why does this short sentence create tension here?</i>
Challenging	A question or elicitation which offers a counter metalinguistic perspective on a student response, inviting students to re-think or raise new questions	<i>I wonder if putting in yet another adjective here - that would be four adjectives in a row - is too much of a good thing, a bit overdone. Is there any other way you could express this?</i>
Verbalising	A teacher statement, or an invitation to students to articulate the link between a grammatical choice and its rhetorical effect, with or without grammatical metalanguage	<i>Could you explain in your own words, just one sentence, what that choice of modal verb communicates to the reader about saving the tiger from extinction.</i>
Reflecting	A question or prompt which invites students to reflect on, evaluate and consolidate their learning about language choices	<i>So today we've been looking at metaphors - can you tell me in your own words what you have learned about metaphors today?</i>
Aligning	A question or statement which steers the metalinguistic talk towards the learning focus, perhaps through re-orienting the line of enquiry, or through a correction	<i>Yes, 'ambling' is a descriptive word, giving us a real sense of the way Anna walks, but it's a verb, not an adjective. What does the choice of 'ambling' make us think about Anna?</i>