

FIRST MOVE

**Belonging, learning and making a difference
in middle school**

“Can you join if you don’t
know anyone yet?”

Jordan, Chapter 1



A guide for students in grades 6–8

FIRST MOVE

Belonging, learning and making a difference in middle school

A practical guide for student leaders and anyone ready to take part
Grades 6–8

BEFORE YOU START

You notice things about your school that someone passing through might miss: confusing directions, a group moving too quickly, the part of an assignment that still doesn't make sense. You have questions too. Some are easy to ask; others take time to put into words.

First Move gives you ways to use what you notice. Whether you're already helping lead a group or wondering where to start, you'll find advice, situations to think through and tools you can use. The students in the examples are finding their place in a club, working through assignments, asking for support and planning a small service project with an adult advisor.

The situations happen on different school days. Chapters 4 and 5 follow the same service project from its first question to its handoff. All the stories and student voices are fictional; they aren't real students' testimonials. You can disagree with a choice, suggest another one or try an activity with an invented situation. You never need to share a private experience to use the guide.

Schoolwork, speaking up for what you need and helping your community often connect. A club or service project can give you a place to practice all three. It still needs to fit around classes, rest, your interests and responsibilities outside school. An adult at school can help you figure out what's possible.

You don't need a club title or the loudest voice in the room to begin. You can ask, draw, listen, write, test an idea, explain something or help a group rethink its plan. A useful part of leading is making a thoughtful choice and paying attention to what happens next.

USE WHAT HELPS

Each chapter starts with a question to keep in mind. Use the situations to try out your own judgment: what do you notice, how do you understand it and what might someone else see differently? The discussion questions can help you go deeper. Think them through alone, talk with someone or write your response. If you're using the guide in class, check with the teacher about other ways to respond.

The advice pages explain ideas you can put to work. The tools help turn an idea into a small plan. Pick what fits; you don't need to fill every blank. A teacher or advisor can adapt an activity for your class or club, access needs and school rules.

Some examples include a few notices, a draft or a worked-out decision. Look at the supplied material before the explanation. What backs up the claim? What still needs an answer? You can then try the same kind of thinking in a different situation. The school information is invented, so there's no need to collect classmates' private experiences. A different conclusion can work if you can explain how it fits the evidence and the task.

Use a fictional situation whenever something feels too personal. Keep passwords, home addresses, private contact details, health information and other students' personal stories out of shared work. If something involves bullying, threats, sexual comments, harm or another safety concern, speak privately with an appropriate school adult. You don't have to investigate it or sort it out through a group activity.

Schools have different arrangements. Your teacher or advisor confirms permissions, supervision, approved ways to communicate and use of school spaces or materials. You can help shape the work within those arrangements.

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MEET THE STUDENTS

Maya often notices a detail she can explain with a sketch. Sometimes she needs to ask more before deciding what to draw.

Eli has plenty of ideas and likes getting started. He is practicing slowing down enough to hear a different suggestion.

Samira likes a clear plan. She also wants room to try creative work and to change her mind.

Jordan is getting to know a new school. He likes diagrams and practical explanations, and is learning which questions to ask when something is unclear.

These descriptions are starting points, not fixed roles. Each student can feel sure in one situation and uncertain in another. Ms. Chen, their teacher and club advisor, helps them make choices and checks the arrangements that need an adult.



Maya

Eli

Samira

Jordan

A place in your school



A question to keep in mind

How can you take part in school life while keeping room for your own interests, needs and responsibilities?

START HERE

Picture a place where people gather: a classroom, lunch table, club or sports practice. What would someone need to know before joining in? An invented example works. You don't need to share a time you felt left out.

A SITUATION TO THINK THROUGH

The question on the blue paper

The poster outside Ms. Chen's room said SCHOOL COMMUNITY CLUB. Underneath, in smaller letters, it said New members welcome.

Maya read it twice. The poster explained when the club met. It did not explain what happened when you walked through the door.

"Are you coming?" Eli asked. He had already drawn a sketch of a mural on the back of a worksheet.

"Maybe," Maya said. "I have to catch my bus after school."

"This meeting is during lunch," he said, pointing to the poster.

"I know. I mean the other meetings."

Inside, Samira had opened a notebook at a table near the window. Jordan stood beside an empty chair with his backpack still on. Maya recognized him from science. He had joined the school three weeks earlier.

Ms. Chen held up a stack of blue paper. "Before we choose anything, write a question you want this club to answer. You can also tell me your question."

Eli wrote MURAL? in large letters.

"That looks like a suggestion," Samira said.

"It has a question mark."

She laughed, then slid him another piece of paper. "Keep the idea. What would we need to find out?"

He wrote Who would use it? under the sketch.

Maya's paper said: What will we do, and how much time will it take?

Jordan wrote: Can you join if you don't know anyone yet?

Ms. Chen placed the papers on the table, along with a few questions from students who had spoken to her. "These can help us decide how the club works."

Samira reached for her notebook, then paused. "I can write today. But I don't want to be the person who takes notes every time. I'd like to make something too."

"I could draw the plan," Maya said. She had meant to wait until she understood more, but this part seemed clear.

"I can write the questions on it," Jordan offered. He put his backpack under the chair and sat down.

They did not choose a mural that day. They agreed to find out which small changes people at school actually wanted. Ms. Chen explained that she would check permission for any project and confirm the meeting schedule before students made commitments. The group would start with work they could do during the supervised club period.

Before lunch ended, Maya drew a box around their next meeting time. Jordan added a short line underneath: Ask Ms. Chen if you want to try one meeting.

"That should go on the poster," he said.

On her way out, Maya looked at the words New members welcome again. She thought about the empty chair, the blue paper and Samira's request. The words meant more now that the group had begun to explain how a new person could take part.

TALK IT THROUGH

You can think about these on your own or pick them up with a group.

1. What does Maya know about the club at first, and what does she still need to ask? Compare two moments in the story.

2. What might explain Jordan keeping his backpack on? What changes when he puts it down? The details may support more than one explanation.

TALK IT THROUGH

continued

3. Samira speaks up before her role becomes a habit. What does she want to keep doing, and what does she want to change?

4. What makes the group's welcome useful to someone walking in for the first time?

5. Eli starts with a question about his idea, then asks about the people who would use it. How might that change what the group makes?

FIND YOUR WAY IN

Take part in a way that works for you

You don't have to know everyone at school to make someone's day easier. The people around you include close friends and students you've barely spoken to. You still share classrooms, hallways and routines. A decision your group makes can affect people who weren't in the room when you made it.

If you're wondering where to start, look for something useful you can do. Ask a question, test a set of directions, make a careful drawing, welcome someone new or point out a detail the group missed. Speaking to the whole group is one way to help. Listening and giving a thoughtful response counts too.

You can also try a different role. Usually sort the materials? You could ask to explain the next idea. Usually run the discussion? Try inviting an answer and giving someone time to think. Being good at one part of the work doesn't mean you have to do that part every time.

Before you join a club, get the details from an official school notice or the adult advisor. When does it meet? Can beginners join? What materials are provided, and what permission do you need? Check costs and transport before you commit. It's fine to ask privately. You don't owe the group an explanation of your family's circumstances.

Ask whether you can try one meeting. Check first, because some clubs have attendance or permission requirements. If the schedule doesn't work, ask about another way to explore the same interest. A classroom activity, supervised lunchtime group or short school project might fit better.

If you're already part of the group, help make it easier for someone else to join. Are instructions stuck in a private chat? Do meetings run so late that someone could miss their transport? Does one person get every important decision? Bring those problems to the group and suggest a change. Your adult advisor can help with access, supervision and school arrangements. You don't have to solve those on your own.

You should be able to contribute, ask questions and get support. You can also decide an activity isn't right for you. There will be things you want to try and things you need to leave out. A packed schedule doesn't prove how much you care about your school.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

What does “join in” mean?

Eli: “If no one says anything, I start offering ideas. I thought that helped. Then Jordan told me he was still trying to understand the question. Now I try to leave a little space before I add another suggestion.”

Jordan: “Sometimes I want to see an example before I answer. If I can write a first thought, I’m more ready to explain it. I don’t always want someone else to speak for me. I want a chance to work out what I mean.”



Both students want a part in the meeting. What could your group change so each has a way to contribute? Look at how the meeting works; neither student needs a different personality to belong.

A CONVERSATION TO TRY

Student: “I’d like to try the club. Could you explain what a usual meeting is like?”

Advisor: “We choose a small project and work on it here. What else would help you decide?”

Student: “I can attend at lunch, but I can’t stay after school. Is there a way to take part during the club period?”

This is one way to start: name what interests you, ask what you need to know and explain a limit. The advisor can check what's possible. Use words that sound like you. A note works too, and you can ask another trusted school adult to help you begin.

ANOTHER SCHOOL DAY

The instructions behind the invitation

On another occasion, the club prepared a lunchtime activity for students who wanted to try making paper scenes. Ms. Chen asked a few members to try the instructions before she invited visitors.

Samira had made a sample street with buildings that stood upright. She held it above the table. "Choose a background, fold along the dotted lines, and arrange the pieces. Then explain your scene."

Jordan reached for a sheet. The dotted lines disappeared beneath the stack of buildings. Eli turned his paper over twice.

"Which side do we fold toward?" he asked.

Samira demonstrated, but Maya was looking for the background sheets. When she looked up, the fold was finished.

"Could you do that again?"

"We haven't even got visitors yet," Samira said.

"That's why we're trying it," Ms. Chen replied.

They began again, this time leaving the sample on the table. Samira made a second example that showed an unfinished fold.

Jordan wrote the direction beneath a drawing. He checked it with Samira because his first version described the fold backward.

Maya suggested putting backgrounds at one end of the table and building pieces at the other. Ms. Chen checked the arrangement and moved a chair so the approach to the table stayed clear. She also put a set of materials within reach of the seated work area.

"Should I hand everyone their pieces?" Maya asked.

"Offer," Ms. Chen said. "Some people will want help. Others will want to choose for themselves."

Eli studied the final direction. "'Explain your scene.' Does that mean stand up and talk?"

"I meant tell someone what's happening," Samira said. "A caption could do that too."

Ms. Chen confirmed that either would fit this activity. She would help anyone who needed another way to take part. The group changed the direction to: Tell a partner about your scene, or add a caption. You can prepare your explanation before sharing it.

During the supervised activity, a visitor chose the written directions. Samira almost stepped in to demonstrate, then waited. The student made the fold, compared it with the sample, and continued.

Later, Eli used the unfinished example himself. He had helped prepare the activity, but he had still forgotten the direction of the second fold.

At the end, a visitor pointed to the word background. "Is that the bottom piece or the back piece?"

Samira added labels to the sample. Their instructions were better than they had been that morning. They had also found something else to change.

MAKE IT EASIER TO GET STARTED

What the trial shows

Think about what someone had to catch the first time: spoken instructions and a quick demonstration, both gone in a moment. Leave an example where people can return to it. An unfinished example can help too, because the final version may hide the fold or step someone is trying to understand.

Check what the activity actually asks people to do. Here, students needed to explain a scene, so either a caption or a conversation worked. In another lesson, speaking might be part of the skill they're practicing. Ask the teacher which choices fit the task and what other arrangements are needed.

You don't need to work out a classmate's private reason for asking. Eli wanting written directions doesn't tell the group why he wants them. Maya missing one demonstration doesn't define what she can do. Ask which arrangement would help, without sorting people into types or making them explain private needs.

A trial can show you something worth changing. It can't promise that the activity will work for everyone. The visitor noticed a confusing word the planners had stopped noticing. Leave room for another question, even after you've improved the instructions.

TRY A DIFFERENT ARRANGEMENT

Want to try this out? Use this invented situation: students choose a picture, pick out two details and explain how those details create its mood. The teacher briefly shows the instructions, then replaces them with a timer. The pictures have no identifying numbers. Everyone has to report to the whole group immediately.

TRY A DIFFERENT ARRANGEMENT

1. Where could someone get stuck because of how the task is set up? Describe that arrangement without guessing a diagnosis or judging the student.

2. Suggest a change that still asks people to examine two details and explain their effect. What could stay visible or available as they work?

3. Try your version with an invented picture. Could someone tell which picture your explanation is about?

4. Which choice would you need the teacher to confirm? What question does your trial still leave open?

Write your idea, sketch the setup or use another format the teacher approves. Keep the thinking in the task. The change should help people do it and show what they mean.

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

My participation map

Use words, a drawing or a short conversation to work through this map. Keep personal contact details out of any shared copy.

An interest I would like to explore:

Something I would like to learn or practice:

One school activity I could ask about:

What I already know from an official source:

What I still need to ask:

The school adult who can help me find out:

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

My participation map

continued

When the activity happens:

What I need to check about time, permission, materials or access:

A possible first step:

A different option if this one does not fit:

Filling this in doesn't commit you to joining. Finding out what an activity involves can be your first step.

TRY IT WITH YOUR GROUP

Make one invitation clearer

With an advisor's permission, take a club notice or a classroom activity invitation and look at it as a new person would. You can use an invented notice instead.

Can you find when and where the group meets, who can join, whether beginners are welcome and which school adult can answer questions? Does it say what a new member might do? Would the words make sense to someone who doesn't know the club's abbreviations?

Pick one missing or confusing detail and draft a clearer version. Before anyone uses it, ask the adult responsible to check it's accurate. Leave out other students' names, personal contact details and photographs. An invented notice is fine if you're not changing a real one.

TRY SOMETHING BEYOND SCHOOL

Bring an adult into the first conversation

An interest can take you beyond a school club. You might hear about a library activity, a youth group or a community project. Finding out more is a first step; you haven't agreed to join just because you ask. Talk with a parent, carer or trusted adult about the opportunity. Ask them to help check who runs it, whether it welcomes your age group and how the adults responsible can be contacted.

The useful question is bigger than 'Does this sound fun?' What would you actually do? Who would explain the task and be there while you do it? When does it start and finish? Check permission, travel, collection arrangements, costs, materials and ways to take part. Use the organization's official information with your adult. Keep private contact details out of a shared workbook, and let adults handle arrangements that need their agreement.

You can bring an idea without offering to run the activity. Perhaps you could help check whether a set of directions makes sense, prepare something the organizer has requested or try a task alongside an experienced person. The organizer needs to confirm what's suitable. A school club's permission doesn't automatically cover a different place or activity.

A FICTIONAL CHOICE

Two ways to explore the same interest

A student likes making short book recommendations. A community center advertises a Saturday reading activity for families. Its notice says young volunteers may ask about helping, but it doesn't describe their tasks or the arrangements for supervision and collection. The student's school librarian has also asked for a few original book descriptions for a display during the supervised lunch club. The student can get to that club. Saturday travel hasn't been arranged.

The student first writes, 'I'll lead the Saturday reading group.' That promises more than the notice offers. They haven't been offered a role, checked the task or agreed the travel. With their adult, they prepare a question instead: 'I'm interested in books. Is there a supported task for someone my age, and what would I need to know before deciding?'

While that answer is pending, the student asks the school librarian about the display. The librarian confirms that the student can draft one description of a book they've read, using their own words, and bring it to the next lunch club for review. The student chooses that task for now. They can still learn about Saturday's activity without claiming a place or making a second promise.

The smaller task gives the student something real to do. It also leaves the unresolved question where it belongs. If the community organizer replies later, the student and their adult can check the new information before deciding. A notice saying 'volunteers welcome' doesn't answer every question, and a pending reply doesn't mean permission has been given.

MAKE YOUR OWN FIRST STEP

A note to use with your adult

Use the fictional choice above or an activity your adult is helping you explore. Write, draw or talk through these prompts. Keep the note about the activity, not private details about your family.

What interests me about this activity?

What task has the organizer actually described?

What do we know from current official information?

What still needs an answer about age, supervision, permission, time, travel, costs or access?

Which adult will help check those answers?

What is one question we can ask through the official route?

MAKE YOUR OWN FIRST STEP

A note to use with your adult

continued

What could I try in a familiar, supervised setting while we find out?

For the book example, a useful note says: 'I want to practice explaining why someone might enjoy a book. The Saturday task and travel are unconfirmed. My adult will help ask the organizer. For now, the librarian has agreed that I can draft one description for review at lunch.' It separates an interest, a confirmed task and an unanswered question.

IF THE PLAN DOESN'T FIT

If the activity is full, too far away or for a different age group, ask your adult about another supported way to explore the interest. You could also wait. You don't need to start a new group or take on an adult's job to prove that you care. If an arrangement changes at the activity, check with the responsible adult and your parent, carer or trusted adult before agreeing to a different task, place or journey.

Already helping lead a group? Look at its invitation with the adult responsible. Does a new person get enough information to make a choice? A clear task, a named adult contact and an honest explanation of what is still pending can make the invitation more useful. Ask the adult to approve any change before it is shared.

KEEP ONE THING

Which action in the story made it easier to take part? Then choose a question you could ask before joining an activity. Those can be different answers. A group has a part to play in welcoming people, and you need useful information to decide what works for you.

NEXT UP

Clubs share your time with classes, assignments and the rest of your life. The next chapter has ways to make sense of schoolwork, ask for help and make a plan you can actually use.

Learning is something you can work on



A question to keep in mind

How can you use directions, feedback and help to choose a useful next step?

WHEN THE WORK ISN'T CLEAR YET

The part between the numbers

Maya liked the first page of her science report. Her drawing showed the ramp, the toy car, and the three starting heights. She had used a ruler for the data table. The page looked finished.

Ms. Chen's comment beside her conclusion said, "Compare your measurements. Explain how the evidence supports your claim."

Maya read it twice. She had written that the car traveled farther from the higher starting point. The numbers were right there. What else was she supposed to say?

Across the table, Eli was already turning to his next assignment.

"I can show you mine," he offered.

Maya almost said yes. Copying his sentence and changing the numbers would be quick. Instead, she opened the assignment directions. "It says each person writes their own explanation."

"We can still talk about what 'compare' means," Eli said. "Can't we?"

They checked with Ms. Chen, who was passing back reports. She confirmed that discussing the directions was allowed. Each student needed to choose evidence and write the explanation independently.

Maya pointed to the comment. "I can tell you what happened. I don't know which part is missing on the page."

"Tell me," Ms. Chen said.

"At the lowest height, the car traveled about forty centimeters. At the highest, it went about ninety. That's more than twice as far. So the starting height seems to matter."

"Where can your reader find that comparison in your paragraph?"

Maya looked. The reader couldn't.

"So I skipped the part between the numbers and the claim."

Ms. Chen nodded. "Add that connection. Keep your claim about this investigation. Our results don't tell us what every car on every ramp would do."

Maya wrote a reminder in the margin: choose two measurements, explain the comparison. She still had to decide how to phrase it, but she knew what she was working on.

At lunch, her planner presented a different problem. Science revision Thursday. Math practice Wednesday. School Community Club scenery sketches Thursday. She had offered to draw six large background panels for the club's short performance at a school assembly.

Six had sounded reasonable when they were tiny rectangles in her notebook.

Samira slid a folded sheet across the table. "I tried a scene with buildings made from letter shapes. Could we use something like that?"

"You used the letters as windows," Maya said. "I hadn't thought of that."

"I said I wanted to try making something," Samira replied. "I worked out this one on the way to school."

Maya turned the sheet around. Samira's buildings were stranger and funnier than hers. "Could you bring this to the meeting?"

WHEN THE WORK ISN'T CLEAR YET

The part between the numbers

continued

Eli arrived carrying three books and a roll of tape. He had promised to help with scenery, sound, and the announcement.

"I can do all three," he said, then stopped to examine his planner. "Actually, the sound test and announcement practice are at the same time."

Nobody had a clever solution to being in two places at once.

At the supervised club meeting, they showed Ms. Chen their plan. She confirmed which materials they could use and when they could work in the room. The group decided on two background panels. Maya and Samira would each design one; other members could help paint during the meeting. Eli chose the sound test and told the announcement group before they began practicing.

Later, Jordan looked over the scenery measurements. He had drawn a clear diagram on a school device, but the file wouldn't open on the club computer.

"I'll figure it out," he said, closing the error message.

"Do you know what you're trying next?" Maya asked.

Jordan shook his head. After a pause, he asked Ms. Chen where he could get help with the approved file format. His diagram was useful even though he needed help sharing it.

Maya opened her science report during the remaining work time. She chose the two measurements she had explained aloud. Her first new sentence was awkward. She crossed out four words and tried again.

The report still wasn't finished. This time, she could point to the part she was making better.

FIND A WAY TO START

Choose a next step you can actually take

When an assignment feels difficult, try to pin down what's getting in the way. Is the idea confusing? Do you understand the idea but not the directions? Or do you know what to do and have more work than time? Each calls for a different kind of help.



Start with what the task asks you to do. Look for words such as compare, explain, calculate, describe or support. Check what you need to turn in, what evidence or method is expected and when it's due. If two directions seem to conflict, ask the teacher which one to follow.

Giving yourself the job “Do the report” can leave you stuck. “Choose two results that support my claim” gives you somewhere to start. Aim for a first step that leaves something you can check: a labeled diagram, one attempted problem or a question beside an unfamiliar word. It doesn't have to be the easiest part. It does need to be clear enough to begin.

FIND A WAY TO START

Choose a next step you can actually take

continued

Before you change everything because of feedback, find the part the comment is about. What needs adding, correcting, explaining or checking? If you can't tell, ask: "Could you show me one place where I need more evidence?" Once you've revised, go back to the comment. Does your change answer it? Check what revisions are allowed and when they're due; those arrangements vary.

You can ask for help and still do your own work. Bring whatever you've tried and point out where you got stuck. A classmate may help you talk through an idea; a teacher can clarify the task or help find a missing step. Check which kinds of collaboration and tools are allowed. Don't assume you can hand in an online answer, an AI-generated response or another student's sentence as your own. Follow your teacher's directions for permission and credit when you use someone else's words, ideas, images or data.

Make room in your plan for the life you actually have: schoolwork, club meetings, travel, meals, rest and other commitments. Leave some space for things taking longer than expected. A smaller club role can still help the group. If your part needs to change, tell the advisor and other members early. Ask what's possible before promising time you don't have.

A plan can show you a problem without solving it. If missing materials, time, access or unclear expectations keep you from starting, ask a teacher or trusted school adult to help you work out the next step. You can ask to discuss private circumstances privately.

TALKING IT THROUGH

Whose explanation is it?

- Eli:** My paragraph starts, “The evidence shows...” You could start that way.
- Maya:** Maybe. But I need to decide what my evidence shows first.
- Eli:** What if I tell you how I compared my results?
- Maya:** We checked that talking about the method is allowed. Tell me how you chose the results, not the sentence to copy.
- Eli:** I looked for measurements that tested my claim. Then I checked whether another result complicated it.
- Maya:** I only picked the biggest number. I should look at the whole table again.
- Eli:** I should too. I went straight to the results I expected.

QUESTIONS WORTH DISCUSSING

Use these on your own or with someone else.

1. Maya can explain something to Ms. Chen that her written conclusion doesn't show. What makes the spoken explanation work? Look at the details of both.

2. What does the group give up to make its club plan manageable? What does it keep, and why do those choices help?

3. What does Maya and Eli's conversation add to your thinking about getting help while doing your own work?

QUESTIONS WORTH DISCUSSING

continued

4. Jordan makes a useful diagram and still needs technical help. What might someone wrongly assume about learning if they overlooked either of those things?

CHECK BEFORE YOU PASS IT ON

What can this source actually tell us?

This example uses an invented school, notices, dates, numbers and comments. None describes a real school's arrangements.

Here's the situation: students at fictional Cedar School are explaining a proposed lunchtime reading room. Ms. Chen gives them three items to check.

Item A: A cropped image shared between students. Its heading says, "Reading room open every lunch." The image contains no date or author. The bottom of the original page is missing.

Item B: A notice supplied by the librarian, dated 8 October in the practice scenario. It says, "A supervised reading room trial will run on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 15 to 29 October. Students should check the current library notice for room and entry arrangements."

Item C: Notes from one supervised class discussion on 9 October. Of the 18 students who chose to answer, 12 said they would like a quiet reading space at lunch. The notes do not record the views of other classes or students who did not answer.

CHECK BEFORE YOU PASS IT ON

What can this source actually tell us?

continued

Jordan's first paragraph reads: "Cedar School is opening a reading room every lunchtime because most students need somewhere quiet. The school has proved the new room will be popular."

Ms. Chen writes: "Check the schedule against its original source. Explain who the responses represent. Separate a proposal from a result."

Jordan underlines every lunchtime. Then he circles most students and proved. He has found three different claims inside two sentences.

TRACE EACH CLAIM

Before trusting Item A, ask where the whole image came from. Jordan can't tell when it was made or what the missing part said. A screenshot can keep the words while cutting off the context that explains them. In this example, Ms. Chen supplies the librarian's full notice as Item B, so he can check the original.

For the announced schedule, Item B is the stronger source: it comes from the person responsible for the trial and gives its days and dates. That doesn't make it an answer to every question. It doesn't tell Jordan what all students want, and a later official update could change the plan.

Keep the group in Item C visible when you describe the responses. Twelve of eighteen is more than half of the students who answered. It isn't evidence about everyone at the school. The notes also tell Jordan that those respondents wanted a quiet reading space; they don't promise that anyone will attend this particular trial.

If two more student posts repeat Item A, Jordan has more copies of the claim. He hasn't necessarily found independent evidence. He still needs to trace where it began. For online school research, use teacher-approved searches to check who made the material and whether other relevant sources support it. A polished page, familiar logo or repeated claim can't do that checking for you.

WHAT A USEFUL REVISION CHANGES

Jordan changes his paragraph to:

“According to the librarian's 8 October notice, Cedar School plans to try a supervised lunchtime reading room on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 15 to 29 October. In one class discussion, 12 of the 18 students who answered said they would like a quiet reading space. Those responses suggest interest among that group. They do not show how many students across the school would use the room. Attendance during the trial would provide different information about its use.”

Notice how much changes here. Jordan corrects the unsupported schedule, says whose responses were counted and separates what people wanted from what they might later do. He also drops because. Nothing in the packet shows that the discussion caused the librarian's decision; the notice was written before the discussion. Adding a few cautious words wouldn't fix those problems on its own.

He checks the feedback one part at a time. “Plans to try” shows it's a proposal. The dates correct the schedule. “In one class discussion” shows who is represented. He also follows Ms. Chen's directions for giving credit to the notice and notes in his assignment.

His new paragraph still leaves a question unanswered. Yours can too. If the evidence doesn't tell you something, a confident sentence won't fill the gap.

TRY A REVISION

Use another invented practice packet. A current notice from the event teacher says that an indoor drawing activity is planned for Wednesday lunch, subject to room confirmation. A student message calls it “the new weekly art club.” A note from a class discussion records that five students offered to bring drawings; it gives no attendance count or schoolwide survey.

Draft: “Our school now has a weekly art club. It will be crowded because everyone who likes drawing is going.”

Feedback: “Check what is confirmed. Replace a prediction presented as fact. Keep an unresolved detail visible.”

TRY A REVISION

continued

If you want to practice, revise the draft using only what this packet supports. Beside each changed claim, name the item that backs up your change. What would you ask the responsible teacher before passing on the event details? Leave that question visible instead of inventing a room, attendance number or answer. Then explain why fixing the spelling alone wouldn't respond to the feedback.

Revised paragraph

Evidence for each change

Question for the teacher

Why spelling changes alone are not enough

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

A small start planner

Try this on paper or in a school-approved planner. An invented assignment is fine if you'd rather use one.

Task and due date:

What I need to show or turn in:

One direction I need clarified:

My first visible step:

When and where I can try it:

Materials or approved tools I need:

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

A small start planner

continued

Who can help, and my specific question:

How I will check the attempt or use feedback:

One commitment I may need to adjust:

TRY IT

Read, start, check

Choose a current assignment or Maya's science revision and try the planner. Spend five minutes on the first step, then pause. Did you make what you expected, discover a question or realize the step was still too big? Change one part of the plan. Your planner can stay private; if you're working with a partner, share a strategy or an invented example.

Speak up and be heard



A question to keep in mind

How can you explain a barrier, ask for a change and listen to other people without giving up your own voice?

WHEN YOU NEED THE GROUP TO LISTEN

Before the vote

The School Community Club had twenty minutes to choose a design for its hallway display about water use at school. Ms. Chen had approved the topic and would check the display space and materials. The students would choose how to present their information.

Eli wrote three roles on the board: design, facts, assembly.

"Samira can keep track of the plan," he said. "Jordan can do the computer part. Maya can draw."

Samira set down her pencil. She had brought an idea for a turning wheel: visitors could move it to match everyday activities with amounts of water. She wanted to help design and build it.

"We agreed to take turns with the notes," she said. "I brought a design to try today."

Eli looked surprised. "But your notes make sense."

"I can take good notes and still want a different part."

There was a short silence. Maya turned her sketchbook facedown.

"Okay," Eli said. "Let's hear designs, then. Mine is a giant tap with facts coming out like drops."

He spoke quickly, drawing as he went. Maya followed with a foldout comic strip. Samira began describing the wheel, but someone asked where the moving pieces would fit. She tried to explain the layers with her hands.

"We should just vote," Maya said. "We need time to make something."

Samira looked at the clock. Her idea sounded much less clear aloud than it had seemed in her head.

"Wait. I haven't shown how mine works."

"You had a turn," Maya said.

"I had a turn speaking. I need a minute to draw the parts. Could we sketch all three ideas before we vote?"

Eli pointed at the clock. "If we spend the whole meeting choosing, nobody gets to build."

That was a real problem. Samira could see the pile of untouched cardboard beside him.

"You want to protect building time," she said.

"What about three minutes to sketch, then one question for each design?"

Ms. Chen stepped closer. "We can use that process today. I'll keep the time. Before we begin, does anyone need the directions repeated or written down?"

Jordan raised a hand halfway. "Written, please. I missed what we're voting on. Is it the best-looking idea or the one we can finish?"

Maya uncapped her marker again. "Those might be different."

With Ms. Chen's help, the group agreed on three things to consider: whether visitors could understand the display, whether the information could be checked, and whether the club could build it with approved materials. Ms. Chen wrote those points where everyone could see them.

WHEN YOU NEED THE GROUP TO LISTEN

Before the vote

continued

Samira drew two circles joined at the center. Eli asked what would keep the top circle from tearing. She hadn't considered that. Jordan suggested testing a small cardboard version before choosing its final size.

When the group voted, the comic strip won. Samira pressed her lips together. She still preferred the wheel.

"Your wheel made me think about putting questions under the flaps," Maya said.

"Would you want to help design those?"

Samira considered it. "Yes. And I'd like to draw some panels, not just write the questions."

"Okay. Let's each try one."

Eli reached for the planning sheet. "I can take notes today. Somebody should check whether I've missed anything."

Before they left, Ms. Chen asked everyone to choose a first task instead of assigning roles by reputation. She also explained that nobody should attach anything to the hallway wall until she confirmed permission.

Maya caught up with Samira at the door. "I was worried we'd run out of time. I didn't listen to what you were asking."

"We nearly did run out," Samira said. "But I wanted people to understand the wheel before deciding."

"You got a fairer hearing."

"Still wanted the wheel, though."

Maya laughed, and Samira did too. Being heard had not made losing the vote enjoyable. It had made the choice something she could take part in.

ASK FOR WHAT WOULD HELP

Make your request clear

Speaking up about your needs, questions, choices or boundaries is called self-advocacy. You might need to ask about a confusing assignment, try a different club role or explain that a discussion is moving too fast. You can speak, write, draw or ask an adult to help you get your point across.

Start with what's happening. "This is unfair" may describe exactly how you feel, but the listener may still not know what to change. "The directions disappear before I finish reading them" gives them something specific to understand. That's a barrier: something getting in the way of understanding, access or taking part.

Then ask for a change: "Could you leave the directions visible while we work?" If you don't know what would help, say that. "I keep losing track after the second step. Could we work out another way for me to follow the directions?" You don't need to bring the whole solution with you.

Give yourself a chance to understand the reply. Someone might disagree, need more information or explain a limit. Check what you heard: "Are you saying we need a plan we can finish today?" Then decide whether to adjust your request, suggest another option or ask an adult to help. You can understand someone's reason without agreeing with it.

ASK FOR WHAT WOULD HELP

Make your request clear

continued

People may need different support to take part fairly. Written directions may help one student; a spoken explanation or demonstration may help another. You can work toward the same goal in different ways. Teachers and advisors help decide what fits. They handle private records and permissions; students shouldn't have to explain one another's needs.

You shouldn't have to find and fix every barrier yourself. Adults can offer clear directions, different ways to contribute and a chance to ask privately before anyone raises a concern. You decide whether to share personal details with classmates. "I'd like to discuss the reason privately" is enough to ask for a private conversation.

If the first person doesn't help, think about what's still unresolved. You could bring an example, ask for a quieter conversation, write a note or approach another trusted school adult. That adult can help find the right person or join you in a conversation. If someone is threatening or harming you, you don't need to argue with them alone. Move toward safety and tell a trusted adult. If you aren't heard, tell another adult.

A request might lead to a change, an explanation or another conversation. Ask what happens next and when to check back. A first answer of no doesn't stop you from respectfully asking about a barrier that remains.

TWO WAYS OF SEEING IT

The same extra minute

Maya's view: "When Samira asked for more time, I thought the display would never get built. I heard a delay. Once she suggested a three-minute limit, I could picture us finishing. I should have asked what she needed before pushing for a vote."



Samira's view: "I wasn't asking the group to choose my idea. I wanted them to understand it. I also didn't want to become the note-taker just because I had done it before. I needed to make two different requests, and say each one clearly."

TALK IT THROUGH

You can use these questions alone or with a group.

1. Where does Samira turn a general objection into a specific request? What changes in the discussion when she changes her words?

2. What shows that Eli's concern about time matters? What shows that getting through the decision quickly won't solve everything?

3. How does Jordan's question make the vote more useful for everyone?

TALK IT THROUGH

continued

4. Did Samira get what she asked for? Separate the chance she requested, the design she preferred and the role she chose. What details support your answer?

ANOTHER SCHOOL DAY

The sentence that needed replacing

On another school day, Maya and Jordan were preparing a short practice reading in class. Their task was to choose an order for two passages and explain the choice. Ms. Chen had given them time to compare possibilities.

Maya wanted the funny passage first. Jordan wanted to begin with the quieter one.

"If we start with the joke, the second passage feels like we've stopped," he said.

"Or people will already be listening," Maya replied.

They tried both orders. Jordan preferred the same one as before. Maya pulled the page toward her.

"You just don't want to use my idea."

Jordan pushed his chair back. "I explained why."

"You explain everything until we do it your way."

Eli, working nearby, looked up. Maya could hear how far her voice had carried. She put the page back between them.

Ms. Chen came over. "What's happening?"

"We're stuck on the order," Maya said.

"And she said I always get my way," Jordan added.

Ms. Chen let each finish. She asked them to leave the decision for a moment. "You can disagree about the reading. The comments about each other need attention too."

Maya stared at the passages. Jordan's reason was written beside the quieter one. She had treated his disagreement as proof that he was against her.

"I said you didn't want my idea just because it was mine," she said. "I don't know that. You gave a reason, and I brushed it off. I'm sorry." Jordan was quiet.

"I still prefer starting with the joke," she added, "but I shouldn't have said that about you."

"I heard you," he said. "I don't want to try it again right now."

Ms. Chen offered a short pause and separate written explanations before they returned to the task. Both agreed. She would help if they were still stuck.

Maya also turned toward Eli. "What I said about Jordan wasn't fair. We disagreed about the order." She did not ask him to take a side.

After the pause, they compared their explanations. Maya asked, "Which part feels like stopping?" Jordan pointed to the change in pace. She could hear it, though she thought a short introduction might help.

They decided to ask Ms. Chen whether they could try that introduction before choosing. Jordan slid the page between them. He did not say everything was fine. They had enough agreement to try the next part of the work.

REPAIR THE WORDS AS WELL AS THE WORK

There are two things to sort out here: which order works for the reading, and how Maya and Jordan are treating each other. Choosing the order won't automatically repair their conversation. Even if the group chose Maya's order, she would still need to correct her claim about Jordan's motives.

Maya names what she said and takes back the claim she can't support. She doesn't ask Jordan to reassure her or take some blame in return. Eli heard the claim, so he needs to hear the correction too; otherwise he could be left with a false impression. That doesn't mean repeating the argument to a bigger audience.

Jordan doesn't have to say everything is fine. He asks for a pause, and the teacher helps arrange it. A correction is a start. What follows also matters: keeping the shared page available, hearing an explanation and avoiding the same personal accusation. An apology doesn't require immediate forgiveness or a closer friendship.

You can own what you said and still disagree about the work. Maya can prefer the funny opening; Jordan can try working together again without changing his preference. Looking at something in the passages gives them a useful question to discuss, instead of making claims about each other's character.

TRY IT WITH AN INVENTED DISAGREEMENT

Use this invented case: Samira and Eli agreed to discuss changes to their shared draft. Samira replaces a heading without asking him. Eli says, "You never think my writing is good enough." Samira replies, "You're impossible to work with." Both still want to finish the draft.

TRY IT WITH AN INVENTED DISAGREEMENT

continued

If you want to work this through, write what could happen next. Give each student a specific correction that fits what they did. Then suggest an agreement for editing the draft: what could either person try alone, and what should they discuss before changing it? Keep room for a pause or teacher support. Nobody has to declare the disagreement settled.

Dialogue with two specific corrections

Editing agreement and decision boundary

TRY IT WITH AN INVENTED DISAGREEMENT

continued

Try two endings: one where the heading changes and one where it stays. Why might their comments still need repairing in either ending? You can write the conversation; you don't need to perform it.

Compare the endings and explain

WHEN TO GET ADULT HELP

Bullying, threats, discrimination, sexual comments, repeated targeting, or fear of harm call for adult attention. They should not become an exercise in finding a compromise or making both students apologize. You do not have to meet someone alone, confront them, or investigate what happened. Get to a safe place and use your school's adult support routes. If you are unsure what kind of situation you are facing, you can ask an adult without first deciding on a label. Tell another appropriate adult if the first cannot or does not help.

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

Prepare a request

Pick the parts that help you get clear. You don't have to follow a script.

What is happening? Name an action or condition without guessing someone's motives.

How does it affect my participation or understanding?

What change, explanation, or help am I asking for?

Who can help with this? Would I prefer to speak privately, write, or bring an adult?

What will I ask to understand the response?

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

Prepare a request

continued

If the barrier remains, what is another safe route to support?

Possible opening: "When _____, I have trouble _____. Could we _____?"

Possible check: "I heard _____. Have I understood?"

Possible follow-up: "That still leaves _____ unresolved. Who could help us work on it?"

TRY IT

Test two ways of asking

Try this invented situation if it's useful: a group assigns every task before one member arrives from another school activity. That student wants a part in the design.

Write a short request and reply, or act it out. Give the listener one reasonable concern to raise. How could the request change while keeping the student's choice visible? Decide where adult support could help. Watching is fine if you don't want to perform. Nobody needs to share a personal experience.

Notice a need, choose a service



A question to keep in mind

How can you choose a useful service by listening before you act?

You can care about a place and still get the wrong idea about what would help. The students in this chapter start with an idea they like, then change it after listening. Use their experience to think about a service that fits the request, what you want to learn and the time you have.

BEFORE YOU START MAKING

The second question

Maya had drawn a beautiful school map. The courtyard looked like a green button, the hallways made a neat rectangle, and a tiny trumpet marked the music room. She placed it in the center of the table before Ms. Chen's lunchtime club began.

"We could give these to new students," she said. "Maybe add a video tour."

Eli leaned over the drawing. "With a clue at each stop. A school treasure hunt."

Jordan studied the trumpet. During his first week, he had reached the music room through a corridor that did not appear on Maya's map. He could picture it clearly. He could also picture everyone waiting while he explained. He traced the rectangle with one finger instead.

Samira opened her notebook. "How many copies? When would people get them?"

"I want to ask something before that," said Ms. Chen. "Who has asked for a map?"

Maya uncapped her green marker, then capped it again. Nobody had.

Their school was preparing a welcome afternoon for incoming students. The club knew about it because Ms. Chen had offered them a choice of school service projects. Maya had assumed that a colorful map would fit.

"A good observation can start a question," Ms. Chen said. "Let's find out what the welcome team needs."

Ms. Chen arranged for Ms. Alvarez, who coordinated the afternoon, to visit their next club meeting. The students wrote three questions in advance. Samira wanted to ask about timing. Eli asked what already worked. Maya added, "Where do visitors usually need another explanation?"

Ms. Alvarez brought the school's existing welcome sheet. Most of the afternoon involved adult-led groups. However, the directions from the main office to the art and music rooms confused some visitors before the groups formed.

"The room numbers are accurate," she said. "But people sometimes mix up the two corridor turns. We'd like a clearer paper guide for those two routes. It needs to work in black and white."

Maya looked at the green button on her drawing.

"Would a treasure hunt help?" Eli asked.

"People will be arriving at different times, and the adults will be getting groups ready," Ms. Alvarez said. "A game would be hard to manage. A short guide we can check would help."

Jordan raised a hand halfway. "Do you want it to show both corridors?"

Ms. Alvarez pulled her chair closer. "Which ones?"

Jordan drew them on scrap paper. He explained where the music-room corridor joined the main hall. This time Maya kept her marker capped and watched.

BEFORE YOU START MAKING

The second question

continued

“That connection is useful,” Ms. Alvarez said. “School staff will check the routes, including the step-free route, before anything is printed.”

The group compared three possibilities: redesign every welcome page, make a video tour, or improve one paper guide. The video sounded exciting to Samira, who had enjoyed designing a scenery panel and wanted to try another visual format. But filming meant arranging spaces, checking what appeared on camera, and finding more time. Next week included a science test and a history assignment.

“One page,” Samira said finally. “Could I try the symbols?”

Maya nodded. “I can write the directions. I need to stop explaining things with green.”

Eli offered to check each direction against the approved school map. Jordan wanted to arrange the page so readers could find their starting point. They could change those roles later.

Ms. Chen approved three twenty-minute club sessions, including a short, supervised test after staff checked a draft. She would handle printing and arrange contact with the welcome team. Nobody had to miss class, spend money, or work during lunch outside the scheduled meetings. A student who preferred a different approved project could choose it without explaining personal reasons.

Before leaving, Maya asked Ms. Alvarez one more question.

“How will you know whether our page is useful?”

“If readers can identify the correct turns and I can update the file when a room changes, that would be useful,” she answered. “Bring me a draft. We may discover something else together.”

Maya wrote that answer above her drawing. For the first time, she knew what the map needed to do.

CHECK WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY HELP

Turn an observation into a useful service

A service is something you do to meet a need. The people affected need a say in what that need is and whether your work helps. Maybe you've noticed confusing directions, hard-to-find supplies or a school display that needs clearer explanations. Treat your first thought as a starting point. Ask a responsible adult to help you check it with the people involved.

Keep track of three different things: what you saw, what you think it means and what someone asked for. Maya knew a welcome afternoon was coming. She thought newcomers might enjoy a colorful map. Ms. Alvarez asked for a readable guide to two specific routes. Those ideas connect, but they don't tell the group the same thing.

Your partner is the person or group you work with because the project affects their work or responsibilities. Here, it's the welcome team. Listen even when their answer changes your favorite idea. You can still ask questions and offer choices. The students decide how to combine words and diagrams, while adults approve the routes and school arrangements.

You can serve your school community. Your school might also arrange an approved partnership with a public library, community center or another local organization. Adults organize the contact and supervision. The people affected still help decide what would be useful. You don't need to travel or contact someone unfamiliar on your own.

CHECK WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY HELP

Turn an observation into a useful service

continued

Look for a real connection to what you're learning in class. Directions need precise verbs and a clear sequence. A guide needs thought about scale, position and what readers need to know. Testing it means gathering observations and using evidence to explain a change. Ask your teacher which skill fits the project, rather than adding a school subject just to tick a box.

Pick a size you can finish carefully. Even a small project may need several meetings: time to understand the request, time to make something and time to check and improve it. If the schoolwork piles up, make the project smaller or ask to change the schedule. Don't quietly give up sleep, assignments or necessary breaks to keep an ambitious plan going.

There's plenty for students to decide, with clear limits on what needs an adult. Adults handle facilities decisions, money, private information and permissions. Ask before printing, displaying work, changing a shared area or arranging a visit. This chapter's project needs no fundraising, public posting or contact with strangers. Students don't handle food, medicine, hazardous materials or unsafe cleanup. If the problem involves those things, tell a responsible adult.

Keep room for the partner to say "please change this," "not yet" or "we no longer need it." Listen to that answer, even after you've put work in. The service needs to be something people can use.

TALK IT THROUGH

What did they know, and what did they assume?

Try these questions alone or with your group.

1. Find a sentence that shows Maya's assumption and one that shows Ms. Alvarez's request. How did the request change the project?

2. Why might Jordan wait before mentioning the missing corridor? Look at something he does in the story, then consider another possible explanation.

TALK IT THROUGH

What did they know, and what did they assume?

continued

3. What does Samira asking to design symbols show about giving someone the same role every time?

4. Why does printing in black and white matter? How could that limit help the group make better choices?

5. Ms. Alvarez wants a file she can update. What does that suggest about how long the guide could be useful?

A PLAN TO BORROW FROM

Make the important checks visible

Project: A one-page guide for two school-approved routes.

Need and source: The welcome coordinator requested clearer directions between the main office and the art and music rooms. The existing welcome sheet remains in use.



People who will use it: Incoming students and accompanying adults at the welcome afternoon.

Skills to practice: Write and revise accurate sequence instructions. Explain how a diagram supports the words.

Student choices: Page order, symbols, wording, and two possible layouts.

Adult responsibilities: Approve route details and testing arrangements; confirm suitable routes; arrange printing and distribution.

Materials and time: Existing school map, scrap paper, school-approved drawing tools, and three twenty-minute club sessions. Printing must be approved before copies are made.

First check: Show a draft to Ms. Alvarez. Ask what is missing or incorrect before inviting approved volunteers to test it.

Possible limit: If the schedule shrinks, postpone title decoration and keep the two routes readable. Do not remove the accuracy check.

Stop or pause condition: Pause if the partner no longer needs the guide, an adult cannot verify a route, or the team cannot complete it within the approved schedule.

PARTNER CONVERSATION

Leave room for an unexpected answer

This separate practice case takes place in a school library. It is not part of the orientation-guide project.

On rainy afternoons, students could use the library's board games during a supervised activity period. Several boxes had been returned with their instruction sheets outside the lids. Eli thought the shelf needed a poster.

"Wouldn't a big reminder help people put everything away?" he asked the librarian during a teacher-arranged conversation.

"Perhaps," the librarian said. "What would it remind them to do?"

"Follow the instructions."

"Some of our instructions are difficult to find before a game begins. I wonder whether that is where we should start."

Eli looked at his question. It already contained the answer he wanted.

He tried again. "What happens when a group opens a box?"

The librarian described a recent activity period. A group had found a game's scoring sheet but not its directions. Another group had the directions, but the page did not explain where the matching pieces were stored. The librarian wanted help making existing information easier to find. She did not want students to rewrite game rules from memory.

Maya wrote, "Everyone finds the game shelf confusing."

"Do we know that?" asked Eli.

"We know those two things happened," she said, revising her note. "And we know what the librarian wants us to investigate."

With the teacher present, two regular participants had agreed to discuss the shelf. One knew where almost everything belonged. The other had joined games after they were already underway and sometimes could not tell which instruction sheet matched which box. They disagreed about whether larger labels would help.

The librarian did not ask them to settle the question by voting. "You're describing different starting points," she said. "We need to understand both."

Maya asked, "Can you show us the part you mean, using an empty box?" That gave each participant a way to explain without naming anyone who had made a mistake.

Before they left, Eli read back the request: "You want the directions already here to be easier to match with their games. We should compare a small label idea with a way to keep the matching pages together. You'll check anything we propose."

"Yes," the librarian said. "And some games may already be fine."

GIVE THE ANSWER SOME ROOM

Ask questions that help you listen

“Wouldn't a reminder help?” puts your solution into the question. Someone can disagree, but they have to push back against your idea to do it. Try “What happens when a group opens a box?” to give them room to describe the problem. Then ask for a clearer example or check what you heard: “When you say the pages get mixed up, which pages do you mean?”

An open question isn't always the right one. Once you understand the request, you may need a direct answer about a detail: “May we make a sample label for this one box?” The problem is asking something that sounds open when you've already decided and only want approval.

Think about what each person is in a position to tell you. The librarian can explain the collection and approve work on it, but can't describe every student's experience. A student can explain using one game without speaking for everyone who visits. Keep both kinds of knowledge in the conversation. “One participant showed us...” is more accurate than turning one person's experience into “Students need....”

You don't need to question everyone. Decide with the teacher and partner whether a small, voluntary conversation would answer something useful. Someone who is absent, says no or prefers to write hasn't agreed with the loudest speaker. If you're missing a point of view, say so instead of guessing it.

COMPARE THE OPTIONS

Which response fits the request?

The students consider three responses to the library's request. Their teacher has offered one supervised work period, provided that the librarian can check the draft before it is used.

COMPARE THE OPTIONS

Which response fits the request?

continued

A reminder poster would be quick to make. It would practice concise writing, but “Return all the pages” would not help readers match a page to a box. The students set this option aside because speed alone does not make it useful.

A matching label on one box and its existing instruction packet would let the students practice clear classification and consistent wording. They could make a paper sample within the available period. The librarian would need to confirm the match and approve any attachment to library materials. The proposal can stay small enough to check.

A new illustrated booklet for every game would offer plenty of writing practice. It would also require checking rules, illustrations, copying permissions, and many pages. The available period would not cover that work. The students cannot fix the mismatch by promising to finish everything at home.

They recommend the sample label, but the librarian later learns the games will move to another room. She asks them to wait until the storage is decided. Pausing keeps them from solving a problem that's about to change. Their reasoning still matters: they used evidence to choose an option, then explained why the conditions for it no longer held.

TRY THE QUESTIONS

Want to practice? Rewrite “Would you like us to make a video explaining all the games?” so the partner can describe a need before agreeing to your solution. Then add one specific follow-up that would help you check whether a response is possible. Explain what each question could tell you. Use this fictional case; you don't need to interview anyone.

Rewritten question

Follow-up question

What each question could reveal

TRY IT WITH YOUR GROUP

Ask before you build

If your group is ready to try this, choose a small school situation with your teacher. A fictional one works too. Begin with “I noticed...” and describe something you could observe. Then use “I wonder...” to show what you still need to find out.

Draft three questions for an adult-approved partner. Include “What would be useful?” and “What is already being done?” Ask your teacher to arrange any conversation. You can contribute questions in writing if you don't want to speak.

TRY IT WITH YOUR GROUP

Ask before you build

continued

Afterwards, record what the partner asked for accurately. Don't collect other students' names or personal stories. Suggest two responses and compare the time, materials and permission each needs, along with what you could learn or practice from class. Keep pausing as an option if neither fits.

You can pull the plan together with: "We suggest ___ because the partner requested ___. We will learn ___. Before starting, we need approval for ___. We will check usefulness by ___." This asks for permission to begin; it doesn't replace the checks.

KEEP ONE QUESTION

Which part of your first idea would you be willing to change after listening? What would you need to understand before changing it?

Work with people, finish with care



A question to keep in mind

How can a team share decisions, learn from a test and leave something useful behind?

Agreeing on a project is a start. Now someone has to do each part, notice when the plan slips and listen when a test shows something needs changing. Here's how the students take their school orientation guide from a first draft to something the welcome team can use.

MAKING THE PLAN WORK

The arrow that pointed twice

Halfway through the first work session, Jordan turned the laptop so everyone could see. Two bold arrows led away from a square marked MAIN OFFICE. The art route had striped arrows; the music route had solid ones. Samira had drawn a paintbrush and a musical note beside the room names.

Eli reached for the trackpad. “If we move this—”

“Can Jordan finish?” Maya asked.

Eli pulled back his hand. Jordan explained that both routes began at the same place, so he had made their first arrow extra large.

Samira leaned closer. “I like the starting point. I can’t tell which arrow belongs to the words underneath.”

“Could we hear everyone’s suggestion before changing it?” Jordan asked.

Ms. Chen had given them a simple meeting routine: show the current work, hear each person’s view, choose the next step, and say who will do it. Anyone could pass or write a suggestion. Today Eli was keeping the task list, a role he had asked to try.

Maya opened her notebook. Her direction sentences stopped halfway down the page.

“I said I’d finish these by our check-in,” she said. “I didn’t.”

“We need them for the test,” Samira said.

“I kept rewriting the opening sentence instead of finishing the steps. I should have told you I was stuck.” Maya rubbed out a doodle beside the unfinished sentence. “I can finish a rough version now, then we can check it together.”

Eli looked at the clock. “We have ten minutes left. What can we finish before the test?”

They gave Maya four minutes to complete the sentences while Samira checked the symbols. Jordan and Eli compared the page with the staff-approved map. Then everyone would review the words together. They postponed the title decoration. Ms. Chen agreed that the revised plan fit their remaining session.

During the second work session, Ms. Alvarez joined the supervised test with three student volunteers. She had already checked the routes and approved the test. The volunteers could decline or stop whenever they wanted. Each received the same draft and a chance to follow a route with an adult present. The team recorded route observations without volunteers’ names.

The first volunteer followed the art directions correctly. The second paused at the large starting arrow.

“That means—” Eli began.

He stopped himself. Explaining would hide whether the guide explained itself.

“What are you looking for?” he asked instead.

“Which way to hold the page,” the volunteer said.

Jordan had drawn the diagram with the office at the top. When readers stood facing away from the office, the diagram’s first turn looked reversed. The second volunteer turned the wrong way. The adult stopped the route at that point. The third volunteer reached the music room but asked which door the directions meant.

MAKING THE PLAN WORK

The arrow that pointed twice

continued

The team's notes were short: one route completed without a question; one wrong first turn; one question about the destination door.

"Should we write that it mostly worked?" Maya asked.

Samira shook her head. "That hides the turn."

Jordan stared at the screen. He had spent the longest on the part that caused the wrong turn. He wanted to explain why the arrows made sense from his chair.

Instead, he wrote, "The page needs a clearer starting view."

For the rest of that second session, they revised the guide. They placed a simple drawing beside the first instruction: a reader standing at the approved starting point, facing a named hallway sign. They separated the two routes and added the confirmed room number beside each destination. Ms. Alvarez checked the changes. Ms. Chen arranged another brief supervised test during the third and final work session, replacing time they had set aside for decoration.

At that second supervised test, two different volunteers tried the revised guide. One followed the art route and the other followed the music route; both finished without questions. The team recorded what happened and noted that two readers could not represent every future visitor.

Later in that same third session, Ms. Alvarez opened the editable file herself. She changed the date in the sample copy and printed a page in black and white.

"I can use this," she said. "The two-route layout is easier to update than the first version."

Jordan saved the approved file with its date. Eli put the test notes and a short update sheet in the school-approved folder. The sheet explained that room or sign changes would require staff to recheck the directions. Ms. Chen handled the final copies for the welcome team.

Samira added the agreed credit: "Created by the School Community Club with the welcome team." Nobody needed a public name or photograph.

Maya kept her original colorful map in her sketchbook. Next to it, she wrote the question that had improved the project: "What happens when someone else tries it?"

SHARE THE WORK FAIRLY

Be ready to adjust

When you split up the work, check the effort as well as the number of tasks. Writing four directions might take longer than choosing four symbols. Ask what each task involves, how long it could take and what support would help. Everyone needs a reasonable share and a voice in decisions. A person doesn't need to explain private circumstances to agree on a smaller task or another way to contribute.

Leave room for people to try something. The careful organizer might want to draw. The confident speaker might want to practice taking notes. Someone who likes technology might still need another reader to check the page. Offer choices, check the workload and switch roles when it helps. One strength or one mistake shouldn't become a permanent label.

If a commitment is missed, name the unfinished task and ask what's possible now. Agree on a new plan, and be honest about your own part. If someone keeps ignoring agreements, putting people down or pressuring others, ask the teacher for help. You aren't responsible for handling unsafe or hurtful behavior on your own.

Before a test, decide what you need to find out. Keep the question and starting conditions comparable when you compare drafts. Then let readers use the instructions in the version you're testing. Record the questions, pauses and mistakes fairly. If you coach someone through a confusing step, don't report that the step was clear. Finding a problem is useful information.

Before you call the work finished, ask the partner to use it. Something that looks complete to your group may be hard for someone else to find, print or update. Hand over the usable work, the instructions they need and any limits you know about. They get to decide whether it meets their request.

FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE

From a test to a useful handoff

Question being tested: Can a reader identify the starting direction and reach the correct room using the guide?

First draft evidence: Three volunteers tried the guide. One completed a route without a question, one made a wrong first turn, and one asked which destination door to use. These observations describe this test only.



Revision: Clarify the starting view, separate the routes, and add confirmed destination room numbers. Have the responsible adult check every changed direction.

Second draft evidence: Two different volunteers tried the revised guide: one followed the art route and the other followed the music route. Both finished without questions. This is encouraging evidence for this version, not a promise that nobody will need help.

Partner check: Ms. Alvarez can open, edit, and print the approved file. She confirms that it fits the welcome team's request.

Handoff contents: The dated editable file, a print-ready copy, brief update instructions, and a record of known limits. Keep them in the school-approved location with access managed by staff.

Remaining limit: If room numbers, hallway signs, or approved routes change, an adult must check the guide again. Students have not taken over responsibility for school navigation or supervision.

TALK IT THROUGH

Which choices made the difference?

Use these questions on your own or in a group.

1. After reaching for the trackpad, how does Eli change what he does? Look at both the meeting and the test.

2. What does the team learn by recording specific observations that “mostly worked” would leave out?

3. Why might the wrong turn be difficult for Jordan to hear about? What does he do that shows he's taking the evidence seriously?

TALK IT THROUGH

Which choices made the difference?

continued

4. Why test the new version with different volunteers? What do those results tell the group, and what can't they promise?

5. Which two details in the final scene show that Ms. Alvarez can use the work herself?

6. When Maya misses her commitment, which reply names the effect and which changes the plan? How does the group deal with the problem without judging her character?

WORKING IN THE SAME FILE

Which copy are we reading?

In a separate class assignment, Samira and Jordan were preparing an information sheet for a school exhibition. The teacher had supplied approved event details and a document in the school's existing workspace. Students could contribute during class without creating accounts or working from home.

"Your opening is gone," Jordan said.

"It's right here." Samira pointed to her screen.

His page began with the room number. Hers began with the exhibition title. Both files were called Exhibition Sheet Final. Samira had made a copy so she could try a different order. Jordan had continued editing the document the teacher shared. Neither knew that the other was working elsewhere.

"Which one did the teacher check?" he asked.

They could not answer by looking at the names.

Ms. Chen helped them identify the shared working document. The approved room and time were in that copy. Samira's opening was a suggestion that had not yet been reviewed. Together, they brought the useful wording into the working document without replacing the checked event details. Ms. Chen showed them where draft copies should remain under the class's existing file routine.

Samira added a note beside the title: "Can this be more exciting?"

Jordan looked at it. "What would you change?"

"I'm not sure." She read the first lines again. Then she replaced her comment: "The opening names the exhibition, but it doesn't say what visitors will see. Could we add 'student models and written explanations'? That comes from the teacher's event description."

Now Jordan could consider a particular change. He checked it against the supplied description before adding it.

They agreed that Samira would edit the opening while Jordan checked the event details. Then they would swap tasks. A classmate who preferred paper marked a printout during class, and they considered those suggestions too.

Before the teacher's final review, Jordan read the sheet aloud while Samira followed the screen. He reached a small calendar picture.

"The date is only in the picture," he said. "It isn't in our sentences."

They added the approved date as ordinary text. The sheet now had one more useful detail and one fewer mystery.

KEEP EVERYONE WITH THE WORK

Make the shared copy clear

Start by finding the working copy together in the school-approved place. Follow the teacher's naming and version routine. Calling a file “final” doesn't make it approved; the adult check and the agreed record do that. Everyone needs to know which copy the group is working on.

The person typing doesn't have to make every decision. One student can edit while another checks the source and a third checks that the wording makes sense. Keep everyone clear on the change, and rotate those roles. If someone can't open the file, they can discuss a displayed draft or contribute on paper. Tell the teacher about the access problem instead of treating it as a refusal to help. Staff manage who can view, comment or edit.

Leave a comment the writer can use. “This is bad” doesn't give them much to go on. “The second paragraph says ‘there,’ but I cannot tell which room it means. Could we name the room?” points to a place and explains the difficulty. Still check suggestions before following them. A confident comment can be wrong, and two useful suggestions can pull in different directions.

When you respond, say what you decided. “Added the confirmed room number” tells everyone what changed. “Kept this sentence because it explains where the display begins” explains why you left something alone. Follow the teacher's routine for finishing comments, after considering the question and making the decision clear. Hiding a disagreement won't sort it out.

Keep a short record of changes that matter: “Draft A: title and event details”; “Draft B: added the description and wrote the date in text”; “Approved copy: checked by the teacher.” You don't need every keystroke. Before handing over, point out the approved copy and who will be responsible for later information changes. The next person shouldn't need your whole conversation to work out what they can use.

CHECK HOW SOMEONE WILL USE IT

Can readers get the same information?

Correct information can still be hard to use. Red and green might look the same on a black-and-white printout. The time might be buried in a long paragraph. A picture might contain something the nearby words never explain. Ask what someone needs to find or understand, then check whether the page helps them do that.

On the exhibition sheet, the students give the event name, date, time and location clear headings. They include words alongside symbols, so readers don't have to recognize an icon to understand it. They check a printout for small or missing text. If a picture carries meaning, they ask the teacher how to include a short description in the approved format. For other formats or languages, they follow school support instead of assuming this version works for everyone.

These checks help you spot obstacles. They don't certify that every reader can use the document. Someone should be able to tell you about a difficulty without having to explain a private diagnosis or circumstance.

TRY A USEFUL COMMENT

Try this invented draft: “Come here Thursday! Follow the green line.” The time is inside a decorative image. Write a comment that points out one missing or hard-to-use piece of information and explains the problem it creates. Which adult-approved source would you need before fixing it? Don't invent a room, time, route or translation just to fill the gap.

Comment and effect

Adult-approved source to check

TRY IT WITH YOUR GROUP

Plan, test and hand over

Use an approved project or an invented classroom project if you'd like to practice. Pick one part you can test during supervised school time. A rough version is enough if it lets you check a real question.

Take five minutes to plan. Invite an idea from everyone, including anyone who prefers to write. Ask about interest and workload when choosing roles. Record each task, who accepts it and when you'll check in. Include a way to pause, pass or agree on a different contribution with your teacher.

TRY IT WITH YOUR GROUP

Plan, test and hand over

continued

Write your test question and decide which observations could answer it. Get the teacher's approval for the participants, place, time and materials. Don't collect classmates' private information. Afterwards, separate what happened from what you think caused it. Choose a change and explain which evidence led you to it.

Ask the partner to try the handoff before you finish. Can they find, open, read and use what you made? Make any needed changes. Agree on credit without requiring anyone's name or image to be public.

KEEP ONE CHANGE

Try finishing these two sentences: "Our evidence changed ____." "Next time I will help the team by ____." Make the action specific enough that you could recognize it happening.

Look back and choose what comes next



A question to keep in mind

How can you describe what you learned and use it to make another thoughtful choice?

START HERE

A finished piece of work doesn't show every decision behind it. Think of something ordinary you've learned to do, or use an invented example. What would someone miss if they only saw the result?

THE WORK BEHIND THE RESULT

The part you cannot see

The orientation guide looked simple on the table: one page, clear directions, enough space to follow the routes without losing your place.

"It doesn't look like weeks of thinking," Eli said.

"It wasn't weeks of drawing," Samira replied. "Some of it was figuring out what we were allowed to do."

Their first sketch was beside the finished copy. Maya pointed to a mark they had changed after the test. "And some of it was finding out what made sense to somebody else."

Ms. Chen had asked each student to prepare a short reflection. They could write, make an annotated drawing or explain their thinking in a conversation. Jordan had written one sentence: Our group made a guide to help new students find their way.

He read it quietly, then looked at the page again.

"That says what all of us made," he said. "I don't know what to put next."

"What did you actually do?" Maya asked.

Jordan thought about the first meeting, when he had noticed a missing corridor connection but hesitated to explain it. "I arranged the diagram," he said. "Then the test showed that its first turn looked reversed from where the reader stood."

"What changed because of that?"

He picked up the earlier sketch. The answer was easier when he could point to it. "We added a drawing of the starting view and separated the routes. I can show both versions and explain why we changed them."

Eli turned his reflection toward them. He had written: Now no one will get lost.

Samira tilted her head. "Can we really say that?"

"It sounds better than 'we made a piece of paper.'"

"There's room between those."

Eli crossed out the sentence. He began again: We made a guide that the school checked. We used feedback from a small test to improve it. We do not know yet how it will work for everyone who might use it.

"That's longer," he said.

"It explains more," Jordan said.

Ms. Chen asked what each person wanted to try next. Maya wanted to explain one of her drawings before handing it over, so she could hear which parts were unclear. Samira had enjoyed designing symbols and scenery. Next time, she wanted to show a rough idea to the person who would use it before working out every detail. Eli wanted to ask a question before offering his next solution.

Jordan looked back at his first sentence. It had not been wrong. It had only been incomplete.

He added: Next time I am unsure about a direction, I want to ask while there is still time to change the plan.

TALK IT THROUGH

Try these on your own or with a group.

1. What can Jordan explain with the earlier sketch that he couldn't show with the finished page alone?

2. What changes between Eli's first claim and his revision? Which details help you trust the new version?

3. Samira says there's "room between" two descriptions. What does she mean? Try a third description that would fit that space.

TALK IT THROUGH

continued

4. Each student chooses a different next step. How does each choice connect to something they've been practicing?

MAKE SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED

Show the thinking behind your work

Looking back can help you decide what to do next. You might explain a choice, work out why you changed something, notice a question or rethink an assumption. That's what reflection is for.



Start with a moment you can explain. “I learned teamwork” leaves people guessing. What did the group need to decide? What did you do? What happened afterwards? A short account of what actually happened gives someone a way to understand your learning.

Here's an invented example: “At first I answered for the group. During the second discussion, I wrote down the question and waited for each person to add an idea. We noticed a problem I had missed.” It shows one change worth practicing again. It doesn't prove the student will handle every discussion well.

MAKE SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED

Show the thinking behind your work

continued

Schoolwork gives you examples too. Say you asked a teacher to explain a comment. You could keep that comment with the section you revised and explain what the conversation helped you understand. A higher score may matter to you. The revision shows something a score alone can't: what you now know how to do.

Keep your claims close to your evidence. Two helpful responses tell you about those two responses, not everyone at school. Helping a few people can still be worthwhile. The project might also need more work, another version or a decision to stop. Being honest about that helps whoever makes the next choice.

Be clear about credit. Say what you made, what the group did together and who checked or supported it. If a teacher, staff member or partner supplied information, credit their role where appropriate and follow school directions about public names. Giving credit helps people understand how the work came together; it doesn't make your part smaller.

Check what you're allowed to keep. Another student's answers, photos, personal details or school records don't become yours to save just because they were in the project. Ask the teacher or advisor what you may retain and where it belongs. An invented example or short description can sometimes explain your learning while keeping other people's information private.

THREE WAYS TO LOOK BACK

What changed in their thinking?

These fictional students are describing other classroom and club situations. Someone can feel confident in one setting and make different choices in another.

Maya: “I thought a picture would explain the plan by itself. When I asked someone to follow it, I realized I had left out a step I already knew. I added a label and checked again. Next time I’ll test an early sketch before I spend a long time making it neat.”

Samira: “I kept saying, ‘Whatever everyone wants.’ That sounded cooperative, but it left out my own idea. In the next meeting I explained one choice and why I thought it would work. I could still listen to someone else’s suggestion.”

Jordan: “I finished the first part of my assignment, but I avoided the question I didn’t understand. I finally showed my teacher where I stopped. We found that I had read one instruction incorrectly. Next time I want to ask a smaller question sooner.”

THREE WAYS TO LOOK BACK

What changed in their thinking?

continued

For each example, look for the student's starting idea, what they did, what they noticed and what they might try next. Which detail would leave you confused if it were missing?

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

Keep a small collection you can explain

Choose two or three examples you're allowed to keep, from schoolwork, a club or a service project. Your teacher may suggest another way to show the same thinking.

For each example, record:

- What it is and when it was made

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

- What you were trying to learn or help with

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

- The part you contributed

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

- A decision, difficulty or change you can explain

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

A TOOL YOU CAN USE

Keep a small collection you can explain

continued

- Evidence of what happened

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

- Help or ideas you should credit

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

- What remains uncertain or unfinished

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

- Something you would try next

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

You could use a revised paragraph, an annotated diagram, an approved project plan, two versions of instructions or your own reflection notes. Choose examples you can explain. Adding more doesn't automatically make the story clearer.

TRY EXPLAINING IT

Show one change

Pick a safe example of your work that you're allowed to share. Explain it to a partner or in a teacher-supported conversation. These questions can help you prepare:

What was I trying to do?

What did I change, and why?

What evidence helps me explain the change?

What would I still like to understand?

Ask the listener for one question about the work. Their job isn't to rank your personality or decide who's "a leader." Afterwards, add one detail that would help someone who wasn't there understand your explanation.

WHEN THE TEST DOESN'T ANSWER YOUR QUESTION

When the result stays unclear

Consider this invented project at another school. A class has been asked to make short explanation cards for a supervised display of student models. The cards should help visitors connect a model's features to what the class studied. The teacher checks the content and approves a small trial during an existing school activity.

The first cards stay flat on the table. The students notice that visitors look at the models but seldom pick up a card or pause over its text. They think the print may be too small. They enlarge it and place the cards upright for a second approved trial. This time visitors are moving through the room just before the activity ends. Few pause at the cards.

"Our revision failed," one student says.

"Maybe nobody cares about the explanations," another replies.

The notes support a narrower statement: few pauses at the cards were observed during either trial. They do not show why, or whether anyone read while glancing. The group changed print size and position together, so it cannot tell which change mattered. The second trial also took place when visitors had less time. The trial provided little evidence about whether the sentences were understandable.

The teacher explains that the display must now come down. The class cannot arrange another trial before it closes. Its report says that the cards were accurate but their usefulness to visitors remains uncertain. The students give the teacher the approved text and their notes, with the limits attached. They do not describe the cards as a tested solution for the next display.

There is disappointment in that result. There is also a clearer account of the problem. "Nobody cares" turns an observation into a claim about people's motives. "We did not find out whether visitors understood the explanations" identifies a question the project left unanswered.

SAY WHAT THE TEST REALLY SHOWS

What can you learn from this attempt?

There's a difference between an attempt going wrong and a test not telling you enough. A reader following directions to the wrong place shows a problem in that attempt. If almost nobody picks up an explanation card, you may learn very little about the explanation. You still learn something about how the whole display worked in those conditions.

Separate what you hoped would happen from what you found out. Making the cards didn't prove visitors understood the models. Finding out that the test couldn't answer its question doesn't erase the work either. Explain the gap between what you wanted to know and what you actually saw.

For another display, first check whether people can find a card and tell which model goes with it. With the teacher's approval, you could then check whether the words help them understand. Those are two different questions. A good result for the first won't answer the second.

You don't have to keep revising forever. The partner may no longer need the work, time may run out or an adult may choose a different approach. Stop carefully: keep the evidence you're allowed to keep and leave an honest account of what's still unresolved.

USE IT SOMEWHERE ELSE

Take the idea into another subject

You can carry something you learned into a different setting, while checking what needs to change. That's called transfer. Imagine a student from the display project gets a history task: explain how two details in a teacher-provided account support a claim. They remember that attractive cards and accurate sentences didn't guarantee readers understood the connection.

USE IT SOMEWHERE ELSE

Take the idea into another subject

continued

For practice, imagine the assigned account describes a town meeting. A speaker proposes using an empty building for a reading room. Several speakers ask how the room would be maintained, and the meeting ends without a decision. These are invented details for this example, not a historical source.

The student's first paragraph says: "The proposal raised practical questions. Speakers asked about maintenance. The meeting ended without a decision." Each sentence may match the account, but the paragraph leaves the relationship for the reader to supply.

During a permitted peer review, the student asks, "Which detail supports my claim, and how?" The partner can find the maintenance question but wonders whether the lack of a decision proves the proposal was rejected. That response reveals a specific gap in the explanation.

The revision says: "Questions about maintenance show that speakers wanted to understand the work involved in keeping a reading room open. The meeting ended without a decision, so this account does not tell us whether the town later accepted the proposal." The student has explained one connection and limited another. The teacher still needs to check the interpretation against the full assigned source.

The useful habit carried over: check what a reader understands before calling the writing finished. But the task changed. Now the reader needs to follow reasoning in a paragraph, rather than find a card beside a model. Success means explaining how the evidence supports the claim. Counting people who pick up a page wouldn't tell you that.

TRY THE IDEA IN ANOTHER SETTING

Here's another situation to try: a school librarian asks for short student-written book descriptions for a display. With your teacher, use an invented description or a book you've read. Decide what someone should learn from it, such as the kind of story and the central situation, without giving away the ending.

TRY THE IDEA IN ANOTHER SETTING

continued

Which strategy from the model-display case could help? Which detail shouldn't you simply copy? You might keep the early reader check but ask "What would you expect this story to be about?" instead of the model question. Describe something you could observe that would make you revise, plus a limit that would remain even after a useful response. You're proposing a check here. Starting a real service project still needs approval.

Strategy and adaptation

Observation and remaining limit

CHOOSE WHAT'S NEXT

Your next step can be close to something you already do. Ask about one assignment before class ends, try a different role in a familiar club or help improve a school routine with an adult's approval. Staying with the same skill for a while is a choice too.

Before you commit, look at your schoolwork and the time you actually have. Ask what support is available. If a new school year is coming, use current school information to check classes, support and activities. You don't need to settle your whole future to make one useful choice now.

Write or say:

Something I can now explain is ...

Something I still need help with is ...

One small thing I would like to practice is ...

A person at school who can help me begin is ...

I will check how it is going when ...

A QUESTION TO TAKE WITH YOU

Return to the question at the start of this chapter. How is explaining what you learned different from showing a finished result? Use one of the fictional examples or work you're allowed to discuss.

Keep this question with you: What do I understand now that can help me make my next choice?

TOOLS TO COME BACK TO

Keep what helps you think

Copy or adapt these short tools with your teacher. You can write, draw or talk through them. Use an invented situation if you'd rather keep something private, and leave other students' personal information out of shared copies.

1. A question about schoolwork

The assignment asks me to:

I have tried:

The place where I am unsure is:

One example I can show is:

My question is:

The next step I understand after asking is:

For example: "I chose two details from the story, but I am not sure how to explain what they show. Could we look at the first detail together?"

2. A plan for a busy week

Schoolwork or other commitment:

Time I can realistically use:

A smaller version or changed commitment I can ask about:

When I will check the plan:

What needs to happen first:

School materials or support available:

Who needs to know about a change:

You can explain a time limit without sharing private family circumstances. If the week won't fit, ask for help with the plan. Squeezing everything into the same space won't make more time.

3. A request about participation

What is happening:

How it affects my understanding
or participation:

What I want to ask for or understand:

Who can help:

How I would like to communicate:

What the response was:

What remains unresolved:

Another safe route to support:

For example: "The group chooses roles before I arrive from my other school activity. Could we leave a way for me to choose a part when I get there?"

4. A service proposal

What we noticed:

The adult-approved partner and their request:

Two possible responses:

What we want to learn:

Adult checks and permissions:

How we will check usefulness:

What we still need to find out:

What is already being done:

What we suggest and why:

Student choices:

Time and materials:

What would make us pause, change or stop:

It's fine to write "We need to ask." That's more useful than filling in an answer you haven't checked.

5. An agreement for the next meeting

The next piece of work:

Help or materials needed:

What “ready to check” will look like:

The person who agrees to do it:

When we will check in:

What we will do if the plan changes:

Read the agreement back so people can correct it. Keep a small role available for someone with less time. Ask the advisor about another way to contribute when needed.

6. A test record

Our question:

What we will observe:

What we think it might mean:

A change worth trying:

The adult-approved test arrangements:

What happened, without names or private details:

Another possible explanation:

What we cannot conclude from this test:

A few responses don't speak for everyone. Record what you saw separately from what you think it means.

7. A careful handoff

What is ready to use:

Who will receive it:

What needs updating and who is responsible:

Credit that has been agreed:

Where the approved copy belongs:

How that person checked they can use it:

Known limits or unfinished questions:

What students should keep, return or remove under school directions:

A checked page and a short explanation may be all the handoff needs. Follow your advisor's directions about where files belong and who can access them.

8. A reflection with evidence

I was trying to:

An example that shows what happened:

Help or ideas I should credit:

One small next step:

One action or decision I can describe:

Something I changed or now
understand differently:

What I am still unsure about:

You can explain something that's still difficult. Looking back doesn't mean turning every experience into a success story.

MORE PLACES TO ASK WHAT WOULD HELP

Take these questions to a teacher before starting anything. Choose work that a responsible adult and the people affected agree would be useful. These are possible conversations, not instructions to begin a project on your own.

Clearer classroom materials labels

Ask the teacher: “Would clearer labels help people return shared supplies?” If yes, compare two labels that use words and simple pictures. It's a chance to practice grouping information and writing clear directions. Use only materials the teacher approves; leave restricted or hazardous supplies to adults. During a supervised activity, check whether people can return an item to the right place.

A school garden information card

Ask the staff member responsible for the garden: “Is there something visitors would like to understand about a plant already growing here?” If they request a card, use teacher-approved sources and ask the responsible adult to check the information. Connect it to a science question. Check that it's accurate and useful before displaying it. Don't label an unknown plant as safe to touch or eat, change the planting or give care instructions without staff confirmation.

A school reading recommendation display

Ask the librarian: “Would a short display of student-created book descriptions be useful?” Read the books and write your own descriptions. Check quotations and image permissions with the librarian. Keep everyone's borrowing history private. Ask a few approved readers whether the descriptions help them understand the kind of book each one is. Help people choose a book; don't rank students by their reading.

A school event information sheet

Ask the teacher organizing the event: “Which ordinary questions do families or students keep asking?” Use current, approved information to draft a clear sheet. Have the organizer check every detail. The school handles translation, other access arrangements, distribution and updates. Don't guess about accessibility, costs, transport, permissions or anyone's private circumstances.

Reading recommendations a community library has requested

Through a teacher, ask whether a public-library partner wants short, original recommendations for an existing event. Start only if the partner requests them and the school approves the arrangement. Read the books, describe them accurately and let the librarian check the format, permissions and intended readers. Adults handle contact, distribution and any public credit. You don't need to share names, photos, borrowing histories or personal accounts. Ask the partner whether the descriptions answer the request.

For any option, keep asking: Who wants this? What do they already have? What could we learn? What can we safely finish? How will we check whether it's useful?

OPTIONAL GUIDANCE FOR ADULTS

Supporting students without taking over

Who this guide is for

First Move is a practical resource for student leaders and students taking their first steps in grades 6–8. It connects schoolwork, self-advocacy and small, adult-supported contributions to school life. Students can use it in a classroom, advisory period or supervised school club. Its fictional situations invite discussion and different interpretations. The tools offer practice; they are not screening instruments, personality measures or evidence that a student is ready for independent adult responsibilities.

Choose what fits your students

Choose a chapter or tool because it fits something students need to understand or do. Offer reading support and other response formats as appropriate. A fictional situation should always be available instead of personal disclosure. Explain the support routes and how to ask privately. Don't require public performance, online accounts, purchases or attendance beyond the supervised school time already agreed.

Keep the cast's different perspectives open. Focus on decisions and evidence rather than labeling someone confident, difficult or “a natural leader.” Needing support doesn't prevent a student from contributing. Speaking easily doesn't remove the need to practice listening.

Leave students real choices

Make clear which decisions belong to students and which need an adult. Students can shape a question, choose among workable responses, choose a role, raise a concern and judge the work. Adults remain responsible for supervision, safeguarding, permissions, facilities, money, private records and outside contact. If a decision is fixed, say so; don't offer a vote whose result cannot matter.

Support a useful service

Start with a request or a need checked with the people affected. Agree on something students can genuinely learn through the work. Keep the scale realistic alongside schoolwork and available time, with room for a draft, feedback, revision and reflection. A partner can decline or ask for less. Avoid making service a demand to rescue others, collect personal stories or publicly prove kindness.

The orientation guide is fictional. For any real activity, staff must verify routes, access information, displays, event details and testing arrangements using official school information and procedures. Stop an activity if it becomes unsafe. Students should not test emergency procedures or take over supervision.

Respond to concerns

Treat ordinary disagreement about work differently from bullying, discrimination, sexual comments, threats or harm. Students should not investigate or mediate serious concerns. Follow the school's safeguarding and reporting procedures. Make another adult route available when the first contact is absent, involved or unhelpful. This guide does not replace professional judgment, school policy or required support arrangements.

If you use the guide for assessed classwork

Assess the learning you actually supported: perhaps a clearer question, a request backed by an example, a revision responding to feedback, an honest account of a small test or reflection that gives credit. Explain criteria beforehand. Keep academic quality separate from personality, confidence, public visibility or family resources. Don't grade private disclosure, club membership counts or the size of a service project.

Possible discussion questions for adults

- Where did students have a real choice, and where did we need to explain a limit?

- Who had enough time and a workable way to participate?

- Did the project respond to the partner's request?

- What did students learn through the work that they can explain with evidence?

- What did our own instructions or arrangements need to change?

OPTIONAL SESSION IDEAS FOR ADULTS

Help students try the decisions for themselves

These optional sequences offer ways to use the situations and examples with a class or group. Students don't need to join a club or complete a service project to take part. The times are planning estimates. Choose, shorten or split sessions to suit reading support, your students and the timetable. One thoughtful discussion may be more useful than completing every tool.

Set up a useful conversation

Choose a piece of thinking to practice. “Tell an observation from an explanation” gives students something clearer to try than “be a better teammate.” Pick a short passage that shows the decision. Plan how to demonstrate it and give students a chance to try for themselves afterward.

Explain response choices and privacy boundaries before asking. Students might annotate an example, talk you through their reasoning, write or combine drawing with explanation. Keep the same thinking in each option: a drawing about a change still needs to explain why it makes sense. Offer an invented case to everyone so no one has to ask publicly for a less personal option.

Check materials as students will use them. Will directions stay available? Are headings easy to distinguish from body text? Is the meaning of an important image available another way? Arrange additional support through school processes. Students can point out a confusing feature without having to establish or disclose a diagnosis.

Conversations about taking part

Session option 1: What do we know, and what are we guessing?

Allow roughly 35–45 minutes. Begin with the first part of “The question on the blue paper,” stopping before Jordan sits down. Ask students to mark one observable action and one possible explanation. Model the distinction using Maya reading the poster twice: that action appears in the text; “she dislikes clubs” does not. Have students read the rest, reconsider an interpretation and identify the new detail that influenced them.

Use the two perspectives on joining in to ask how a group could make room for both speakers. “The instructions behind the invitation” gives students a second setting in which to test their idea. Ask for one practical change and one way to find out whether it helps. Collect a short response that includes an observation, an interpretation and a reason. Use it to plan the next discussion; do not treat the interpretation as a reading of a student's personality.

Session option 2: What needs to change in the draft?

Allow roughly 35–45 minutes. Read the science-feedback passage in Chapter 2. Put the teacher's comment beside Maya's explanation aloud. Ask students to locate the comparison that was missing from the written conclusion. Then use the additional reading “What can this source actually tell us”. Give students time to attempt a revision before showing the worked reasoning.

Have pairs compare two possible revisions against the task and available evidence. A longer answer is not automatically a stronger one. Ask what the revision adds, what supports it and what remains uncertain. End with an independent explanation of one change. Students may use the provided case; they do not need to display graded personal work. If several students repeat the same unsupported claim, return to the source material rather than giving only a general reminder to be careful.

Session option 3: What helps a conversation move forward?

Allow roughly 30–40 minutes. Use “Before the vote” to distinguish Samira's request for a fair hearing from her preference for the wheel. Then read “The sentence that needed replacing”. Ask students to identify the exact action that needs addressing, the response to it and the agreement about what happens next.

Offer a choice between discussing written dialogue, annotating it or rehearsing a brief invented exchange. An observer can identify useful wording without performing. Do not assign students to portray real incidents or replay hurtful language. End by asking what a repaired process would look like at the next meeting. A statement of regret is evidence of a response; following the agreement would provide different evidence. Neither requires the other student to announce immediate forgiveness.

Service decisions using fictional examples

Session option 1: Which request are we answering?

Use roughly 35–45 minutes for the partner conversation in Chapter 4 and “Leave room for an unexpected answer”. Have students separate what was noticed, what someone assumed and what the partner requested. Ask them to compare two responses using the actual request, available time and learning goal. Include a response that sounds appealing but does not fit. Students should be able to explain why postponing it may be sensible.

Before a group proposes a real project, check the request and permissions yourself. A completed proposal sheet is evidence of planning, not evidence that the school or partner has agreed. If real contact is not appropriate, continue with the fictional materials. The academic work of reading, comparing and justifying a choice is still available.

Session option 2: What does the evidence support?

Use roughly 35–45 minutes for the guide's first and second tests. Let students reconstruct what each test established before discussing improvement. Ask what an observer could record and what would be an inference. Then use “Which copy are we reading” to consider whether a partner could locate and use the intended version of a file.

The lesson can run with printed draft pages and written comments. If you use a digital platform, prepare the school-approved access and practice copy before class. Demonstrate comments and version information with invented content. A student who cannot access the screen should still be able to contribute to the reasoning and the revision. Do not make personal-device access or speed with software a proxy for understanding.

Session option 3: What could we use in another task?

Use roughly 30–40 minutes for Chapter 6's reflections and “When the result stays unclear”. Ask students to identify a useful action, the evidence available and a limit. Then change the setting: a direction sheet, a paragraph explaining a result, or a club discussion. Which part of the approach could carry over? Which part would need to change?

Ask for a small proposed next attempt, not a promise about permanent personal improvement. A student might choose to show an early draft to a reader or check the meaning of one direction. Revisit the attempt when the timetable allows. Record what happened, including a need to revise the plan or seek adult support. A project that pauses can still provide evidence of careful judgment.

Examples of useful responses and feedback

These are possible responses, not answers students must reproduce. Another interpretation can work when it is supported by the details.

Chapter 1: Jordan's backpack

A weak claim would be, "Jordan is shy, so he keeps his backpack on." The text does not establish that as a fixed trait. A more careful response is, "Jordan stands beside the empty chair with his backpack on. He may be unsure whether he is joining the activity. Later he offers to write the questions and sits down, which supports that interpretation. He could also have been waiting to find out where to sit." Useful feedback asks the student to explain the change in action and acknowledge another plausible reading.

Chapter 3: Samira's request

"Samira lost because the comic won" confuses the choice of design with the process she requested. A stronger response explains that the group sketched the proposals and asked questions before voting. Samira still preferred the wheel, but the group understood it better and she chose a design role afterward. Ask students which part of her request was met and which preference was not. Do not require them to claim she ought to feel pleased about the result.

Chapter 5: The two tests

“The new guide works for everyone” exceeds the evidence. A supported account says that two different volunteers used the revised version, one on each route, and both finished without questions. The first test identified specific difficulties; the second gives encouraging information about the revised guide. Several features changed, so the test does not identify one change as the sole cause. It also does not establish how every future visitor will use the guide. Useful feedback asks the writer to retain the encouraging result while narrowing the conclusion.

Feedback that gives students something to try

If the work is assessed, choose a small set of criteria connected to what students have practiced and explain them in advance. For an explanation, look for relevant evidence and a clear connection to the claim. For a request, look for a barrier and a change someone can understand. For a service proposal, check that it answers a verified request and identifies decisions still needing approval.

Distinguish an unsupported answer from a partly supported answer and an explanation that connects evidence with a reasonable conclusion. Show those differences with short samples. “You included the two test outcomes; now explain what they do and do not tell the team” gives a student something more useful to attempt than “add detail.” After revision, ask the student to identify the specific change and what prompted it.

Keep academic judgment separate from accent, eye contact, confidence, willingness to perform or access to materials outside school. Do not award extra credit merely for a more public project, more service hours or more personal disclosure. Give students a way to demonstrate the same reasoning through school-supported materials and permitted response formats. Follow existing learning and support arrangements when deciding how work will be assessed.

Check the arrangements you provided

After a lesson, review whose ideas appeared in the discussion and whose work you have not yet had a chance to understand. An absence of spoken comments does not tell you that a student had no ideas. Look at written responses or offer a private opportunity to explain. Note whether your directions, timing or material format created an avoidable barrier. Choose one change to try in the next lesson and observe what happens.

SOURCES BEHIND THE GUIDE

These primary organizational sources informed the guide's broad principles. The stories, dialogue, tools and projects are original. They are not reports of real cases or evaluated interventions, and none of these organizations has endorsed First Move. Use current school arrangements and policies for actual activities.

Association for Middle Level Education. Young Adolescent Development.

<https://www.amle.org/young-adolescent-development/>

Editorial use: a specifically middle-grades audience, appropriately challenging learning and supportive school relationships. No neurological or developmental-outcome claims are made in the student text.

Wall, Amanda; Massey, Dixie; and Vaughn, Margaret. Student Agency. Association for Middle Level Education research summary.

<https://www.amle.org/student-agency/>

Editorial use: meaningful student choices, varied ways to participate, and adult-created conditions that support those choices. The manuscript does not treat agency as a fixed personality trait.

National Youth Leadership Council. Service-Learning K–12 Standards.

<https://nylc.org/k-12-standards/>

Editorial use: service connected to learning, attention to the people affected, student voice with adult guidance, reflection and checking progress. The fictional project illustrates these principles without claiming program effectiveness.

Sources reviewed for this revision on 3 October 2026. Web pages and school policies can change.

SOURCES FOR THE ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

These sources informed the additional guidance and examples. The new scenes, information packets, numbers, dialogue and worked examples are original fictional practice materials, not reports from actual schools. Each packet makes clear what its invented evidence can and cannot support. None of the organizations listed has endorsed First Move.

SOURCES FOR THE ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES

continued

CAST. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0.

<https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

Editorial use: offer workable ways to encounter information, take part and explain learning; examine barriers in the arrangement rather than label students. Classroom examples illustrate choices to discuss with a teacher. They do not establish universal access or replace individual support arrangements.

Digital Inquiry Group. Civic Online Reasoning classroom resources.

<https://cor.inquirygroup.org/curriculum/collections/cor-classroom-posters/>

Editorial use: investigate the source of a claim and seek relevant supporting evidence. The invented reading-room packet develops these ideas through a full notice, a cropped message and a limited discussion record. It does not reproduce the organization's lessons or examples.

World Wide Web Consortium, Web Accessibility Initiative. Writing for Web Accessibility.

<https://www.w3.org/WAI/tips/writing/>

Editorial use: clear headings and instructions, meaningful wording, and descriptions of information carried by images. The exhibition-sheet activity introduces practical information checks with teacher support. It makes no claim of technical accessibility compliance.

StopBullying.gov. Support the Children Involved.

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/support-the-children-involved>

Editorial use: distinguish practice with an ordinary disagreement from concerns requiring adult response. The manuscript does not ask students to diagnose bullying, investigate harm or mediate threatening or targeted behavior.

The AMLE and NYLC sources listed above also informed this expansion. The additional sources and the existing organizational references were checked on 4 October 2026. Follow current school policies and adult guidance for real activities.