

Civics and Citizenship Level 10

Chapter 5 — Skills: participating and communicating

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How well does democratic decision-making work?

Content description VC2HC10S06.

This section draws on elaborations VC2HC10S06.E01 and VC2HC10S06.E02.

Theory

What is democratic decision-making? Democratic decision-making is how a community makes the choices everyone in it must live with, in a way that gives the people affected a say. In Australia most binding choices are made by elected parliaments (Section 1B showed how policy becomes law). Some choices are made by all voters at once — a **referendum**, the vote used to change the Australian Constitution (Section 1A). And choices that cross borders are made when national governments agree on rules together, written down in a **treaty** — a formal agreement between countries (Section 1D looked at Australia’s regional and global roles).

Evaluating effectiveness — defining the term first. The Victorian Curriculum uses the words *effective* and *effectiveness* here but does not define them, so this section treats a decision-making process as effective when it does well against the seven questions in the checklist below, and every task in this section is answerable on those seven questions alone. Effective is a **contested** term: different people weigh the questions differently, and two careful people can reach opposite verdicts. That is why every evaluation must state its **frame** — which questions you weigh most — before it judges.

Is a decision-making process effective? Seven questions to judge it by

1 Accepted

Do people accept the decision as fairly made, even those who disagree with the result?

2 Inclusive

Did everyone affected get a chance to have a say?

3 Informed

Were the facts and the different views available, so the decision rested on good information?

4 Decisive

Could a decision actually be reached when one was needed?

5 Workable

Can it be put into practice, with the powers, money and people to make it happen?

6 Accountable

Can voters replace the decision-makers, or have the decision looked at again?

7 Protects minorities

Does it stop a majority from overriding the rights of a smaller group?

The criteria can pull against each other

More agreement usually means a wider-accepted decision, but a slower one. State which criteria you weigh most (your frame) before you judge a process.

Effective is a contested term: people weigh these questions differently. Every evaluation in this section is answerable on these seven questions alone.

Seven questions for judging a decision-making process: accepted, inclusive, informed, decisive, workable, accountable, and protects minorities, each with a one-line explanation.

Who decides: the scales of decision-making (E01). Decisions usually sit at the smallest scale that can handle them. A class sets its own rules; a council decides for its area; a parliament decides for its state or the whole country. Two kinds of question force a bigger scale: the rules everyone must live under (the Constitution — only all voters can change it), and problems that cross borders (one country alone cannot fix them). The table below shows the ladder of scales and whose agreement each one needs.

Scales of decision-making: who decides, and whose agreement is needed

Scale	Who decides	Whose agreement is needed	Example
Classroom	Students and teacher set the rules together	Everyone in the class follows the rules they helped make	A class agrees on its rules for group work
School	School leaders, with input from students and families	The school community accepts the decision	The school changes its lunchtime arrangements
Local council	Councillors elected by local residents	The residents of that area chose them	A council builds a new skate park
Victorian Parliament	Members elected by Victorian voters	Victorian voters chose them	Parliament changes the state's road rules
Australian Parliament	Members of both houses, elected across Australia	Voters in every state and territory chose them	Parliament passes a law on immigration
All voters	Every enrolled voter in Australia, at a referendum	A national majority of voters, and a majority of states	A referendum to change the Constitution
Countries together	National governments, including Australia's	The governments of the countries that sign up	The Paris Agreement on climate change

Decisions are usually made at the smallest scale that can handle them. Some questions need a bigger scale: the rules everyone must live under, and problems that cross borders.

A table of the scales of decision-making, from the classroom to countries together, showing who decides and whose agreement is needed at each scale.

How much agreement is needed? (E01) The bigger the scale, the more agreement a decision usually needs.

Consensus-building is the work of reaching wide agreement: debating, listening, and changing a proposal so more people can accept it. Different decision rules ask for different amounts of agreement, and each rule trades speed against acceptance.

How much agreement is needed? Five decision rules

1 One person decides

A leader decides alone, such as a captain picking the team. Fast, but nobody else has a say.

2 Simple majority

More than half of those voting. Used in parliaments and class votes. Quick, and every vote counts equally; the losing half may disagree with the result.

3 Special majority

More than a set share must agree, such as two-thirds of the members. Forces support from across the group, not just one side.

4 Double majority

Two majorities at once: most voters overall AND most voters in most states. This is the rule for Australian referendums.

5 All agree (consensus)

Everyone must accept the decision, such as friends agreeing on a day out. The widest acceptance, but the hardest to reach.

Quicker, fewer need to agree

Slower, wider acceptance

Consensus-building is the work of reaching wide agreement: debating, listening, and changing a proposal so more people can accept it.

Five decision rules in order of how much agreement they need, from one person deciding to everyone agreeing, with the trade-off between speed and wide acceptance.

The referendum: decision-making at the biggest national scale (E01). Section 128 of the Constitution says only a referendum can change the Constitution, so on this question the people — not parliament alone — are the final

decision-makers. The machinery, taught in full in Section 1A, is summarised below. It demands two majorities at once: a **double majority**.

Changing the Constitution: the referendum machinery (section 128)

1 Parliament agrees to the proposal

A bill to change the Constitution must pass both houses of the Australian Parliament. If the Senate rejects it twice, with a three-month gap, it can still be put to the people.

2 The AEC runs the vote

The Australian Electoral Commission runs the referendum. Every enrolled voter in every state and territory votes yes or no.

3 The double majority test — BOTH tallies must be won

Tally 1 — a national majority

More than half of all formal votes across Australia. Territory voters count in this tally.

Tally 2 — a majority of states

More than half of the votes in at least 4 of the 6 states. Territories are not states, so they do not count here.

Carried

Both requirements met: the Constitution changes.

Not carried

Either requirement missed: nothing changes.

Section 128 means the people, not parliament alone, are the final decision-makers on the Constitution. Section 1A teaches this machinery in full.

Flowchart of how the Constitution is changed under section 128: Parliament agrees to the proposal, the AEC runs the vote, then a double majority test with a national tally and a states tally, leading to carried or not carried.

The double majority makes agreement wide — and makes change rare. Since Federation, 45 proposed changes have been put to voters at 20 national referendums, and only 8 have carried: fewer than one in five.

Case study: the 1999 referendum. On 6 November 1999 Australians voted on two questions: whether to become a republic, and whether to add a preamble (an opening statement of values) to the Constitution. Neither carried.

The 1999 referendum: two questions, 6 November 1999

Question	National yes vote	States with a yes majority	Result
Establish Australia as a republic, with a president appointed by a two-thirds vote of the federal Parliament	45.1 per cent	0 of 6	Not carried
Add a preamble (an opening statement of values) to the Constitution	39.3 per cent	0 of 6	Not carried

What the result shows

Neither question won a national majority, and neither won a majority in any state, so the Constitution stayed as it was. The result was accepted and the rules were not disputed: a decision can be effective in holding the community together even when one side is disappointed.

Prepared by ClassBasics from the Australian Electoral Commission referendum results, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Table of the two questions at the 1999 referendum, with the national yes vote, the states with a yes majority, and the result: both questions not carried.

Case study: the 1977 referendum. The double majority means a national majority alone is not enough. In 1977 a proposal that House and Senate elections always be held on the same day won 62.2 per cent of votes across Australia — a clear national majority — but won a majority of voters in only three states, so it failed. Three other proposals on the same day carried in all six states.

The 1977 referendum: a national majority is not always enough (21 May 1977)

Proposal	National yes vote	States with a yes majority	Result
House and Senate elections to always be held on the same day	62.2 per cent	3 of 6	Not carried
Replacement senators to come from the same party as the senator being replaced	73.3 per cent	6 of 6	Carried
Territory voters to be counted in referendums	77.7 per cent	6 of 6	Carried
Parliament to set a retirement age for federal judges	80.1 per cent	6 of 6	Carried

The double majority at work

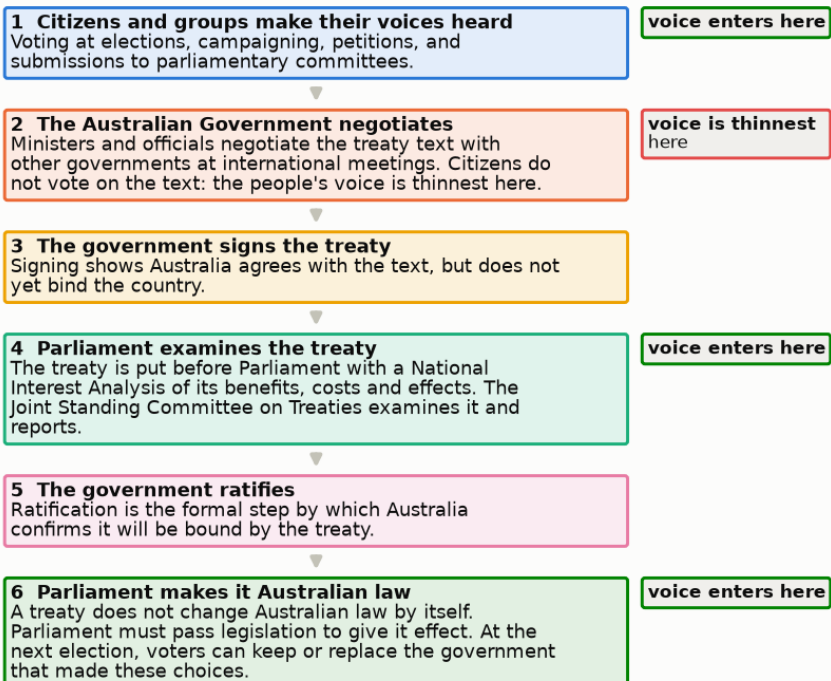
The same-day-elections proposal won a clear national majority, but it won a majority of voters in only three states, so it failed. Smaller states must agree too: that is the point of the double majority. The other three proposals carried in all six states.

Prepared by ClassBasics from the Australian Electoral Commission referendum results, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Table of the four proposals at the 1977 referendum, showing that the same-day-elections proposal won 62.2 per cent nationally but failed because it won a majority of voters in only three states.

Global issues and democratic decision-making (E02). There is no world parliament and no world government, so global issues cannot be decided by one global vote. They are decided when national governments agree on rules together. The diagram below traces how a treaty's rules reach Australian law, and where the people's voice enters that chain. The ways citizens take part — voting, campaigning, petitions, letters — are the subject of Section 5B.

Democratic decision-making about a global issue: how a treaty reaches Australian law



There is no world parliament

Global rules reach Australia only through its own democratic processes: an elected parliament examines the treaty, and an elected parliament must pass any law that gives the treaty effect at home.

Flowchart of how a treaty reaches Australian law: citizens and groups, negotiation by the government, signing, examination by Parliament, ratification, and legislation, with markers showing where the people's voice enters.

Case study: the Paris Agreement. The clearest recent example of democratic decision-making about a global issue is the climate chain below: a global deal, examined and given effect through Australia's own democratic processes.

Australia and the Paris Agreement: from global deal to Australian law



Prepared by ClassBasics from the United Nations treaty records, the Parliament of Australia committee records and the Federal Register of Legislation, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Timeline of Australia and the Paris Agreement from December 2015 to September 2022, from the deal being adopted to the Climate Change Act 2022 receiving Royal Assent.

The chain shows real potential: nearly 200 countries, large and small, agreed the deal; each country sets and updates its own target; Australians got a say through the parliament that examined the treaty and passed the *Climate Change Act 2022*, and they can replace that parliament at the next election. It also shows the limit: no world body can force any country to meet its target, so progress depends on each country's own politics, which makes global decision-making slow and its results weaker than many would like.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded (E01)

Evaluate the effectiveness of the referendum process as the way Australia decided whether to become a republic, using the 1999 referendum and the seven-question checklist.

Working	Comment
Frame. I weigh <i>accepted</i> , <i>inclusive</i> and <i>decisive</i> most.	A frame must be stated before judging: different weights can give a different verdict.
Inclusive. Every enrolled voter in every state and territory could vote, and both sides' arguments were posted to every household.	A direct national vote is as inclusive as decision-making gets.
Accepted. The rules were set in advance by section 128, and the result — both questions not carried — was accepted without dispute; the Constitution stayed as it was.	A process can hold a community together even when one side loses.
Decisive. The double majority sets the bar high: only 8 of 45 proposals since Federation have carried, so the process rarely changes the Constitution.	Wide acceptance is bought at the price of low decisiveness.
Verdict. The referendum process is effective at making sure only widely supported changes pass, but weak at letting change happen when a simple majority wants it.	The verdict follows from the frame: weighing acceptance over speed gives this verdict.

Example 2 — unscaffolded (E02)

Evaluate what potential there is for democratic decision-making on climate change through the Paris Agreement chain. Apply two checklist questions and state your frame.

Model response. I weigh *inclusive*, *accountable* and *workable* most. On inclusion, the chain has real potential among nations: nearly 200 countries, large and small, agreed the deal, and each sets and updates its own target. On accountability, it works through Australian democracy: the treaty was put before Parliament with a National Interest Analysis, examined by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, and the 2030 target only became Australian law when Parliament passed the *Climate Change Act 2022*; voters can replace the government at the next election. On workability, the chain is weaker at the global scale: no world body can force a country to meet its target, and progress depends on each country's own politics, so it is slow. On balance, democratic decision-making about climate change is real but limited — it works through national democracies choosing to act together, not through one global vote. A different frame, weighing *decisive* most, would judge the same chain more harshly, which is why the frame must be stated.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

- Q1.** Define, in your own words, (a) democratic decision-making and (b) consensus-building.
- Q2.** List the seven questions this section uses to judge a decision-making process.
- Q3.** What is a double majority? State the two majorities an Australian referendum must win.
- Q4.** Put these scales of decision-making in order from smallest to largest: Australian Parliament; classroom; international agreement between countries; local council; national referendum; school; Victorian Parliament.
- Q5.** Name (a) the body that runs a federal referendum, and (b) the parliamentary committee that examines treaties before Australia joins them.
- Q6.** State two dates from the Paris Agreement chain: when Australia ratified the Agreement, and when the *Climate Change Act 2022* received Royal Assent.

Unscaffolded

- Q7.** Explain how requiring more agreement — for example a special majority instead of a simple majority — can both strengthen and weaken a decision-making process. (3 marks)
- Q8.** Using the 1977 same-day-elections proposal, explain why a national majority alone is not enough to change the Australian Constitution. (3 marks)
- Q9.** “A referendum gives ordinary voters the final say.” Evaluate one strength and one limit of giving decisions directly to voters. (4 marks)
- Q10.** Evaluate what potential there is for democratic decision-making on climate change. Apply two questions from the checklist and state your frame. (5 marks)
-

Source-based inquiry

Use **Source 1** (below) to answer the questions. Both views are real arguments in Australian public debate, presented in their strongest form. You are not asked which side you support; you are asked how well each view stands up against the seven questions.

Source 1 — Two views on who should decide global issues

Two citizens speaking at a public forum on how decisions about climate change should be made.

View A — decide together, globally

Climate change does not respect borders, so the answer must cross borders too. The United Nations gives every country, large and small, one voice, and nearly 200 countries agreed to the Paris Agreement. A deal made by almost the whole world carries more weight than any one country acting alone, and it lets countries hold each other to their promises.

View B — decide at home, through elected parliaments

There is no world government and no world election. Decisions that bind Australians should be made by the parliament Australians elect. Treaties are already examined by a parliamentary committee before Australia joins them, and if voters disagree with a government's choices they can replace it at the next election.

How to use this source

Both views are real arguments in Australian public debate, presented here in their strongest form. You are not asked which side you support; you are asked how well each view stands up against the seven criteria in Figure 5A-3.

Prepared by ClassBasics for this section; the two views summarise positions held in Australian public debate, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Source 1, two views on who should decide global issues: View A says countries should decide together through the United Nations, and View B says decisions that bind Australians should be made by the Parliament Australians elect.

S1. (a) State, in one sentence each, what View A and View B say about who should decide about climate change. (2 marks) (b) Identify one assumption behind each view. (2 marks) (c) Name the one checklist question each view weighs most. (2 marks) (d) Write the strongest reply View B could make to View A's claim that "a deal made by almost the whole world carries more weight". (2 marks) (e) Give your own judgement on where decisions about climate change should be made, stating which questions you weigh most. Then compare your verdict with a classmate's and note one point your judgement changed on, or one point that held. (2 marks)

(Section 5C builds on part (e): you will deliberate a resolution to a global crisis after hearing your classmates' views.)

Answers

Q1. (a) The ways a community makes the choices everyone in it must live with, in a way that gives the people affected a say. (b) The work of reaching wide agreement: debating, listening, and changing a proposal so more people can accept it. **Q2.** Accepted; inclusive; informed; decisive; workable; accountable; protects minorities. **Q3.** A decision rule that needs two majorities at once: more than half of all formal votes across Australia (territory votes count here), and more than half of the votes in at least 4 of the 6 states. **Q4.** Classroom; school; local council; Victorian Parliament; Australian Parliament; national referendum; international agreement. **Q5.** (a) The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). (b) The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. **Q6.** Ratified 10 November 2016; Royal Assent 27 September 2022. **Q7.** See solutions. **Q8.** See solutions. **Q9.** See solutions. **Q10.** See solutions. **S1.** See solutions.

Fully-worked solutions

Q7. It strengthens because wider agreement means more people accept the result and a smaller group is harder to override. It weakens because the more people who must agree, the slower and harder it is to decide, so a needed change can be blocked by the minority who disagree. (3 marks: strengthening point + weakening point + link to acceptance versus speed.)

Q8. Section 128 requires a double majority: a national majority and a majority of voters in at least 4 of the 6 states. The same-day proposal won 62.2 per cent of votes across Australia but a majority in only 3 states, so it failed even with a clear national majority. The rule protects smaller states: their voters must agree too. (3 marks: double majority explained + 1977 facts applied + reason for the rule.)

Q9. Strength: a referendum is inclusive and accepted — every enrolled voter has one equal vote, and the double majority means a carried change rests on wide support. Limit: it is weak on being decisive and informed — a single yes/no question cannot capture detail or compromise, complex issues can be simplified in campaigns, and the high bar means most proposals fail (only 8 of 45 carried since Federation). (4 marks: strength + limit + checklist language + evidence.)

Q10. *Model answer.* Frame: I weigh *accountable* and *decisive* most. On *accountable*, the potential is strong: the treaty was examined by a parliamentary committee, the target became Australian law only through the *Climate Change Act 2022*, and voters can replace the government at the next election. On *decisive*, the potential is weak: no world body can force a country to meet its target, and each country's own politics can stall progress, so the chain is slow. On balance, democratic decision-making about climate change is real but limited: it runs through national democracies choosing to act together. A frame weighing *inclusive* most would judge the chain more favourably. (5 marks: frame + two criteria applied with evidence + balanced verdict + limit acknowledged.)

S1. (a) View A says decisions about climate change should be made by countries together through the United Nations; View B says decisions that bind Australians should be made by the parliament Australians elect. (b) View A assumes global problems need global rules, and that countries will hold each other to their promises. View B assumes parliamentary scrutiny and elections are enough to keep governments answerable, and that national action can matter even when a problem is global. (c) View A weighs *workable* (a problem that crosses borders needs rules that cross borders); View B weighs *accountable* (decision-makers must be replaceable by the people they bind). (d) Strongest reply from B: a world deal only carries weight if each country keeps it, and countries keep deals best when their own voters chose the government that signed — so the deal's real weight comes from national democracies, not from the meeting itself. (e) Any reasoned judgement that states a frame; the note on the classmate comparison should name a specific point changed or held. (2 marks each part.)

Curriculum focus

This section is written to Victorian Curriculum 2.0 Civics and Citizenship, Levels 9 and 10, content description **VC2HC10S07** (Skills strand, Participating in civic processes).

It draws on six elaborations:

- **VC2HC10S07.E01**
- **VC2HC10S07.E02**
- **VC2HC10S07.E03**
- **VC2HC10S07.E04**
- **VC2HC10S07.E05**
- **VC2HC10S07.E06**

This is the **doing section** of the book. The curriculum asks you both to *participate* and to *evaluate*. That means one of the tasks below is not a page of questions: it is a participation artefact you actually produce — a campaign, a letter or a petition — and an evaluation of how well your chosen method works. This section also connects to the Level 10 achievement standard, which asks students to judge how well civic participation methods work — including by taking part in them. Content links: the policy-shaping processes of Section 1B, Australia’s regional and global roles and treaty commitments in Section 1D, international law in Section 2C, and global citizenship in Section 3A.

Teaching sequence

1. What civic participation is

In Levels 7 and 8 you met the main ways citizens take part in democracy — voting, contacting members, joining groups and making your views known. This section picks those ideas up again and does two harder things with them: it asks you to **participate for real**, and it asks you to **judge how well participation works**.

The Victorian Curriculum uses the term *civic participation* but does not define it. This section therefore treats it as **the ways people take part in the public life of their community — from their school to the world — to influence decisions, laws and outcomes that affect them and others**. Every question in this section can be answered on that definition alone. If you meet a different definition in another source, note it and compare: different definitions can change what counts as “participation” (for example, whether posting online counts).

Notice what sort of term *effective* is. It is not a measurable term like distance. It is a **contested** term: people disagree about what makes participation work, and the standard you choose can change the conclusion you reach. So this section does something that honest civic reasoning always does: it **states a frame** before it judges anything (Part 4).

The content description carries two verbs. **Participate** means actually taking part — not just reading about people who do. **Evaluate** means weighing methods and strategies against stated standards and reaching a judgement you can defend. Both verbs matter in this section.

2. Methods and strategies, from local to global

A **method** of civic participation is a particular way of taking part (a petition, a letter, a campaign, a strike). A **strategy** is a plan that combines methods over time to reach a goal. Australian citizens use many methods. The table below lists the main ones, how each works, and a real, dated Australian example of each.

Methods of civic participation in Australia

Method	How it works	Real Australian example
Vote	Choose who holds power at elections.	The federal voting age is 18; it was lowered from 21 in 1973.
Contact a member or minister	Write with your views; the office must record the letter.	Members' offices record and answer constituent letters.
Petition	Many people ask a parliament to act on one matter.	The House of Representatives has run an e-petition website since 2016; any resident can start one.
Submission to an inquiry	Written evidence and requests to a parliamentary committee.	The Parliament of Victoria invites written submissions from anyone.
Campaign	A planned effort to change minds or policy.	ICAN, the campaign to ban nuclear weapons, was launched in Melbourne in April 2007.
Lawful peaceful assembly	Public marches and rallies show numbers and depth of feeling.	School climate strikes, 2018-19: about 300,000 participated in Australia on 20 September 2019.
Volunteering	Give time through an organised body.	Clean Up Australia Day, first Sunday of March since 1990; Red Cross bushfire appeals in 2019-20.
Consumer choice	Buy - or refuse to buy - to shift markets.	Rooftop solar: more than 4.29 million systems installed by December 2025.
School voice	Elections, motions and decisions inside the school.	Student representative councils and school captains.

Every method has rules. Check the requirements of the institution you are addressing before you act.

Table of methods of civic participation, with how each method works and a real, dated Australian example for each.

Sources: House of Representatives e-petition requirements from the Parliament of Australia petitions website, archived 21 September 2016 (web.archive.org), retrieved 26 August 2026; Clean Up Australia history from Clean Up Australia Limited records as reported in public registers, retrieved 26 August 2026; school climate strike figures as reported by organisers and the media in 2019, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Participation also runs at different **scales**, and each scale has its own decision-makers. A method works best when it is aimed at the decision-maker who actually has the power to act on your issue.

The scales of civic participation: aim at the power

5 • Global issues

Example issues: climate agreements, human rights, treaties.

Power: international bodies and treaties, such as the United Nations.

4 • National issues

Example issues: immigration, federal environment law, defence.

Power: the Australian Parliament and the Australian Government, Canberra.

3 • State issues

Example issues: public transport, state schools law, hospitals.

Power: the Victorian Parliament.

2 • Local issues

Example issues: litter, parks, local roads, waste collection.

Power: your local council.

1 • School issues

Example issues: canteen packaging, uniform rules, school events.

Power: the principal, the school council, the student representative council.

One issue can sit at several scales at once. Find the scale where the power over your issue sits, and aim your method there.

Ladder diagram of the five scales of civic participation, from school and local issues up to global crises, with the decision-maker at each scale.

The ladder reads both ways. A local clean-up is participation at the school-and-local scale; a campaign asking the Australian Government to sign a treaty is participation at the global scale. One issue can sit at several scales at once: litter is a school issue, a council issue and a global sustainability issue. Part of planning participation is working out **which scale holds the power** over the part of the problem you want to change.

3. Ways people under 18 can participate (E01)

You cannot vote in a federal election until you are 18. The Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 sets the federal voting age at 18; it was lowered from 21 in 1973. That does not mean people under 18 wait in silence. Under-18s have many real, lawful pathways into civic life, and Australians under 18 have used all of them.

Pathways open to people under 18 in Australia

You cannot vote in a federal election until you are 18 (Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918). That does not mean waiting in silence - these pathways are all real and all lawful.

Petition

Any resident can start one - there is no minimum age. The House's e-petition website has run since 2016; one signature starts it.

Inquiry submission

Parliamentary committees invite written evidence and requests. Anyone can write one, and people under 18 do.

School voice

Student representative councils, school captains and assemblies: elections, motions, votes and minutes.

Volunteering

Clean Up Australia Day, first Sunday of March since 1990; bushfire appeals and clean-ups in 2019-20.

Campaigns and media

Awareness campaigns, fundraising through trusted charities, and posts that put an issue on the public agenda.

Peaceful assembly

Marches and rallies. Rules about attendance and safety still apply - weighing the two is itself a civic skill.

A live debate: the voting age itself

On 21 October 2019 a bill was introduced in the House of Representatives to lower the federal voting age from 18 to 16. It did not become law. Arguing about the rules of participation is itself civic participation.

Diagram of pathways of civic participation open to people under 18 in Australia, from school voice to petitions, submissions, volunteering, campaigns and peaceful assembly.

- **Petitions.** Any resident of Australia can create a House of Representatives petition — there is no minimum age. The House has run an e-petition website since 2016. The Petitions Committee checks that each petition is addressed to the Speaker and Members, is about a matter the House has power to act on, uses moderate language and is in English; it needs only one signature to start (the creator is the first signer), and it is then presented to the House. The committee can refer it to the responsible minister. The Victorian Parliament also accepts petitions, online and on paper.
- **Submissions to parliamentary inquiries.** Committees of the Victorian and Australian parliaments invite written submissions when they inquire into issues. Anyone can write one, and under-18s do. A submission is your evidence and your request, in writing, to the people with the power to recommend change.
- **School voice.** Student representative councils, school captains and student assemblies are democratic institutions in their own right: elections, motions, votes and minutes. They are often the first place a person practises the skills this section is about.
- **Volunteering.** Under-18s can join events like Clean Up Australia Day, held on the first Sunday of March since 1990, which the organising body says draws more than a million participants a year. During the 2019–20 bushfire season young people joined clean-ups, appeals and animal support drives across New South Wales and Victoria.
- **Campaigns and social media.** Young people run awareness campaigns, collect donations through trusted charities, and use media to put an issue on the public agenda.
- **Lawful peaceful assembly.** Public marches and rallies are a recognised method of participation. Australia's democratic traditions protect peaceful protest, and schools and governments also set rules about attendance and safety — weighing those two things is itself a civic skill, and the debate is examined in the Source inquiry task below.

A recent example shows these pathways working together. From late November 2018, Australian school students began striking on Fridays over climate change. On 15 March 2019 an estimated 1.4 million people joined climate strikes worldwide; on 20 September 2019 organisers reported over 4 million participants worldwide, including about 300,000 in Australia. The strikes were organised by students, covered by the media, and answered by politicians — including the then Prime Minister’s call for “more learning and less activism” and the then Education Minister’s view that students should act after school or on weekends. Whatever your view of the strikes, they are a case study in under-18 participation: a method chosen, a message sent, a public debate forced, and responses that can now be evaluated.

There is also a live debate about the voting age itself. In 2015 the then Opposition Leader Bill Shorten said the voting age should be lowered to 16, and on 21 October 2019 Adam Bandt, a Greens member, introduced a bill in the House of Representatives to lower it to 16. The bill did not become law, and the voting age remains 18 — but arguing about the rules of participation is itself civic participation.

Sources: House of Representatives petitions website, archived 21 September 2016 (web.archive.org); Parliament of Victoria, “Get involved” page, retrieved 26 August 2026; Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 (Cth); voting-age history and the 2019 bill as reported in public records and the media, retrieved 26 August 2026; strike participation figures as reported by organisers and ABC News, 20 September 2019, retrieved 26 August 2026.

4. What makes participation effective?

The curriculum asks you to *evaluate methods and strategies*. Because *effective* is a contested term, this section uses a stated frame: **a method or strategy is effective to the degree that it moves the decision-maker who has power over the issue, toward the goal the participants set, without costs the participants are not willing to accept.** Every evaluation you write in this section should state its frame, because a different frame can support a different conclusion.

The checklist below turns that frame into six testable questions.

Is it effective? A checklist for methods and strategies

Contested term - the frame must be stated

People disagree about what makes participation work, and the standard you choose can change the conclusion you reach. Frame used in this section: a method or strategy is effective to the degree that it moves the decision-maker who has power over the issue, toward the goal the participants set, without costs the participants are not willing to accept.

1 • Right target?

Does it aim at the decision-maker who has power over the issue?

2 • Right method for the target?

Can that decision-maker actually use this input?

3 • How many, and for how long?

Numbers and persistence matter. One letter, once, is not a movement.

4 • Lawful and safe?

Are participants protected from harm they have not accepted?

5 • Allies won or lost?

Does it build support, or turn possible supporters away?

6 • What does the evidence show?

What do research and history say about this kind of method?

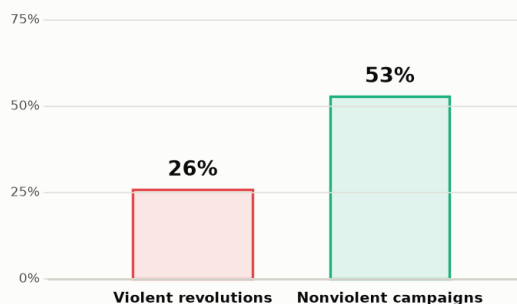
State your frame before you judge. A different frame can support a different conclusion - that is why the frame is written down.

Checklist of six questions for evaluating whether a method or strategy of civic participation is effective, with a note that effectiveness is a contested term and the frame must be stated.

There is research evidence about methods, and it is worth knowing — with its limits. In *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011), Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan compared more than 200 violent revolutions and more than 100 nonviolent campaigns across the twentieth century. In their data, 26 per cent of the violent efforts succeeded, while 53 per cent of the nonviolent campaigns did. They also found that every campaign in their data set which won the active participation of at least 3.5 per cent of the population succeeded — and all of those were nonviolent.

What the evidence says: success of violent and nonviolent campaigns

Share of campaigns that reached their stated goal - Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011): over 200 violent revolutions and over 100 nonviolent campaigns across the twentieth century.



Use this evidence carefully
In the largest study of its kind, peaceful methods outperformed violent ones, and every campaign that won the active participation of at least 3.5 per cent of the population succeeded. The limits: the data cover large, society-wide campaigns across a century - not small local efforts - and Chenoweth's own later work reports that success rates of nonviolent campaigns have fallen since around 2010 as governments have adapted.

Bar chart comparing the success rate of violent and nonviolent campaigns in the Chenoweth and Stephan data set, 26 per cent versus 53 per cent, with limits of the evidence noted.

Use this evidence carefully. It is about large, society-wide campaigns across a century; it is not a rule that any small campaign will succeed. Chenoweth's own later work reports that the success rate of nonviolent campaigns has fallen since around 2010 as governments have adapted. The finding that matters for this section is the comparison: in the largest study of its kind, peaceful methods outperformed violent ones, and numbers plus persistence mattered. That is an evidence-based reason to weigh peaceful, well-supported methods heavily — not a guarantee.

Two broad families of method are often set against each other: **institutional** methods (petitions, letters, submissions, voting at 18, joining a party or group) and **disruptive but lawful** methods (marches, strikes, public stunts). Each side has a strong case.

- **The strongest case for institutional methods:** they give decision-makers input they can actually use. A well-written submission or a petition with thousands of signatures is evidence a minister can table, a committee can quote and a member can raise in parliament. They are lawful, low-cost and hard to dismiss as illegitimate. Their weakness is speed and attention: petitions can be noted and shelved, and institutional channels move slowly.
- **The strongest case for disruptive methods:** they put ignored issues on the agenda. Most people will never read a submission; a march of 300,000 cannot be scrolled past. Disruption signals that feeling runs deep, and it can make inaction politically expensive. Its risks are real too: it can lose supporters who dislike disruption, invite labels like “truancy”, and shift attention from the issue to the protest itself.

An evaluation that engages both cases is stronger than one that cheers for a side. When you evaluate a method in this section, steelman it — present it at its strongest — then test it against the checklist.

5. Case study: ICAN, a transnational campaign that began in Melbourne (E05)

A **transnational** campaign operates across national borders, coordinating people and groups in many countries around one goal. One of the most successful began in Australia.

The **International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)** is a global civil society coalition working for a treaty banning nuclear weapons. Its founders were inspired by the 1997 treaty that banned anti-personnel landmines — proof, they argued, that a weapon could be outlawed by treaty even before every government agreed. ICAN was

launched publicly in Melbourne on 23 April 2007 (with a second launch in Vienna on 30 April 2007), using funds raised in Australia to establish the campaign. By 2022 it counted 661 partner organisations in 110 countries.

ICAN: from a launch in Melbourne to a treaty in force

Where the campaign came from

The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is a global civil society coalition. Its founders were inspired by the 1997 treaty that banned anti-personnel landmines - proof that a weapon could be outlawed even before every government agreed. By 2022 ICAN counted 661 partner organisations in 110 countries.



Australian citizens take part through ICAN's Australian partner organisations - campaigning, fundraising and writing to members. The Australian Government has not signed the treaty (see the next figure).

Timeline of ICAN from its 2007 launch in Melbourne to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entering into force in January 2021, with the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.

ICAN's strategy combined several methods: public campaigns focused on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons; lobbying of governments and the United Nations; and coalition building across 110 countries. The result was the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)**, adopted at the United Nations on 7 July 2017 by a vote of 122 to 1. On 6 October 2017 ICAN received the Nobel Peace Prize "for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons". The treaty entered into force on 22 January 2021, after the 50th state ratified it.

Australian citizens are involved in ICAN through its Australian partner organisations — campaigning, fundraising, writing to members and running events. At the same time, the Australian Government has not signed the treaty. Its stated position is that Australia relies on the United States' nuclear forces as part of its defence arrangements, and that a ban treaty could weaken that protection. Public opinion polling in Australia has shown strong support for a ban. Both positions are set out at strength below; this book reports them and takes no side.

Should Australia join the nuclear weapon ban treaty? Both positions at strength

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entered into force on 22 January 2021. Australia has not signed it. This book reports both positions and takes no side.

The strongest case for Australia to sign and ratify
Nuclear weapons are the only weapon of mass destruction not yet banned by a treaty. The TPNW fills that gap. The humanitarian case: any use of nuclear weapons would cause harm no health service could answer. Australia helped start this campaign - ICAN launched in Melbourne in April 2007. Public opinion polling in Australia has shown strong support for a ban.

The strongest case for the government's position - not signing
Australia relies on the United States' nuclear forces as part of its defence arrangements; the government says a ban treaty could weaken that protection. No nuclear-armed state has joined the treaty, so it cannot yet reduce any weapons. The government argues that change is better pursued step by step inside existing forums where nuclear-armed states are present.

Steelman rule: before you judge, put each side at its strongest. Evaluating the gap between the government's position and public opinion is a task for your reasoning, not for this book.

Two-column steelman of the debate over Australia joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons: the strongest case for signing and the strongest case for the government's position of not signing.

Section 2C examines how international law shapes Australian lawmaking; Section 3A examines global citizenship. ICAN is a case where citizens acted globally to make new international law — and where the Australian Government reached a different conclusion. Evaluating that gap is exactly the skill this section builds.

Sources: ICAN formation, Nobel Peace Prize and treaty milestones from ICAN's recorded history and Nobel Prize records (nobelprize.org), retrieved 26 August 2026; TPNW adoption and Australia's position from United Nations records and treaty status lists, retrieved 26 August 2026; the landmine-treaty inspiration as recorded in ICAN's history.

6. Participating in practice: campaigns, letters and petitions (E03, E04)

Now the doing. There are three production tasks in this section — an awareness campaign at school, a letter to an institution, and a petition built to the House's rules. The Participation artefact brief at the end of the section asks you to produce at least one of them for real.

An awareness-raising campaign is a strategy with a goal, an audience, a message and methods. The planning sheet below is the template used for the campaign task. Keep every part: a campaign without a stated goal or success measure cannot be evaluated — and evaluation is half the content description.

Campaign plan: raising awareness at school

Item	Guidance for your plan
Issue	One contemporary global issue, stated in one sentence (see Section 1D).
Goal	The specific change you want - stated so someone else can check whether it happened.
Audience	Who at school you are speaking to: students, staff, families, the school council.
Message	One line your audience can remember and repeat.
Methods	Poster series, an assembly presentation, planned posts on a school channel.
Timeline	A date for each element, in order, with who is responsible for each.
Success measures	How you will know it worked - count something: signatures, attendees, replies.
Evaluation	Which checklist questions from Part 4 you will apply afterwards, and your frame.

A campaign without a stated goal and success measures cannot be evaluated - and evaluation is half the content description.

Planning template for a school awareness-raising campaign, covering issue, goal, audience, message, methods, timeline, success measures and evaluation plan.

A letter to a member or institution is one of the oldest institutional methods, and one of the most available to young people. A member's office must record correspondence; a letter that is polite, specific and personal is usable input. The model letter below shows the structure. It is a worked model, written for this book — your letter must be your own words about an issue you have chosen.

Model letter to a federal member (work of the book - not a real letter)

[1] Alex Chen, Year 10 student, Melbourne VIC
[1] 26 August 2026

[2] The Hon. [member's name] MP
[2] Federal Member for [electorate name]

[3] Dear [member's name],

[4] I am a Year 10 student writing about electronic waste (e-waste). Old phones, laptops and batteries often end up in landfill, where they can release harmful materials.

[5] Our school collects old devices, but we have no safe, certified place to send them. E-waste is a national and a global problem: useful materials are lost, and harmful ones enter the environment.

[6] I ask you to support a national scheme that gives every school a free, certified e-waste collection point.

[7] I would welcome a reply setting out your view. Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,
Alex Chen

Parts of an effective letter

- 1 · Sender and date - who you are, and when.
- 2 · Address it to the decision-maker with power over the issue.
- 3 · A polite greeting.
- 4 · The issue - one issue, stated plainly.
- 5 · Why it matters - evidence plus a local connection.
- 6 · A specific request - one thing they can do.
- 7 · A polite close that asks for a reply.

Write your own letter in this structure, about an issue you have chosen. A member's office must record correspondence - a polite, specific, personal letter is usable input.

Model letter from a Year 10 student to their federal member asking for action on e-waste at schools, labelled to show the parts of an effective letter.

A **petition** asks a parliament to act, and collects signatures to show support. The House of Representatives has run an e-petition website since 2016, and any resident of Australia — at any age — can create one, as long as it meets the requirements. The model petition below is built to those requirements. It is a worked model for this book, not a live petition.

Model e-petition to the House of Representatives (work of the book - not live)

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain residents of Australia draws the attention of the House to the amount of electronic waste (e-waste) sent to landfill, and requests that the House establish a funded national collection scheme for e-waste at schools.

Your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Requirements it meets
(House of Representatives)

- Addressed to the Speaker and Members of the House.
- About a matter the House has power to act on.
- Moderate language.
- Does not promote unlawful acts.
- Written in English.
- One signature starts it - the creator is the first signer.
- Checked by the Petitions Committee, then presented to the House.

Any resident of Australia, at any age, can create an e-petition on the House's website, which has run since 2016. Do not publish a real petition without your teacher's and your family's approval.

Model e-petition to the House of Representatives asking for a national school e-waste collection scheme, annotated against the House's petition requirements.

Notice how the three tasks work at different points of the methods ladder from Part 2: the campaign works on your school community, the letter works on one decision-maker, and the petition works on the House of Representatives itself. Choosing the right tool for the scale is strategy.

7. Citizens, sustainability and climate change (E06)

Australian citizens contribute to sustainability and respond to climate change at every scale on the ladder — often at the same time.

Australian citizens, sustainability and climate change: real, dated examples

Kind of contribution	Real, dated Australian example	Scale
Household and consumer action	Rooftop solar: more than 4.29 million systems installed by December 2025 - one of the highest household uptakes in the world. Saving energy and reducing waste shift markets and signal what citizens will support.	Household to market
Organised community action	Clean Up Australia Day, on the first Sunday of March since 1990, drawing more than a million participants a year.	Local
School programs	ResourceSmart Schools: free support for Victorian schools to build sustainability into school life, working toward a five-star certification. The program continues under the Victorian Government after Sustainability Victoria closed on 30 June 2026.	School
Crisis volunteering	The 2019-20 bushfire season burnt more than 24 million hectares, mostly in New South Wales and Victoria. Citizens volunteered at relief centres, gave to Red Cross and other appeals, and joined clean-ups.	Local to national
Advocacy	The school climate strikes of 2018-19; petitions, submissions and campaigns about climate policy aimed at governments.	National to global
Global frameworks	Australia's commitments under United Nations climate agreements (see Section 1D). Citizens participate by pushing on those commitments.	Global

Local action, national channels and global frameworks are connected - citizens participate at all three at once.

Table of real, dated examples of Australian citizens contributing to sustainability and responding to climate change, from household solar to clean-ups, school programs, disaster volunteering and student strikes.

- **Household and consumer action.** As at December 2025, Australia had more than 4.29 million rooftop solar installations — one of the highest household uptakes in the world. Choosing solar, saving energy, reducing waste and buying with the environment in mind are participation too: they shift markets and signal to governments what citizens will support.
- **Organised community action.** Clean Up Australia Day has run on the first Sunday of March since 1990 and draws more than a million participants a year. Victoria's ResourceSmart Schools program, a free program that supports schools to embed sustainability across learning and school life and work toward a five-star certification, continues under the Victorian Government after Sustainability Victoria closed on 30 June 2026.
- **Crisis volunteering.** During the 2019–20 bushfire season — more than 24 million hectares burnt, mostly in New South Wales and Victoria — citizens volunteered at evacuation centres, raised money through the Red Cross and other appeals, and joined clean-ups afterwards. Climate change is one of the reasons bushfire seasons are getting harder, which links disaster volunteering to climate action.
- **Advocacy.** Student strikes, petitions, submissions and campaigns about climate policy are participation aimed at governments' climate commitments. Section 1D explains Australia's responsibilities under international climate agreements; citizens participate by pushing on those commitments — for stronger action, for different action, or against particular policies. Australians hold a range of views on the best climate policy; the institutions are the point of this section, not the outcome of the argument.

The pattern is the one this section keeps returning to: local action (a clean-up, a school program), national channels (petitions, letters, inquiries) and global frameworks (climate agreements, transnational campaigns) are connected, and citizens participate at all three.

Sources: rooftop solar figures as reported by Clean Energy Australia industry records and summarised in public references, retrieved 26 August 2026; Clean Up Australia records, retrieved 26 August 2026; Sustainability Victoria program and closure notices (sustainability.vic.gov.au), retrieved 26 August 2026; 2019–20 bushfire season figures from official and media reports, retrieved 26 August 2026.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded (E02)

Your school canteen sends a large amount of plastic packaging to landfill. Determine an effective way to participate, using the effectiveness checklist.

Step	What you do	Why it matters
Define the issue	Plastic packaging from the canteen is going to landfill.	A clear issue can be answered; a vague one cannot.
Find who has power	The canteen operator and the school council choose what is sold. The local council collects the school's waste.	Checklist question 1: aim at the decision-maker with power.
Choose methods	Survey students; propose recyclable or reusable options; present the results to the school council.	Institutional methods give the council input it can use (question 2).
Build support	Get the student representative council to back the proposal; ask a teacher to help present it.	Allies make the case harder to set aside (question 5).
Set success measures	A written response from the school council; one packaging change trialled for a term.	Without measures you cannot evaluate (question 6).
Evaluate	After the decision, judge the method against your frame and say what you would change.	Evaluation is half the content description.

Example 2 — model extended response (evaluating a strategy)

Evaluate the effectiveness of ICAN's strategy. State your frame.

Model response. My frame: I judge a strategy by whether it moved the decision-makers with power toward its stated goal, and how far, at what cost. ICAN's stated goal was a treaty banning nuclear weapons. Measured against that goal, the strategy was highly effective at the global scale: the TPNW was adopted in 2017, entered into force in 2021, and ICAN's role was recognised with the Nobel Peace Prize. The checklist explains part of the success: ICAN targeted the right institution (the United Nations and individual states), used a clear message (humanitarian consequences), built a wide coalition (661 partner organisations in 110 countries by 2022) and sustained the effort for a decade. The strategy's limits matter too. Nuclear-armed states did not join the treaty, and Australia — where the campaign began — has not signed it, on the ground that it relies on United States nuclear forces for its defence. So the strategy changed international law but has not yet disarmed anyone, and its next test is persuading more states to join. A different frame — judging the campaign only by weapons eliminated — would reach a harsher conclusion. Stating the frame keeps the evaluation honest.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. This section defines *civic participation* in one sentence. Write that definition in your own words, then name the two verbs from the content description and say what each requires you to do.

Q2. Copy the methods ladder and complete it: for each scale, name the decision-maker a participant should aim at.

Scale	Decision-maker with the power
School issue	
Local issue	
State issue	
National issue	
Global issue	

Q3. List four pathways of civic participation open to a person under 18 in Australia. For each, give one real example from this section.

Q4. A class wants to start a House of Representatives e-petition. List four requirements the petition must meet before the Petitions Committee will accept it, and state the minimum number of signatures needed to begin.

Q5. Put these ICAN milestones in order (1–5): the TPNW enters into force; ICAN is launched in Melbourne; the TPNW is adopted at the United Nations; ICAN receives the Nobel Peace Prize; the 50th state ratifies the treaty.

Q6. Match each action to the kind of participation it best shows (household and consumer action; organised community action; crisis volunteering; advocacy): (a) a family installs rooftop solar; (b) students join a Clean Up Australia Day site; (c) volunteers staff a bushfire evacuation centre; (d) a student writes to their federal member asking for stronger climate action.

Un scaffolded

Q7. “Voting is the only method of civic participation that matters.” Identify one assumption in this claim and give two reasons, with real examples from this section, why the claim is wrong. *(3 marks)*

Q8. Choose one issue at school scale and one at global scale. For each, determine an effective way for a person under 18 to participate, and explain your choice using two questions from the effectiveness checklist. *(4 marks)*

Q9. Evaluate the school climate strikes of 2018–19 as a method of civic participation. Present the strongest case for the strikes and the strongest case made by their critics, then give your own judgement using a stated frame and two checklist questions. Marks are awarded for the quality of your reasoning — terms defined, both positions at strength, evidence used, frame stated — not for the conclusion you reach. *(6 marks)*

Q10. Evaluate the effectiveness of ICAN’s strategy using the model extended response above as a guide. Reach a judgement and state the frame you used. *(5 marks)*

Source inquiry task

Read the two sources, then answer the questions. Both sources come from the public debate over the Australian school climate strikes of 2018–19.

Source A — reported views of the then Prime Minister and Education Minister, late 2018

After students began striking on Fridays in November 2018, the then Prime Minister Scott Morrison called for “more learning and less activism” in schools. The then Education Minister Dan Tehan said that if school students felt strongly about an issue, they should take action after school or on weekends.

Source B — ABC News report, 20 September 2019

“It’s our future”: Climate strike draws “hundreds of thousands” to rallies across Australia demanding action. Organisers reported about 300,000 participants in Australia on 20 September 2019, as part of a global week of climate strikes.

Sources: Source A as reported in national media in November 2018 and summarised in public records of the strikes, retrieved 26 August 2026; Source B from ABC News, 20 September 2019, retrieved 26 August 2026. The views reported are those of the speakers and outlet named.

Questions.

- (a) State the viewpoint in Source A and the viewpoint implied by Source B. (2 marks)
 - (b) Source A rests on an assumption about where students' views belong. State one assumption behind Source A, and one assumption behind Source B. (2 marks)
 - (c) "Students should be learning, not campaigning" and "about 300,000 people participated" are different kinds of claim. Identify which is a value claim and which is a factual claim, and say what would test the factual one. (3 marks)
 - (d) Name one checklist question from Part 4 that Source A's critics of the strikes speak to, and one that Source B's supporters speak to. Explain each choice in one sentence. (4 marks)
 - (e) Using a stated frame and the checklist, give your own judgement: were the school strikes an effective method of civic participation? Say what the other side gets right. Marks are awarded for the reasoning steps you show, not the conclusion you reach. (5 marks)
-

Participation artefact brief

This is the required participation task for the section. Choose **one** of the three options and produce it for real, then evaluate it. Your teacher will confirm the deadline and how the artefact is submitted.

Option 1 — Awareness-raising campaign at school (VC2HC10S07.E03). Choose a contemporary global issue (for example, one from Section 1D). Complete the campaign plan shown in Part 6, then produce at least one real element of the campaign — a poster series, an assembly presentation, or a planned set of posts for a school channel — and run or present it.

Option 2 — Letter to an institution (VC2HC10S07.E04). Write a real letter, in the structure shown in Part 6, to your federal member, a Victorian member of parliament, or your local council, about a contemporary issue. Post or email it. Keep a copy and record any reply you receive.

Option 3 — Petition draft (VC2HC10S07.E04). Draft an e-petition to the House of Representatives that meets every requirement shown in Part 6. Do not publish it without your teacher's and your family's approval; the artefact is the draft, checked line by line against the House's requirements.

For every option, include an evaluation (one page or about 250 words):

- 1. State your frame — the standard you will judge your method against.
- 2. Apply at least three questions from the effectiveness checklist to what you did.
- 3. State one strength and one limit of the method you chose.
- 4. State one thing you would change next time, and why.

Success criteria. The artefact is complete and in your own words; it targets a real decision-maker at a stated scale; it meets the rules of its method (campaign plan complete; letter structure correct; petition requirements met); the evaluation states a frame and applies the checklist honestly, including the limit.

Answers

Q1. Civic participation: the ways people take part in the public life of their community — from their school to the world — to influence decisions, laws and outcomes. The verbs: *participate* requires actually taking part (producing a campaign, letter or petition); *evaluate* requires weighing methods against stated standards and defending a judgement.

Q2. School issue: the school (principal, school council, student representative council). Local issue: the local council. State issue: the Victorian Parliament. National issue: the Australian Parliament (and the Australian Government). Global issue: international bodies and agreements, such as the United Nations and its treaties.

Q3. Sample four: starting or signing a petition (the House’s e-petition website accepts petitions from any resident of Australia, at any age); making a submission to a parliamentary inquiry (the Victorian Parliament invites submissions from anyone); school voice through student representative councils; volunteering (Clean Up Australia Day, bushfire appeals); lawful peaceful assembly (the 2018–19 school climate strikes); campaigns and social media. Any four with a real example each.

Q4. Requirements (any four): addressed to “The Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives”; about a matter the House has power to act on; moderate language; does not promote unlawful acts; in English. Minimum signatures to begin: one — the person who creates the petition (the principal petitioner) is the first signature.

Q5. Order: ICAN launched in Melbourne (1, April 2007); TPNW adopted at the United Nations (2, 7 July 2017); ICAN receives the Nobel Peace Prize (3, 6 October 2017); the 50th state ratifies the treaty (4, 24 October 2020); the TPNW enters into force (5, 22 January 2021).

Q6. (a) household and consumer action; (b) organised community action; (c) crisis volunteering; (d) advocacy.

Q7. Award: one assumption identified (e.g. that only formal voting counts as participation, or that only methods open to adults matter) + two supported reasons. Sample: under-18s cannot vote yet but petitions, submissions, campaigns and strikes are real methods with real effects — the House accepts petitions from any resident at any age; the 2018–19 strikes put climate on the national agenda; ICAN, founded in Melbourne, helped produce a United Nations treaty. Voting is one method among many, and a democracy uses all of them.

Q8. Award: one method per scale, each justified with two checklist questions. Sample: school-scale litter — a student survey plus a proposal to the school council targets the decision-maker with power (question 1) and builds allies through the student representative council (question 5). Global-scale climate — a letter to a federal member targets the national decision-maker (question 1) and uses an institutional method the office must record and can use (question 2).

Q9. Award the reasoning steps, whichever conclusion is reached: the strikes’ case at strength (numbers and attention: about 300,000 in Australia on 20 September 2019; an issue put on the agenda that institutional channels had not moved; a method available to under-18s); the critics’ case at strength (school time is for learning; action after school or on weekends keeps both education and participation; disruption can cost support); the checklist applied to at least two questions; a stated frame; a judgement that follows from both.

Q10. Award: a stated frame; the goal identified (a treaty banning nuclear weapons); evidence of movement toward the goal (TPNW adopted 2017, in force January 2021, Nobel Peace Prize 2017, coalition of 661 partner organisations in 110 countries by 2022); the limits (no nuclear-armed state has joined; Australia has not signed, citing its reliance on United States nuclear forces); a judgement that weighs the two; acknowledgment that another frame could judge differently.

Source inquiry. (a) Source A: students' place is in the classroom; activism belongs outside school hours. Source B implies the strikes are legitimate and urgent because the issue concerns the strikers' own future and drew huge support. (b) Sample assumptions — Source A: that missing class is the main cost, and that young people's views carry less weight during school; Source B: that participation by students is legitimate, and that size shows the concern is real. Any one each, clearly stated. (c) "Students should be learning, not campaigning" is a value claim; "about 300,000 people participated" is a factual claim that could be tested against counts, photographs and organiser and police estimates. (d) Sample: Source A speaks to "lawful and safe for participants?" and "does it win allies or lose them?" (disruption costs support); Source B speaks to "how many, and for how long?" (numbers and persistence) and "right method for the target?" (attention forces the issue onto the agenda). One per source with a sentence of reasoning. (e) Full marks require: a stated frame; both positions engaged; at least two checklist questions applied; a judgement; and a fair statement of what the other side gets right (e.g. the critics are right that education is valuable and that disruption can cost support; the supporters are right that under-18s have few faster ways to be heard).

Arguing from evidence — and choosing how to communicate

Content description VC2HC10S08.

This section draws on elaborations VC2HC10S08.E01, VC2HC10S08.E02, VC2HC10S08.E03, VC2HC10S08.E04, VC2HC10S08.E05, VC2HC10S08.E06 and VC2HC10S08.E07.

Teaching sequence

1. What is an evidence-based argument?

The Victorian Curriculum uses the phrase *evidence-based argument* but does not define it. This section therefore treats it in a fixed sense: **an argument is a claim supported by reasons, and it is evidence-based when every major claim rests on evidence that is named and dated, so a reader can check it.** Every task in this section is answerable on that definition alone. Notice what kind of phrase this is: *evidence-based* is not a matter of taste — an argument either shows its evidence or it does not. The harder judgement comes later, with the word *effective*, which does depend on your frame.

An evidence-based argument has five parts.

An evidence-based argument: the five parts

1 Claim

Your position: what you are arguing.



2 Evidence

Named, dated and checkable: official statistics, laws, court judgements, institutional processes, dated case studies.



3 Reasoning

The link that shows why your evidence supports your claim - evidence does not argue for itself.



4 Counter-evidence and other perspectives

The strongest case against your claim, acknowledged and answered - not ignored.



5 Conclusion

Your judgement, with your frame stated: what you weighed most.

If any part is missing, say which one and why - a gap you name is better than a gap you hide.

The five parts of an evidence-based argument: a claim, evidence, reasoning that connects the evidence to the claim, counter-evidence and other perspectives acknowledged and answered, and a conclusion that states its frame.

In civics and citizenship, your evidence usually comes from six places. Each one is strong for a different reason.

Six kinds of evidence in civics and citizenship

Kind of evidence	A real example in this book	Why it carries weight
Official statistic	UNHCR, Global Trends (June 2025): 123.2 million people forcibly displaced by the end of 2024.	Counted by the agency whose job is counting.
Law	Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic), s 15: freedom of expression.	A right written in law can be quoted and checked.
Constitutional text	Constitution s 128: the double majority needed to change the Constitution (Section 1A).	The rules above ordinary law.
Court judgement	Roach v Electoral Commissioner (2007): the High Court read the right to vote into the Constitution (Section 2B).	Shows how courts interpret the law.
Institutional process	How a bill becomes an Act (Section 1B).	Shows how something can happen.
Dated case study	Earth Hour, first held in Sydney on 31 March 2007.	Shows that something did happen.

Citing evidence is not weighing it: Section 4B of this book teaches you to test sources. Here, use your best evidence openly.

Table of six kinds of civics evidence with a real example of each from this book and why that kind of evidence carries weight.

Citing evidence is not the same as weighing it. Section 4B of this book teaches you to test sources and data; this section assumes you have already done that and asks you to **use** your best evidence openly.

2. Choosing how to communicate

Before you build anything, fix two things: your **purpose** (to inform, to persuade, to call people to act, or to raise money) and your **audience** (who you are trying to reach). Then choose the method that fits both.

Choosing a method of communication

Method	Best for	Strength	Limit
Poster	One message, one glance, in a public place.	Reaches people where they already are.	Little room; cannot carry detail.
Flow chart or graph	The shape of a problem: causes, links, responses.	Taken in at a glance; organises a big issue.	Weak on emotion; needs a clear structure.
Speech or presentation	Adding a human voice; persuading a room.	Answers questions; tone carries weight.	Reaches only the people in the room.
Letter to a member of parliament	Speaking to someone with the power to act.	Formal; expects a reply; carries evidence.	Slow; reaches few people at a time.
Petition	Many citizens asking parliament for one thing.	Shows weight of support.	Must follow parliament's rules.
Social media campaign	Reaching many people fast; sharing.	Large, cheap reach; can travel far.	Easy to scroll past; comments can drift.
Written argument	A full case with evidence and reasoning.	Room for evidence, reasoning and counter-evidence.	Few readers finish a long text.

No method is effective in itself. A method is effective for an audience and a purpose - state both before you choose.

Table of seven methods of communication — poster, flow chart, speech, letter to a member of parliament, petition, social media campaign and written argument — with what each is best for, its strengths and its limits.

The word *effective* is **frame-dependent**: a method is effective *for someone, at something*. This section's frame is the one you state — audience first, then purpose. To judge a method, use these six questions.

Is a method effective? Six checklist questions

1 Right audience?

Does it reach the people you need to reach?

2 Right purpose?

To inform, to persuade, to call people to act, or to raise money?

3 Clear message?

Can the audience take it in the time they have?

4 Evidence shown?

Named, dated, checkable facts - visible to the reader.

5 Reach that fits?

Enough of the right people will see it.

6 A next step?

Does it give the audience something to do?

Effective is a frame-dependent word. State the audience and the purpose before you judge the method.

Checklist of six questions for judging how effective a method of communication is: right audience, right purpose, clear message, evidence shown, real reach, and a next step to take.

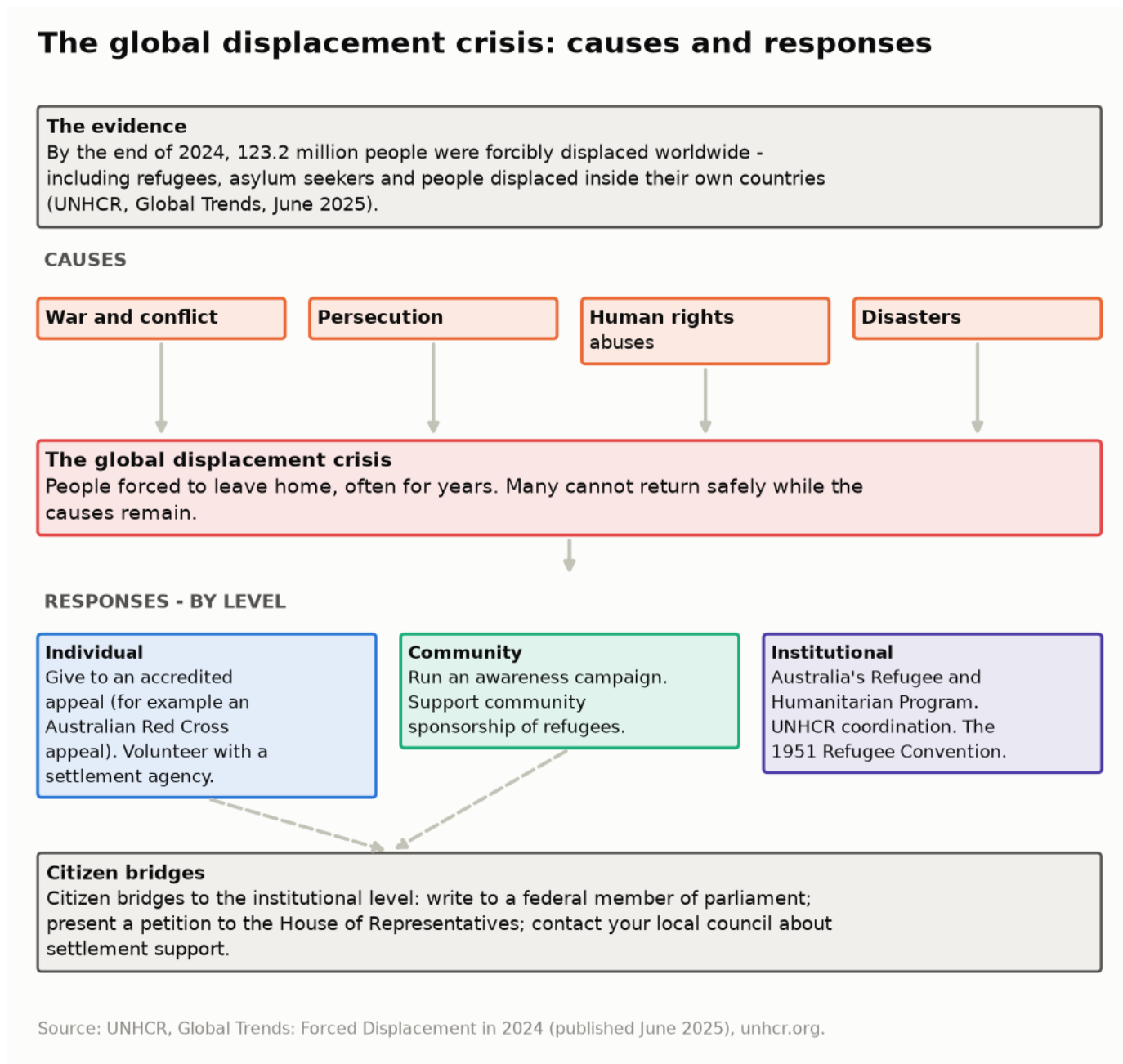
Hold on to the last point of the checklist, because it explains a pattern you will meet again and again: a method that works in one campaign can fail in another when the audience or the purpose changes (VC2HC10S08.E07). The method and the frame travel together.

3. Mapping a global crisis graphically (E01)

A flow chart or graphical representation turns a big issue into a picture a reader can take in at a glance. It suits a **purpose to inform** and an audience that needs the shape of a problem before it can act. A good one has short boxes, clear arrows, and real evidence behind it.

This section's running case is the **global displacement crisis**. By the end of 2024, **123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced** from their homes — including refugees, asylum seekers and people displaced inside their own country — according to UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, in its *Global Trends* report (June 2025). A **refugee** has a fixed legal definition under the 1951 Refugee Convention — a person outside their own country owing to a well-founded fear of persecution (Section 2C of this book sets out the definition in full); an **asylum seeker** is a person seeking that protection whose claim has not yet been decided.

Example 1 below builds the flow chart step by step.



Flow chart of the global displacement crisis: evidence box with the UNHCR figure, four cause boxes for war, persecution, human rights abuses and disasters, the crisis in the centre, then responses at individual, community and institutional levels, with arrows showing how citizens can reach the institutional level.

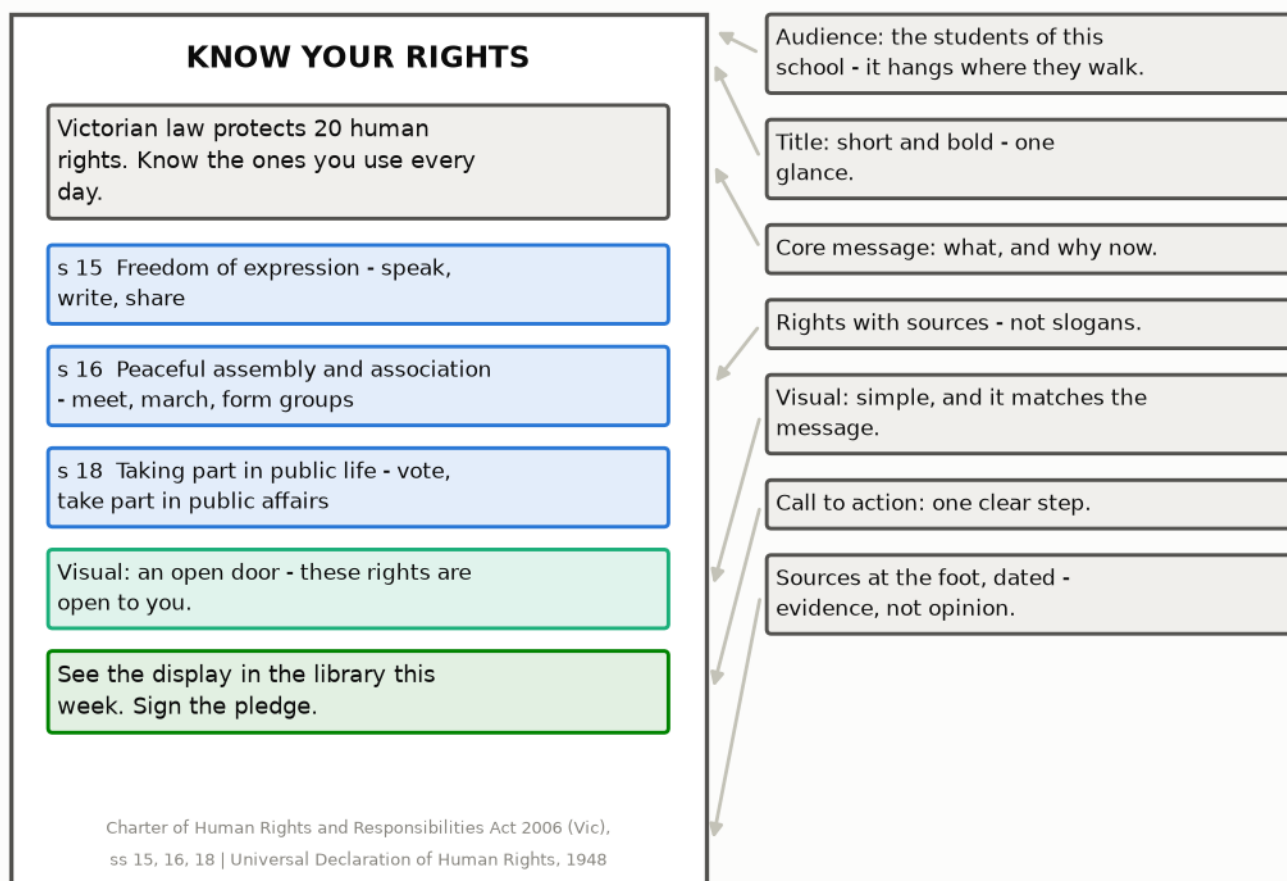
Source: UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024 (published June 2025), unhcr.org.

4. Communicating rights: the poster (E02)

A poster's job is different: **one message, one glance, in a public place**. That makes it a strong method for a **human rights message** aimed at people who walk past — students in a school corridor, for example.

The content is ready to hand. The **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)** protects **20 human rights** (Sections 8 to 27 of the Act), from the right to life to freedom of expression and the right to a fair hearing (Section 2B of this book evaluates the Charter). At the global level stands the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948.

A model human rights poster: the plan



The poster's job is one message, one glance, in a public place. Detail lives in the display and the law - the poster sends people to them.

Annotated plan of a model human rights poster, with labelled parts: title, target audience, one core message, three Charter rights with their section numbers, a visual idea and a call to action.

Notice the three rights chosen for the model poster: **freedom of expression (s 15)**, **peaceful assembly and association (s 16)** and **taking part in public life (s 18)**. They are the very rights you use when you construct an argument and communicate it. Section 15(2) of the Charter is worth reading in full:

Every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds ... in another medium chosen by that person.

(Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic), s 15(2))

Victorian law itself protects your choice of the medium you communicate in. Choosing that medium **well** — the skill of this section — is how you make that right do something.

5. Reflecting on how you came to your perspective (E03)

A **perspective** is your position on an issue plus the reasons behind it. A reflective tool turns the lens on yourself: instead of testing other people's arguments, you test your own.

The reflection tool: how did I come to my perspective?

1 State your perspective

Your position and your reasons, in one or two sentences.



2 Name the evidence you used

Official statistics, laws, judgements, processes, case studies - named and dated.



3 Name the evidence you left out

Including the evidence that does not support your position - the strongest case against it.



4 Weigh what you left out

Honestly: is it weak, strong, or stronger than yours?



5 Say what would change your mind

If the answer is nothing, the view is not evidence-based.

Apply this tool to arguments you agree with as hard as to the ones you oppose. Symmetry is the test of honesty.

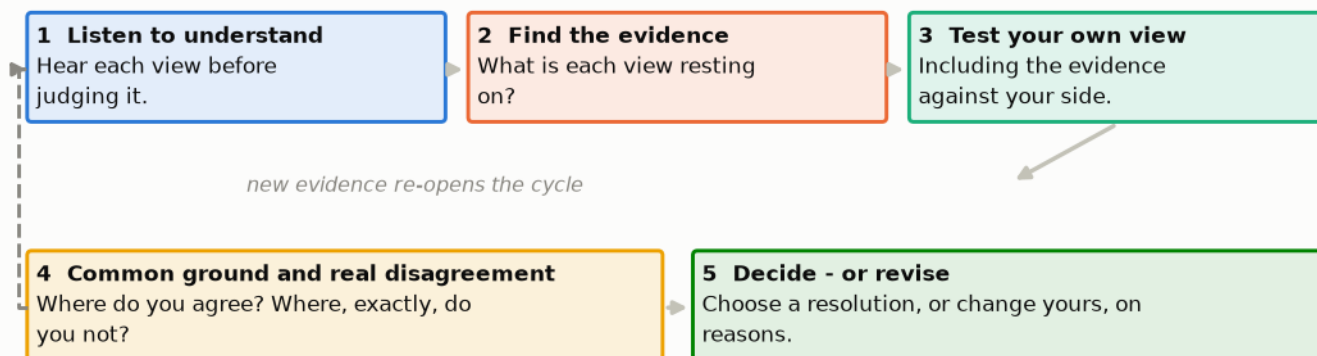
Reflection tool in five steps: state your perspective, list the evidence you used, name the evidence you left out including evidence against your position, weigh what you left out, and say what would change your mind.

Step 3 is the one most writers skip, and it is the step this curriculum asks for directly: **engaging with evidence that does not back your view**. This strengthens an argument rather than weakening it, for three reasons. First, it shows you tested your own view instead of cherry-picking for it. Second, a claim that survives honest counter-evidence is worth more than one that was never exposed to any. Third, readers trust a writer who shows them the whole case — and trust is what makes communication effective. When you present the evidence against you, put it in the **strongest form its own supporters would recognise**, then answer it. The same rule applies to arguments you agree with: test your own side as hard as you test the other side.

6. Deliberating together (E04)

Deliberation is careful weighing before deciding — done together. Section 5A of this book examines how democratic decision-making works; deliberation is the citizen's half of it. After you listen to your classmates' views on a resolution to a global crisis, you do not simply vote or shout: you move through a cycle.

The deliberation cycle: weighing together before deciding



Ground rules: argue about reasons, not people; and each person can say what evidence would change their mind.

Deliberation cycle in five steps: listen to understand, find the evidence behind each view, test your own view against the others, look for common ground and real disagreement, then decide or revise your resolution.

Two ground rules keep deliberation honest. Argue about **reasons, not people**. And each person should be able to say, out loud, **what evidence would change their mind** — if nothing could, that is not a position held on evidence.

7. Learning from media and campaigns (E05)

Campaigns communicate on purpose: every campaign chooses an audience, a method, a message, an appeal (factual, emotional, or both) and a next step for the reader. Section 3C of this book examines the media's influence in detail; here you read campaigns as a communicator, asking what they chose and why.

Consider **Earth Hour**, run by the conservation organisation WWF and first held in **Sydney on 31 March 2007**: people and landmarks switch off their lights for one hour. Its method is a simple symbol that anyone can join, repeated every year, and easy for news media to show. It is well matched to its purpose — raising awareness of energy use. It is not designed to change a law, and judging it for not doing that job would mistake its frame. Australian **Red Cross** appeals after disasters work differently again: named facts, a clear need, and a donation channel. Each campaign's method fits the purpose it chose. When you analyse a campaign, start there.

8. The task ahead

Everything in this sequence feeds one final act: **construct an evidence-based argument on a contemporary civics issue, decide which method of communication will work best for it, and justify that choice**. The full task is the source inquiry and argument task at the end of this section.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded (E01)

Using a graphical representation, demonstrate the causes of the global displacement crisis and what citizens can do about it.

Working	Comment
State the crisis with evidence. By the end of 2024, 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced (UNHCR, <i>Global Trends</i> , June 2025).	An evidence-based flow chart opens with a named, dated figure — not a feeling.
Map the causes. War and conflict; persecution; human rights abuses; disasters.	Causes often connect: war both displaces people directly and destroys the services that protect them.
Map responses at three levels. Individual: donate to an accredited appeal such as an Australian Red Cross	Sorting responses by scale shows citizens where they can act now and where they must work through

Working	Comment
appeal; volunteer with a settlement agency. Community: run an awareness campaign; support community sponsorship of refugees. Institutional: Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program; UNHCR coordination; obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention.	institutions.
Connect citizens to the institutional level. Write to a federal member of parliament; present a petition to the House of Representatives; contact your local council about settlement support.	A petition is a formal written request, signed by citizens, presented to parliament. These are the bridges from individual to institutional action.
Check the chart. Short boxes? Real arrows? Every claim backed by evidence?	A flow chart is itself an argument: it claims these causes and responses are the ones that matter.

Example 2 — model extended response (E06, E07)

Your group wants students at your school to learn about the rights protected by the Victorian Charter **and** to take at least one action, such as visiting a rights display or signing a pledge. Decide which method of communication is most effective. Justify your choice against one alternative.

Model response. First, my frame: my audience is students at my school, and my purpose is awareness plus one concrete action at school. I will compare a poster campaign with a short assembly speech against a social media video. I choose the **poster plus assembly speech**. Posters sit exactly where my audience already is — corridors and the canteen — and a Charter right needs to be stated precisely, with its section number, in a way one glance can hold; the speech adds the human voice and can end with the call to action. The strongest case for the video is reach: it can travel beyond the school and be shared. But reach is not my main purpose, and a video's weakness is that exact legal content — the rights and their sources — is easily scrolled past or lost. My judgement would reverse if the purpose changed to spreading the message across the whole community; that is why I state the frame with the choice. Methods are effective *for* an audience and a purpose, not in themselves.

Marks are awarded for the reasoning: frame stated, both methods argued at full strength, evidence used, judgement tied to audience and purpose, and the condition that would change the judgement. A student who chooses the video and reasons this well scores equally.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

- Q1.** Define, in your own words, (a) an evidence-based argument and (b) a frame, as this section uses those terms.
- Q2.** List the five parts of an evidence-based argument and explain the role of counter-evidence in one sentence.
- Q3.** For each item, state the kind of evidence it is (official statistic, law, constitutional text, court judgement, institutional process, dated case study): (a) section 15 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic); (b) the UNHCR figure of 123.2 million forcibly displaced people; (c) *Roach v Electoral Commissioner* (2007); (d) the stages a bill passes through to become an Act.
- Q4.** Match each scenario to the best-fit method from the methods table (poster, flow chart, letter to a member of parliament, petition, social media campaign) and give one reason: (a) your school wants every student to see one message this week; (b) your class wants to show how the causes of a crisis connect; (c) your community group wants parliament to change a law; (d) your team wants a shareable message to reach many young people fast.
- Q5.** List the five steps of the reflection tool, and explain why step 3 — naming the evidence you left out — is the step most writers skip.
- Q6.** Quote section 15(2) of the Victorian Charter as it appears in this section, and state which skill of this section that right protects.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Explain why engaging with evidence that does not back your view strengthens an argument rather than weakening it. (2 marks)

Q8. A message that worked well as a social media campaign failed when the same group put it on posters. Explain two reasons this can happen. (3 marks)

Q9. Three classmates have just given different views on how Australia should respond to the global displacement crisis. Explain how you would deliberate before settling on a resolution, naming the steps you would follow. (3 marks)

Q10. Choose a contemporary issue that matters to young Victorians. Decide which method of communication will work best for presenting your view to your local community, and justify your choice using two questions from the effectiveness checklist. (4 marks)

Source inquiry and argument task

Use **Source 1** (below) to answer the questions. It is the capstone task of this section: the final part asks you to construct your own evidence-based argument and determine your own method.

Source 1 - Two campaigns on the global displacement crisis

Campaign A - social media post (international appeal)

[Photo: a family walking a long road with two bags] 123.2 million people were forcibly displaced by the end of 2024 (UNHCR). Behind every number is a family. Donate now - one tap at the appeal link. Share this post.

Campaign B - letter to a federal member (local community group)

Dear Member, Since 2023 our volunteer program has helped 14 refugee families settle in this district - school enrolments, English classes, first jobs. We ask you to support more community sponsorship places, so local groups can welcome more families. We would welcome a reply, and a meeting. - A local community group

Campaigns A and B were written for this book as teaching sources. They stand for real kinds of communication used in Australian public life; they are not real quotations.

Source 1, two campaign communications about the global displacement crisis: Campaign A, a social media post for an international appeal asking for donations, and Campaign B, a letter from a community group to a federal member of parliament asking for more community sponsorship places.

Source: Campaign A and Campaign B were written for this book as teaching sources. They stand for real kinds of communication used in Australian public life; they are not real quotations.

S1. (a) Identify the method of communication and the intended audience of each campaign. (2 marks) (b) State the kind of evidence each campaign relies on. (2 marks) (c) Which campaign is more effective for raising money now, and which is more effective for changing policy? Justify each answer with two questions from the effectiveness checklist. (4 marks) (d) Identify one assumption behind each campaign's choice of method. (2 marks) (e) Construct your own evidence-based argument on a contemporary civics issue you choose. In one paragraph: state your claim; give at least two pieces of real, named, dated evidence; acknowledge one piece of evidence that does not support your claim and answer it; and name the method of communication you would use, justifying it against your audience and purpose. (8 marks)

Marks are awarded for the quality of the reasoning — terms defined, evidence named and dated, counter-evidence acknowledged and answered, method justified against a stated frame — not for the conclusion reached. Two students reaching opposite conclusions can both receive full marks.

Answers

Q1. (a) An argument whose major claims rest on evidence that is named and dated so a reader can check it. (b) The audience and purpose you state before judging a method. **Q2.** Claim; evidence; reasoning; counter-evidence and other perspectives; conclusion. Counter-evidence is acknowledged and answered so the claim is tested, not shielded. **Q3.** (a) law; (b) official statistic; (c) court judgement; (d) institutional process. **Q4.** (a) poster — one message, one glance, where students already are; (b) flow chart — shows connections between causes; (c) letter to a member of parliament (a petition also fits — many signed citizens asking parliament to act); (d) social media campaign — fast, shareable, reaches young people where they are. **Q5.** State your perspective; list the evidence you used; name the evidence you left out; weigh what you left out; say what would change your mind. Step 3 is skipped because it feels like helping the other side — but skipping it leaves the argument untested. **Q6.** “Every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds ... in another medium chosen by that person.” It protects the choice of the medium you communicate in — the very choice this section teaches. **Q7.** *See solutions.* **Q8.** *See solutions.* **Q9.** *See solutions.* **Q10.** *See solutions.* **S1.** *See solutions.*

Fully-worked solutions

Q7. Acknowledging counter-evidence shows the writer tested the claim rather than picking only supporting facts; a claim that survives honest counter-evidence is stronger than one never exposed to any; and it builds the reader’s trust, which is what makes the communication work. (2 marks: any two of testing, strength, trust.)

Q8. The audience changes place: social media reaches people where they scroll, posters only reach people who walk past. The format changes too: a shareable post can travel and a video can carry a story, while a poster must hold its message in one glance. So a method that fitted one audience and purpose can fail when the same message moves, even with identical words — methods are effective within a frame, not in themselves. (3 marks: two distinct reasons + the frame point.)

Q9. Listen to understand each view before judging it; find the evidence behind each classmate’s position; test my own view against theirs, including evidence against my side; look for common ground (for example, that people fleeing war deserve help) and the real disagreement (for example, how large the intake should be and how claims are processed); then decide on a resolution — or revise my own. Deliberation is weighing before deciding, and it works on reasons, not on who shouts loudest. (3 marks: steps named + the point of the cycle.)

Q10. *Model answer.* Issue: road safety around the school. Frame: audience is my local community and the council; purpose is a concrete change. Method: a letter to the local council with a petition signed by students and neighbours. Checklist: right audience — the council is the body that can change the road rules, so the letter goes where the power is; evidence shown — the letter carries dates, counts and locations of near-misses, which a poster could not fit. A poster would raise awareness but give the council nothing to act on; social media would reach many people but not the body that decides. My judgement rests on purpose: if the goal were awareness first, the method would change. (4 marks: frame + two checklist questions applied + method justified.)

S1. (a) Campaign A: social media post; audience is the general public, especially people who scroll social feeds. Campaign B: letter to a member of parliament; audience is one federal member (and through them, parliament). (b) Campaign A relies on an official statistic (the UNHCR figure) plus an emotional appeal. Campaign B relies on a dated local case study (the volunteer program and the families it helped) plus a specific request. (c) Campaign A is more effective for raising money now: its reach is large, and its call to action — donate through the link — takes one tap, fitting a fundraising purpose. Campaign B is more effective for changing policy: its audience is the person with the power to act, and its evidence speaks to that person’s job. (d) Campaign A assumes people moved by an image and a figure will donate without needing detail; Campaign B assumes one member can be persuaded by local evidence and that a formal letter deserves a formal reply. (e) Any argument that states a claim; gives two real, named, dated pieces of evidence; acknowledges and answers one piece of counter-evidence; and names a method justified against a stated audience and purpose. Marks are for the reasoning, not the conclusion reached.