

Civics and Citizenship Level 9

Chapter 5 — Skills: participating and communicating

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How well democratic decision-making works

Curriculum link — VC2HC10S06

- VC2HC10S06.E01
- VC2HC10S06.E02

You have already met the machinery of democracy in earlier sections: parliaments, elections and referendums. This section asks a different question — not *what* the machinery is, but *how well it works*. “How well” is the hard part: two people can look at the same decision and disagree about whether it was effective. So this section first builds a set of questions for judging effectiveness, then applies them at two bigger scales — a national decision, the republic referendum of 6 November 1999, and a world decision, the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Theory

Decisions at every scale

Democratic decision-making happens at many scales, and the rule changes as the group gets bigger (Figure 1).

From the classroom to the world: the scales of decision-making

As the group gets bigger, the decision rule changes.

Scale	Who gets a say	The rule
Classroom	All students and the teacher	Talk it through — consensus, or a vote
School	Students, teachers and families (e.g. student council, school council)	Discussion, then a vote
Local community	Residents, through their local council	Elected councillors decide by majority
Victoria	Victorians, through the Victorian Parliament	Majority of elected members
Australia	Australians, through the Commonwealth Parliament	Majority in both houses of parliament
The Australian Constitution	The Australian people, at a referendum	Double majority: a national majority AND a majority of states (4 of 6)
The world	Countries, through the United Nations and treaties	Negotiation, one country one vote, then each country chooses whether to join

Referendums are the subject of section 1A; this section looks at when each scale of decision is needed.

A table of seven scales of decision-making from the classroom to the world. For each scale it shows who gets a say and the rule used: classroom — all students and the teacher, consensus or a vote; school — students, teachers and families through councils, discussion then a vote; local community — residents through their local council; Victoria — Victorians through the Victorian Parliament; Australia — Australians through the Commonwealth Parliament; the Australian Constitution — the Australian people at a referendum, needing a double majority; the world — countries through the United Nations and treaties.

Figure 1. From the classroom to the world: as the group gets bigger, the decision rule changes.

The scope of consensus

At the smallest scales, groups often try **consensus** first — a decision everyone in the group can support, reached by talking rather than voting. Consensus has real strengths and real limits (Figure 2).

Consensus: when it works well, and when it breaks down

A consensus is a decision everyone in the group can support.

When consensus works well

- The group is small, so everyone can be heard.
- The group shares the same goal.
- There is enough time to talk the matter through.
- Everyone is willing to listen and adjust their idea.
- The result has everyone's backing, so it is easy to carry out.

When consensus breaks down

- The group is large — hearing everyone takes too long.
- People in the group have competing goals.
- One person, or a few people, can block what almost everyone else wants.
- The decision is delayed, or watered down until it says little.
- The scale is too big — a whole state, nation or the world.

When consensus stops working, groups turn to voting and majority rule — but they do not have to stop trying to listen.

Two panels. “When consensus works well”: the group is small so everyone can be heard; the group shares the same goal; there is enough time to talk the matter through; everyone is willing to listen and adjust their idea; the result has everyone’s backing so it is easy to carry out. “When consensus breaks down”: the group is large so hearing everyone takes too long; people have competing goals; one person or a few can block what almost everyone else wants; the decision is delayed or watered down; the scale is too big — a whole state, nation or the world.

Figure 2. The scope of consensus: the conditions under which it works well, and the conditions under which it breaks down.

Figure 2 sets the scope of consensus-building. It works in small groups with a shared goal and time to talk. It breaks down as the group grows, goals compete, or one person can block the rest. Past that point, a group needs democratic decision-making of a different kind — a vote under an agreed rule, at a bigger scale.

When a bigger scale is needed: the referendum

Some decisions are too big to leave to a parliament’s ordinary **majority rule** — deciding by vote, where the side with more than half the votes wins. The Australian Constitution sets out the powers of the parliaments, so a parliament should not be able to change it on its own. Section 128 of the Constitution therefore requires a **referendum** — a vote in which the Australian people decide a proposed change to the Constitution — and a referendum passes only with a **double majority** (Figure 3). The step-by-step machinery is the subject of section 1A; here we use one real referendum to evaluate the rule.

The double majority rule — and how it decided the 1999 republic referendum

Section 128 of the Australian Constitution sets the rule for changing the Constitution.

First leg — a national majority

More than half of all voters across Australia vote YES.

Second leg — a majority of states

More than half of voters vote YES in at least 4 of the 6 states. Territory votes count in the national total only.

Applied to the republic referendum, 6 November 1999

- First leg: 45.13% of voters across Australia voted YES — less than half. The first leg was not met.
- Second leg: no state had a YES majority. The second leg was not met either.

Result: NOT CARRIED

The Constitution was not changed. Australia's head of state remained the monarch. The same double majority rule still applies to any future referendum.

Question voted on: to establish Australia as a republic, with a President appointed by a two-thirds majority of members of the Commonwealth Parliament. Source: Australian Electoral Commission, Referendum dates and results (retrieved 26 August 2026).

Two rule boxes. First leg — a national majority: more than half of all voters across Australia vote YES. Second leg — a majority of states: more than half of voters vote YES in at least 4 of the 6 states, with territory votes counting in the national total only. Applied to the republic referendum of 6 November 1999: 45.13% of voters across Australia voted YES, so the first leg was not met; no state had a YES majority, so the second leg was not met either. Result: NOT CARRIED.

Figure 3. The double majority rule, and how it decided the republic referendum of 6 November 1999 (source on the figure).

Notice the judgement built into the rule. A national majority alone would let the most populous states decide for everyone. A majority of states alone could pass a change that most voters oppose. Both legs together mean a change needs broad support across the country *and* across the states.

What does “effective” mean?

“Effective” is a contested word. Two people can agree on what happened and still disagree about whether it worked, because they define “worked” differently. In this section we give the word a working meaning: a democratic decision is effective when it does well on six questions (Figure 4). And where people disagree, we apply the **steelman rule**: present each side at its strongest before judging it.

Six questions for judging a democratic decision

In this section, "effective" means doing well on these six questions.

1 Voice	Did the people affected get a real say?
2 Informed choice	Did decision-makers get accurate information and real options?
3 Fair counting	Were the votes counted honestly, under a fair rule?
4 Acceptance	Can people accept the result — including people who disagree with it?
5 Workability	Can the decision actually be carried out and made to work?
6 Review	Can the decision be checked later, and changed if it is not working?

"Effective" is a contested word — two people can agree on what happened and still disagree on whether it worked. These six questions make the judgement answerable.

Six numbered questions for judging a democratic decision: 1 Voice — did the people affected get a real say? 2 Informed choice — did decision-makers get accurate information and real options? 3 Fair counting — were the votes counted honestly, under a fair rule? 4 Acceptance — can people accept the result, including people who disagree with it? 5 Workability — can the decision actually be carried out and made to work? 6 Review — can the decision be checked later, and changed if it is not working?

Figure 4. Six questions that give "effective" a working meaning.

Global issues: who decides?

Climate change does not stop at borders, but there is no world parliament and no world government. So how can the world decide anything? There are three main ways (Figure 5).

How decisions get made about global issues

There is no world parliament. These are the three main ways countries decide together.

Body	Who gets a say	How it decides
The UN General Assembly	All 193 member countries. Each country has one equal vote — the only UN body where every country is represented.	Important questions need two-thirds of votes; other questions need more than half. Its decisions state the position of the world's countries.
The UN Security Council	15 member countries: 5 permanent members (China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, the United States) and 10 elected for two years.	Needs 9 of 15 votes — but any permanent member can block a decision with a veto. Its decisions bind all member countries under the UN Charter.
Treaty conferences (e.g. the UN climate conferences, called COPs)	Countries negotiate the words of an agreement, then each country chooses for itself whether to join (to ratify).	The agreement binds only the countries that ratify it. Each country then acts through its own laws and plans.

Source: United Nations, "Main Bodies"; Security Council, "Voting System"; General Assembly (retrieved 26 August 2026).

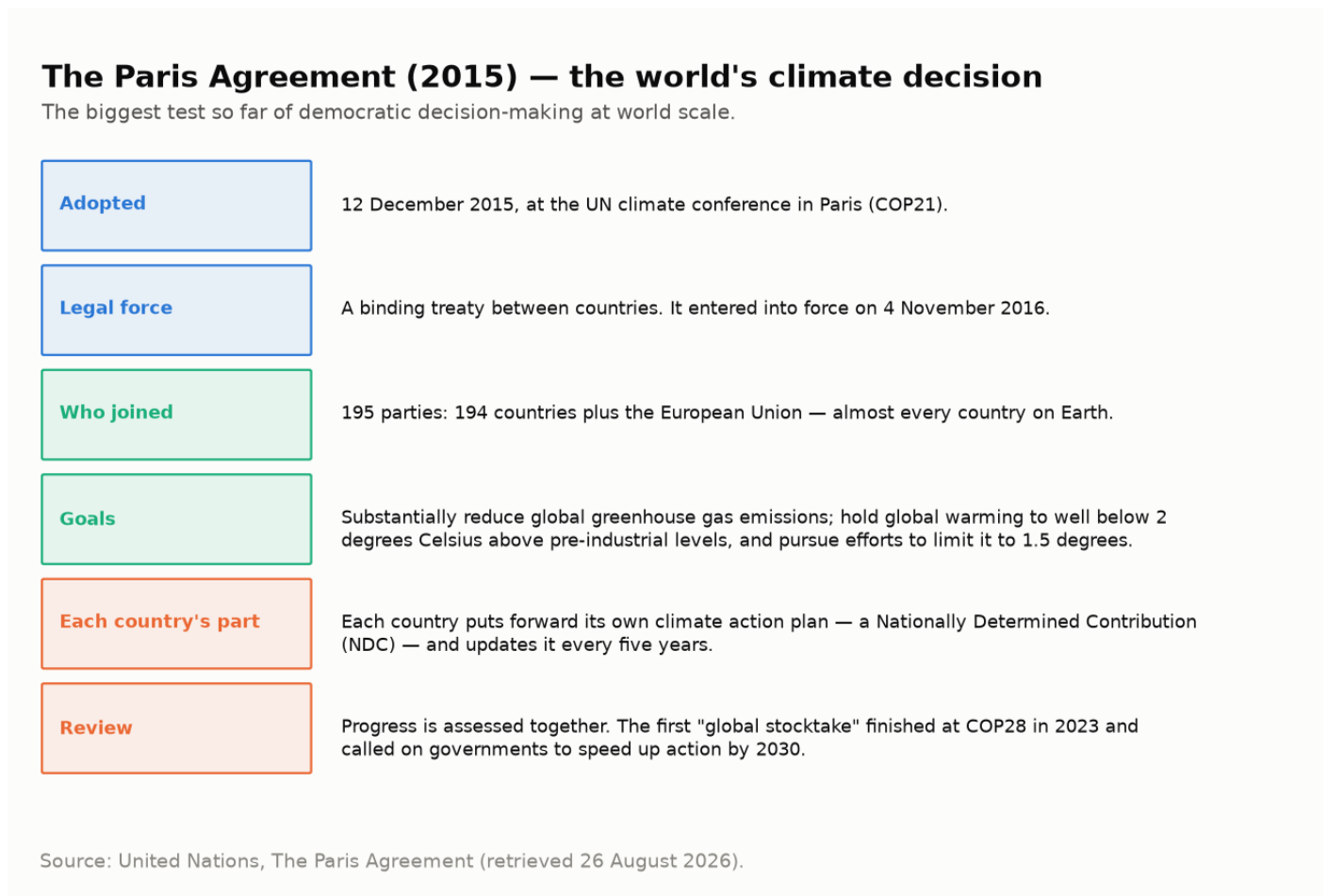
A table of the three main ways decisions get made about global issues. The UN General Assembly: all 193 member countries, each with one equal vote; important questions need two-thirds of votes, others need more than half. The UN Security Council: 15 member countries — 5 permanent members (China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, the United States) and 10 elected for two years; needs 9 of 15 votes, but any permanent member can block a decision with a veto. Treaty conferences such as the UN climate conferences (COPs): countries negotiate the words of an agreement, then each country chooses for itself whether to join.

Figure 5. How decisions get made about global issues (source on the figure).

Two words matter here. A **veto** is a special vote that lets one country block a decision even if all the others support it. A **treaty** is an agreement between countries, and to **ratify** it is to formally confirm that a country will stand by it; a treaty binds only the countries that ratify it. Australia's own part in these decisions — what the Australian Government does at regional and global level — is the subject of section 1D.

The world's biggest climate decision

The Paris Agreement (2015) is the biggest test so far of democratic decision-making at world scale (Figure 6).



A fact table for the Paris Agreement. Adopted: 12 December 2015 at the UN climate conference in Paris (COP21). Legal force: a binding treaty between countries, in force from 4 November 2016. Who joined: 195 parties — 194 countries plus the European Union, almost every country on Earth. Goals: substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions; hold warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees. Each country's part: its own climate action plan, a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), updated every five years. Review: progress assessed together; the first global stocktake finished at COP28 in 2023 and called on governments to speed up action by 2030.

Figure 6. The Paris Agreement (2015) — the world's climate decision (source on the figure).

A model evaluation

Figure 7 shows what a balanced evaluation of the Paris Agreement looks like: the strongest case FOR, the strongest case AGAINST, then a judgement.

A model evaluation

Question: Is the Paris Agreement an effective piece of democratic decision-making?

The strongest case FOR

- Almost every country on Earth joined one agreement with the same goals (voice).
- Every country sets its own plan, plans are reviewed every five years, and countries are asked to make them stronger (review).
- The rule book for reporting was agreed together, so progress can be checked honestly (informed choice).

The strongest case AGAINST

- There is no world government to make countries keep their promises (workability).
- The plans are up to each country, and together they have not yet added up to the Agreement's goals.
- Countries that produce the most emissions can delay action without penalty.
- Negotiation between 195 parties is slow, and big countries carry more weight than small ones.

Judgement

The Agreement shows democratic decision-making can work at world scale: it produced one rule-based agreement almost every country signed, with built-in review. But its effectiveness depends on countries keeping and strengthening their own promises, because nothing can force them to.

A model evaluation in three panels. The strongest case FOR: almost every country joined one agreement with the same goals (voice); every country sets its own plan and plans are reviewed every five years (review); the rule book for reporting was agreed together (informed choice). The strongest case AGAINST: there is no world government to make countries keep their promises (workability); the plans have not yet added up to the goals; the biggest emitters can delay without penalty; negotiation between 195 parties is slow and big countries carry more weight. Judgement: the Agreement shows democratic decision-making can work at world scale, but its effectiveness depends on countries keeping and strengthening their own promises.

Figure 7. A model evaluation: steelman both sides, then judge.

Words to keep handy

Figure 8 collects the six key words for this section. Each is defined where it first appears above.

Six words to keep handy

Each is defined where it first appears in this section.

consensus a decision everyone in the group can support	majority rule deciding by vote: the side with more than half the votes wins
referendum a vote in which the Australian people decide a proposed change to the Australian Constitution	double majority what a referendum needs to pass: a national majority AND a majority of voters in at least 4 of the 6 states
veto a special vote that lets one country block a decision even if all the others support it	ratify to formally confirm that a country will stand by a treaty it helped negotiate

Six term cards. consensus — a decision everyone in the group can support. majority rule — deciding by vote: the side with more than half the votes wins. referendum — a vote in which the Australian people decide a proposed change to the Australian Constitution. double majority — what a referendum needs to pass: a national majority AND a majority of voters in at least 4 of the 6 states. veto — a special vote that lets one country block a decision even if all the others support it. ratify — to formally confirm that a country will stand by a treaty it helped negotiate.

Figure 8. Six words to keep handy.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded (E01: the scope of consensus, and the bigger-scale decision)

Read Source A, then trace and evaluate the republic referendum of 6 November 1999. The question voted on was: to establish Australia as a republic, with a President appointed by a two-thirds majority of members of the Commonwealth Parliament.

Source A — How the Australian Constitution is changed

Effect of section 128 of the Australian Constitution, summarised

1. A bill proposing the change passes both houses of the Commonwealth Parliament by an absolute majority (more than half of all members in each house).
2. Members of parliament who support the change write the YES case; members who oppose it write the NO case.
3. The Australian Electoral Commission sends a pamphlet with both cases to every household with an enrolled voter.
4. Australians vote YES or NO. Voting is compulsory for citizens aged 18 and over.
5. The change passes only with a double majority: more than half of all voters across Australia, AND more than half of voters in at least 4 of the 6 states. Territory votes count in the national total only.
6. If the double majority is reached, the Governor-General signs the bill and the Constitution is changed.

Summarised from section 128 of the Australian Constitution as explained by the Parliamentary Education Office, Referendums and plebiscites fact sheet (retrieved 26 August 2026).

A document extract titled “Source A — How the Australian Constitution is changed”, the effect of section 128 summarised in six steps: 1 a bill proposing the change passes both houses of the Commonwealth Parliament by an absolute majority; 2 supporters write the YES case and opponents write the NO case; 3 the Australian Electoral Commission sends a pamphlet with both cases to every household with an enrolled voter; 4 Australians vote YES or NO, with voting compulsory for citizens aged 18 and over; 5 the change passes only with a double majority — more than half of all voters across Australia and more than half of voters in at least 4 of the 6 states; 6 if the double majority is reached, the Governor-General signs the bill and the Constitution is changed.

Figure 9. Source A — how the Australian Constitution is changed (source on the figure).

Reasoning	Comment
Step 1 — why not consensus? The decision affected millions of Australians. Consensus needs a small group with time to talk (Figure 2), so at national scale it is out of scope.	This is the analysis E01 asks for: consensus-building has a scope, and past it a bigger-scale form of democratic decision-making is needed.
Step 2 — why not parliament alone? Source A, step 1: parliament can <i>start</i> a change, but cannot finish it. Step 5 gives the finishing rule.	The Constitution sets out parliament’s own powers, so the people — a bigger scale again — must approve any change.
Step 3 — apply the double majority. Figure 3: 45.13% of voters across Australia voted YES, so the first leg failed; no state had a YES majority, so the second leg failed too. Result: not carried.	The rule gave a clear, checkable answer. Everyone could see which leg failed and why.
Step 4 — evaluate with two of the six questions. <i>Fair counting</i> : an independent commission ran the vote, enrolment was compulsory, and the rule was known in advance (Source A, steps 3–5). <i>Acceptance</i> : both cases were sent to every household, the result was accepted by the losers, and the same rule still applies today.	A decision can be effective as a <i>process</i> even when the answer is “no”. Effectiveness is about how the decision was made, not about getting a particular result.

Example 2 — scaffolded (E02: democratic decision-making about a global issue)

Can the world decide democratically? Read Source B, then evaluate the Paris Agreement against three of the six questions.

Source B — The goals of the Paris Agreement

The Agreement's long-term goals and how countries take part, summarised

Background: adopted at the UN climate conference (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015; in force from 4 November 2016.

The Paris Agreement sets long-term goals to guide all nations: to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions; to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees; to assess collective progress from time to time; and to provide finance to developing countries.

The Agreement works on a five-year cycle. Every five years, each country is expected to put forward an updated national climate action plan — known as a Nationally Determined Contribution, or NDC — saying what it will do to cut emissions and to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Summarised from the United Nations, The Paris Agreement (retrieved 26 August 2026).

A document extract titled “Source B — The goals of the Paris Agreement”, summarised. Background: adopted at the UN climate conference (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015; in force from 4 November 2016. The Agreement sets long-term goals: substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions; hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees; assess collective progress from time to time; provide finance to developing countries. It works on a five-year cycle: every five years each country is expected to put forward an updated national climate action plan, known as a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

Figure 10. Source B — the goals of the Paris Agreement (source on the figure).

Reasoning	Comment
Voice. Almost every country on Earth — 195 parties — joined one agreement with the same goals (Figure 6). At the UN General Assembly every country, big or small, has one equal vote.	Measured by voice, world-scale decision-making is more democratic than it looks: no country was left out of the room.
Review. Source B: each country’s plan is updated every five years, and collective progress is assessed together; the first global stocktake (COP28, 2023) called for faster action.	A built-in review cycle means the decision can be checked and strengthened — question 6 in Figure 4.
Workability. There is no world government to make countries keep their promises; the biggest emitters can delay without penalty, and the national plans have not yet added up to the goals (Figure 7).	This is the honest weakness: the Agreement depends on countries choosing, again and again, to stand by what they signed.
Judgement. The Paris Agreement shows democratic decision-making <i>can</i> work at world scale — one rule-based agreement, almost universal membership, built-in review — but its effectiveness depends on countries keeping and strengthening their own promises, because nothing can force them to.	“Potential” is exactly the right word from E02: the potential is real, and so are the limits.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Match each term to its definition, checking against Figure 8. Terms: *consensus*, *majority rule*, *referendum*, *double majority*, *veto*, *ratify*. (a) A vote in which the Australian people decide a proposed change to the Constitution. (b) A special vote that lets one country block a decision even if all the others support it. (c) A decision everyone in the group can support. (d) What a referendum needs to pass: a national majority AND a majority of voters in at least 4 of the 6 states. (e) To formally confirm that a country will stand by a treaty it helped negotiate. (f) Deciding by vote: the side with more than half the votes wins.

Q2. For each decision below, use Figure 1 to name (i) the scale it belongs to and (ii) the rule used. (a) A class choosing where to go on an excursion. (b) Closing a local street for a community festival. (c) Changing the Australian Constitution. (d) Agreeing a world goal for cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Q3. Figure 2 sorts the conditions under which consensus works well and breaks down. Place each scenario in a column of Figure 2 and give one reason: (a) a squad of eight players choosing a team name; (b) 1200 students choosing a new uniform colour; (c) a family choosing where to have dinner.

Q4. Use Figure 3 and any two questions from Figure 4 to evaluate the republic referendum of 6 November 1999. For each question you choose, quote one fact from Figure 3 in support.

Q5. Using Figure 5: (a) name the body in which every country has one equal vote; (b) name the body whose decisions bind all member countries under the UN Charter; (c) name the five countries that can block a decision in that body, and the name of this special vote; (d) state what makes a treaty binding on a particular country.

Q6. Using Figure 6: (a) when and where was the Paris Agreement adopted? (b) how many parties joined, and who are they? (c) what must each country put forward every five years, and what is it called? (d) which question in Figure 4 is served by the five-year review cycle?

Un scaffolded

Q7. A school of 1200 students proposes to decide its new canteen menu by consensus. Using Figure 2, explain why consensus is likely to break down at this scale, and propose a better rule for the decision.

Q8. The double majority has two legs. Explain what could go wrong if only one leg were required: (a) if only the national majority were needed; (b) if only the majority of states were needed. Conclude with one sentence on what the two legs achieve together.

Q9. Evaluate the Paris Agreement as a piece of democratic decision-making. Follow the steelman rule: the strongest case FOR, the strongest case AGAINST, then your own reasoned judgement in six to eight lines.

Q10. A classmate claims: "There is no world government, so global issues cannot be decided democratically." Use Figure 5 to test the claim. Name at least two ways in which a country's own democratic machinery is still part of a global decision, and give your reasoned judgement on the claim.

Source-based inquiry

Read Sources A and B (Figures 9 and 10), then answer parts (a) to (c).

Q11. (a) Compare the decision rules: what does a change to the Australian Constitution need that the Paris Agreement does not, and what does the Paris Agreement require of each country that a referendum does not? (b) Choose two questions from Figure 4 on which the s 128 process does well, and two on which the Paris process does well; give one fact from the sources for each. (c) Argument: "Democratic decision-making can work at world scale." Using both sources, write a reasoned argument of six to eight lines, presenting the strongest case on each side before your judgement.

Answers

Q1. (a) referendum. (b) veto. (c) consensus. (d) double majority. (e) ratify. (f) majority rule. **Q2.** (a) Classroom — talk it through, consensus or a vote. (b) Local community — elected councillors decide by majority. (c) The Australian Constitution — referendum with a double majority. (d) The world — negotiation through the United Nations and treaty conferences, then each country chooses whether to join. **Q3.** (a) Works well: small group, shared goal, everyone heard. (b) Breaks down: the group is too large for everyone to be heard, and tastes compete. (c) Works well: small group with (mostly) a shared goal and time to talk. **Q4.** See fully-worked solutions for a model pair. **Q5.** (a) The UN General Assembly. (b) The UN Security Council. (c) China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States; a veto. (d) The country ratifying it — a treaty binds only the countries that ratify it. **Q6.** (a) 12 December 2015, at the UN climate conference in Paris (COP21). (b) 195 parties: 194 countries plus the European Union. (c) Its own climate action plan, called a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). (d) Question 6, review — progress is assessed together and plans are updated every five years. **Q7.** See fully-worked solutions. **Q8.** See fully-worked solutions. **Q9.** See fully-worked solutions. **Q10.** See fully-worked solutions. **Q11.** (a) A constitutional change needs a double majority of voters — a binding decision imposed on everyone once carried; the Paris Agreement needs no world-wide vote, but each country must separately ratify the treaty and then act through its own laws and plans. (b) See fully-worked solutions for a model answer. (c) See fully-worked solutions.

Fully-worked solutions

Q7. Consensus needs a small group in which everyone can be heard, time to talk the matter through, and a shared goal (Figure 2). A school of 1200 students fails the first two conditions: hearing 1200 views would take far too long, and tastes in food compete. A few loud voices could also block what most students want. So consensus is likely to break down, and a better rule is majority rule with a real voice for everyone affected — for example, a secret ballot of all students over a shortlist drawn up with the student council, so the decision is both quick to reach and easy to accept.

Q8. (a) With only the national majority, the most populous states could outvote the rest: a change could pass even if voters in most states opposed it, because the national total simply adds people together. (b) With only the majority of states, a change could pass while most voters across Australia voted against it, because the less populous states together hold a minority of the people. Together, the two legs mean a change needs broad support among the people *and* broad support across the states — neither the big states nor the small ones can impose a change on the other.

Q9. *Model response.* FOR: almost every country on Earth joined one agreement with the same goals; every country sets its own plan and reports against an agreed rule book; and the five-year cycle with a global stocktake builds in review and the chance to strengthen promises. AGAINST: there is no world government to enforce the promises; the biggest emitters can delay without penalty; negotiation between 195 parties is slow; and the national plans have not yet added up to the temperature goals. Judgement: the Paris Agreement is a real piece of democratic decision-making at world scale — its voice, review and acceptance are strong — but its workability is its weak point, so its effectiveness depends on countries choosing to keep and strengthen their promises, and on voters in each country holding their governments to them.

Q10. The claim mistakes “no world government” for “no democratic machinery”. Figure 5 shows two ways a country’s own democracy sits inside a global decision. First, in the General Assembly each country’s position is set by its own government — the one its people elected — and important questions need two-thirds of votes. Second, a treaty binds only the countries that ratify it, and each country decides by its own democratic process whether to ratify it — in Australia, the parliament and (where the Constitution is involved) the people at a referendum. So global decisions are made by democracies agreeing together, not by a world government. Judgement: the claim is half right — there is no world-scale majority rule with enforcement — but wrong to conclude that global issues cannot be decided democratically: the Paris Agreement shows countries can bind themselves, democratically, to shared rules.

Q11(c). Model argument. For: both processes share the ingredients of democratic decision-making. Under s 128, every enrolled voter gets a compulsory, independently run vote with both cases put to them; under the Paris process, almost every country had a voice, the rules for reporting were agreed together, and a five-year review cycle checks progress. In both, the losing side can accept the result because the rule was known and fair. Against: neither is majority rule as a classroom knows it — a referendum can fail even with most voters’ support in some states, and the Paris Agreement cannot force any country to keep its promises, so its workability is weak. Judgement: democratic decision-making can work at world scale, but differently: at national scale a fair rule compels everyone; at world scale, democracies bind themselves — and the effectiveness of that bargain depends on review, on public pressure, and on countries choosing to keep their word.

Sources (all retrieved 26 August 2026): Australian Electoral Commission, Referendum dates and results; Parliamentary Education Office, Referendums and plebiscites fact sheet; United Nations, The Paris Agreement; United Nations, “Main Bodies”; United Nations Security Council, “Voting System”; United Nations General Assembly.

Taking part, and judging what works: civic participation from local to global

Curriculum link — VC2HC10S07

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- VC2HC10S07.E06

Earlier sections of this book followed the machinery of Australian democracy: the Constitution, the parliaments, law-making, policy, and the courts. This is the **doing** section. It asks two questions: what can you actually do about an issue you care about — right now, before you turn 18 — and how do you judge whether a method of taking part is **effective**? By the end you will have produced one real participation artefact of your own: a letter, a petition draft, or campaign material.

Theory

What is civic participation?

Civic participation is taking part in public life to influence decisions about your community, your country, or the world. The best-known act of participation in Australia is voting. For citizens aged 18 and over, enrolment and voting are **compulsory** (required by law), and that is one reason turnout is so high: at the 2025 federal election about 90.7% of enrolled electors voted, and enrolment reached a record 98.2% of eligible people (Australian Electoral Commission). Australia sits in roughly 13% of the world's democracies that make voting compulsory.

Voting, though, is only one method — and it is not open to you yet. Participation also means writing to members of parliament, petitioning, sending **submissions** (formal written views) to parliamentary **inquiries** (public examinations of an issue, usually run by a committee), joining campaigns, volunteering, and running campaigns of your own. Most of these are open to everyone, at any age.

Eight ways in before 18

People under 18 cannot vote in elections, but they are not shut out of participation. Figure 1 shows eight real methods, each with the person or body it reaches and one real, dated Australian example.

Eight ways you can take part before you turn 18

Each card names who the method reaches, plus one real, dated Australian example.

1. Enrol early

Put your name on the electoral roll now, at 16 or 17.

Reaches: the electoral roll (AEC)
the AEC lets 16 and 17 year olds enrol early, ready to vote at 18.

2. Sign or start a petition

Collect support for a clear request to a parliament.

Reaches: the House or the Senate
petitioning is a right citizens have had since Federation.

3. Write a submission

Send your written views to a committee inquiry.

Reaches: the inquiry committee
anyone may lodge a submission to an inquiry - no age limit.

4. Write to your local member

A short letter or email about one issue.

Reaches: your federal or state member
parliaments list every member's contact details online.

5. Join a campaign group

Become a member and join organised action.

Reaches: the group and the wider public
Amnesty International Australia has a youth membership.

6. Apply for a youth council

Give advice straight to a government body.

Reaches: the agency running the council
the eSafety Youth Council, members aged 13-24, began in 2022.

7. Volunteer

Hands-on community and environment work.

Reaches: your local community
Clean Up Australia and National Tree Day welcome volunteers.

8. Run a school campaign

Raise awareness and push for change at school.

Reaches: your school community
Victorian schools join the ResourceSmart Schools program.

Sources: Australian Electoral Commission; Parliament of Australia (aph.gov.au); eSafety Commissioner; Amnesty International Australia; Clean Up Australia; Planet Ark; Sustainability Victoria (all retrieved 26 August 2026).

Eight cards in two columns, one for each method of participation available before age 18 - enrol early, sign or start a petition, write a submission, write to your local member, join a campaign group, apply for a youth council, volunteer, and run a school campaign - each card stating what the method reaches and giving one real Australian example.

Figure 1. Eight ways you can take part before you turn 18.

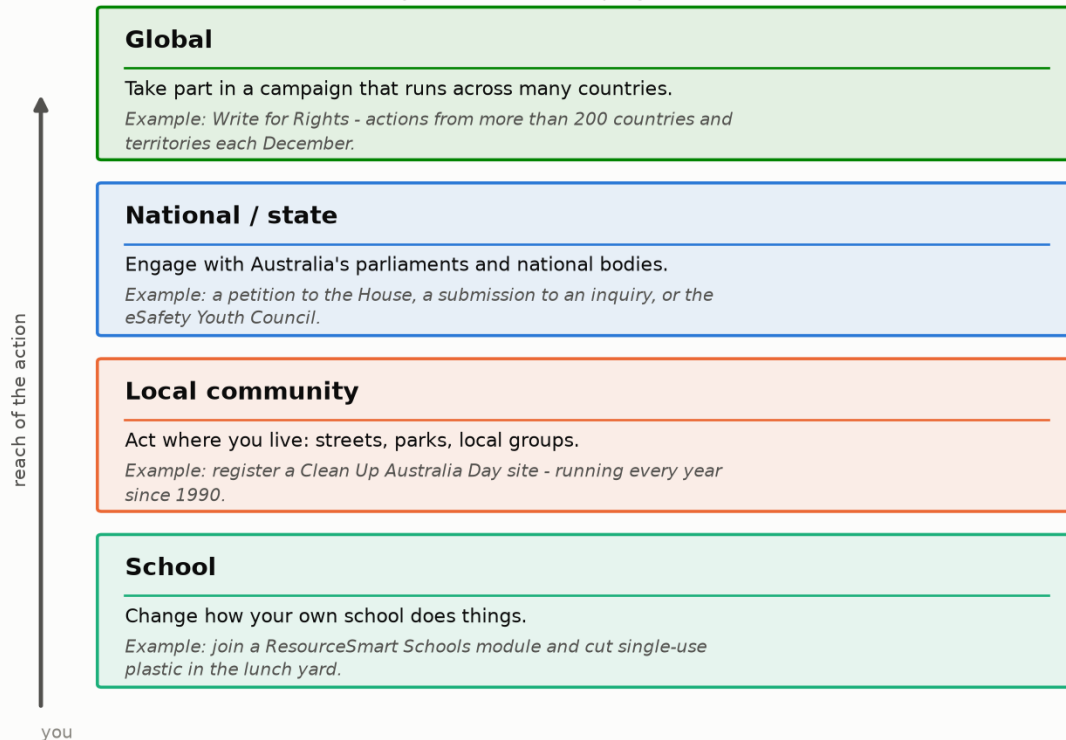
Notice the pattern: every method reaches a person or body with some power over the issue — a member, a committee, a minister, a school leadership, or the public, whose opinions shape those decision-makers.

From school to global: four scales

The same issue can be worked on at different **scales**: school, local community, national or state, and global. Figure 2 shows the four scales with a real example at each. Most serious campaigns act at several scales at once — a school plastic-waste campaign (school scale) can feed a letter to your federal member (national scale) and sit inside a worldwide movement on waste (global scale).

From school to global: four scales of action

The same issue can be worked on at every scale - most campaigns use several.



Sources: Amnesty International Australia; Parliament of Australia; eSafety Commissioner; Clean Up Australia; Sustainability Victoria (all retrieved 26 August 2026).

Four stacked bands labelled global, national/state, local community and school, with one example action in each band and an arrow on the left marked 'reach of the action' pointing up from 'you'.

Figure 2. Four scales of action, from school to global.

Judging methods: five questions

“Effective” is a contested word. One person calls a campaign effective if a law changes; another calls it effective if it changes what people know and care about. So before judging any method, name your standard. This section uses the five questions in Figure 3, applied with the steelman rule from section 1B: the same questions, at their strongest, to methods you dislike and methods you like. A poster campaign can fail the reach question but pass the voice question; a petition can pass reach but fail the check question if nobody follows it up.

Five questions to judge a method of participation

"Effective" is a contested word: people weigh these questions differently. Name your standard first.

1. Reach

Does it reach the person or body that can make the decision you care about?
A letter to the responsible minister reaches further than one to a bystander.

2. Voice

Does it show real support - numbers, evidence or lived experience?
A petition with 500 local signatures shows more support than one post.

3. Lawful and safe

Does it stay within the law and keep everyone taking part safe?
Peaceful, planned action protects the people and the message.

4. Effort over time

Can you keep it going long enough to matter, or does it fade in a week?
A campaign with a plan for the whole term beats a one-off burst.

5. Check

Can you find out afterwards whether it changed anything?
A petition gets a published response; a poster campaign is harder to measure.

The standard used in this section. Apply the same five questions to every method, including the ones you favour.

Five stacked bands, each with one question for judging a method of participation - reach, voice, lawful and safe, effort over time, and check - with a short example under each question.

Figure 3. Five questions to judge a method of participation.

Letters and petitions: how they work

Two of the oldest methods are also two of the most reachable: the letter and the **petition** — a formal written request that states a point of view and asks a parliament or institution for action (or for no action).

A letter works best when it keeps the shape in Figure 4: one issue, a clear ask, evidence, and a real name. Your local federal member is the usual target for a national issue; every parliament lists its members and their contact details online. (The parliaments these letters and petitions land in are mapped in section 1B.)

A model letter to a member of parliament

The same shape works for a state member or a senator. Keep it to one page.

A Your name
Year 9, [your school]
[your suburb], [state]
26 August 2026

B The Hon. [name] MP
Member for [your electorate]
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Dear [member's name],

C RE: Cutting single-use plastic waste

D I am a Year 9 student at [school]. I am writing to ask you to support stronger action to cut single-use plastic waste.

E Australia produces about 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste each year - about 100 kilograms for every person - and only 13% of it is recovered. At my school, the bins overflow with single-use packaging every day.

F I would like to know what you are doing about this problem, and whether you would support laws that reduce single-use plastics. I would be glad to send you our class survey results.

G Yours sincerely,
[your signature and name]

A Your details and the date - who is writing, and when.

B The right person: your local federal member. Parliaments list each member and electorate on their websites.

C One issue only, named in the subject line.

D Say who you are and state your request in the first lines.

E Give your reasons with evidence - here, national plastic-waste figures from Clean Up Australia, plus what you see at school.

F Say exactly what you want the member to do, and offer something (your class survey). A specific ask is easier to answer.

G Finish politely and sign your name - a real person, not a form.

Model text written for this section. Plastic-waste figures: Clean Up Australia, about page (retrieved 26 August 2026).

A one-page model letter to a member of parliament about single-use plastic waste, with markers A to G down the left side and seven matching callout boxes on the right explaining each part: your details and the date, the right person, one issue in the subject line, who you are and your request, reasons with evidence, the exact ask, and a polite signed ending.

Figure 4. A model letter to a member of parliament, with each part explained.

Petitioning is one of the rights citizens have had since Federation, and the only way an individual can directly bring a concern before the Parliament. Figure 5 shows the Commonwealth path: a petition that meets the House's rules is presented to the House of Representatives, referred to the responsible government minister for a response, and published in full in **Hansard** (the official written record of parliamentary proceedings) and on the Petitions List. The Senate has its own rules: a Senate petition is addressed to the Senate, presented by a senator, and certified by the Clerk of the Senate. The House's Petitions Committee checks form and content against the rules — it does not edit petitions, check their facts, or take sides — and it invites you to email a draft for advice before you collect signatures.

How a petition moves through the Commonwealth Parliament

Verified from the Parliament of Australia's petitions pages.



Sources: Parliament of Australia - Petitions hub, Senate Petitions, Standing Committee on Petitions (aph.gov.au, retrieved 26 August 2026).

A flow chart of six steps - draft, check the rules, collect signatures, presented to the House, to the minister, on the public record - above three fact panels: petitioning is a right since Federation; Senate petitions follow their own rules; and the Committee checks form and content only.

Figure 5. How a petition moves through the Commonwealth Parliament.

Case study: Write for Rights

A **transnational** campaign is one that runs across many countries at once. (Australia's part in transnational law and institutions as a whole is covered in sections 2C and 3A.) The clearest example for this section is Amnesty International's **Write for Rights** campaign (Figure 6). Every year in the lead-up to Human Rights Day (10 December), supporters in more than 200 countries and territories write letters, sign petitions and take other actions for a set of people whose rights are under attack. It began small — 2,326 letters in 1991 — and by 2023 had grown to 5.8 million letters, emails and petition signatures in a single year; in 2024 more than 4.66 million actions were counted worldwide. Australians take part through Amnesty International Australia.

Case study: Write for Rights

Amnesty International's transnational letter-writing campaign for people whose rights are under attack.

What and when

Every year, in the lead-up to Human Rights Day (10 December), supporters in more than 200 countries and territories write letters, sign petitions and take other actions for people whose rights are under attack. The campaign has run for more than 20 years. Each year it focuses on a set of cases - in 2025, ten people from ten countries.

How it has grown

1991	2023	2024
2,326	5.8 million	4,662,600+
letters in the early campaign	letters, emails and petition signatures	4.66m+ actions; 376,500+ cards and letters

How Australians take part

Through Amnesty International Australia

Australians write letters, sign petitions, host events and add their actions to the global count. Young people can join as youth members.

Why letters can work

Letters show the person at risk the world is watching, and tell authorities their acts are recorded. Amnesty says it has changed more than 100 lives.

Two of the 2025 cases

Sai Zaw Thaike, a Myanmar photojournalist, is serving 20 years with hard labour for cyclone reporting. Sonia Dahmani, a Tunisian lawyer, was jailed for speaking about racism.

Source: Amnesty International Australia, Write for Rights campaign page (amnesty.org.au, retrieved 26 August 2026). Totals count letters, emails, signatures and other actions; they vary by year.

A case-study page in three panels: what and when (a yearly campaign before Human Rights Day, running for more than 20 years); how it has grown (2,326 letters in 1991, 5.8 million actions in 2023, over 4.66 million in 2024); and how Australians take part, with two of the 2025 cases named.

Figure 6. Case study: Write for Rights.

Why letters? The strategy has two targets. Letters to the person at risk say “the world is watching” and cut their isolation; letters to the authorities show that the case carries a political cost. Amnesty says the campaign has helped change the lives of more than 100 people over two decades. Steelman the other side: critics say letter-writing is cheap effort that governments can ignore, and a letter cannot by itself free anyone — some cases run for years. Amnesty’s own answer is that letters are one tool inside a wider strategy of public pressure, and the record of more than 100 changed lives is evidence that the strategy can work.

Citizens acting for sustainability

Sustainability and climate are issues where citizen action is clearly visible in Australia (Figure 7). (Treaty-based climate responses between governments are the subject of section 1D; here the focus is what citizens themselves do.) Clean Up Australia began when Ian Kiernan organised ‘Clean Up Sydney Harbour’ in 1989 and 40,000 people turned up; it went national in 1990 and is now the nation’s largest community-based environmental event. Planet Ark’s National Tree Day, running since 1996, has planted more than 28 million trees. In Victoria, the free ResourceSmart Schools program (run by Sustainability Victoria) helps schools embed sustainability in their facilities, their community and their curriculum, with students leading real projects. And the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, founded in 2007, is a youth-led movement running climate campaigns. These are contributions citizens make themselves — alongside, and often pushing, government responses to climate change.

Four ways Australians act for sustainability

Real organisations you can join or support before you turn 18.

Clean Up Australia Day

Community group; the nation's largest community-based environmental event. Began after Ian Kiernan's 'Clean Up Sydney Harbour' in 1989 drew 40,000 people; went national in 1990. Families, schools and local groups register sites and clear litter from streets, parks and waterways.

National Tree Day (Planet Ark)

Australia's largest community tree-planting and nature care event, established 1996. Over 28 million trees planted since 1996. Schools Tree Day runs on the last Friday in July and National Tree Day on the last Sunday; anyone can join a local planting event.

ResourceSmart Schools

A free Victorian Government program run by Sustainability Victoria. Helps schools embed sustainability in their facilities, their community and their curriculum; schools complete modules and earn certificates. Students lead real projects.

Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC)

A youth-led climate movement, founded in 2007. Works 'to educate, inspire and mobilise young people to win campaigns for a safe climate'. Young people run campaigns, events and projects across Australia.

Sources: Clean Up Australia (cleanup.org.au); Planet Ark National Tree Day; Sustainability Victoria ResourceSmart Schools; AYCC (all retrieved 26 August 2026).

Four stacked panels, one per organisation - Clean Up Australia Day, National Tree Day (Planet Ark), ResourceSmart Schools, and the Australian Youth Climate Coalition - each stating who runs it and what a participant actually does.

Figure 7. Four ways Australians act for sustainability.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded (choosing and justifying a method)

Your school's bins overflow with single-use packaging every day. A student survey of 214 students finds 78% want the canteen to switch to reusable or recyclable options. Choose a method from Figure 1 and justify it with the five questions of Figure 3.

Reasoning	Comment
Find the decision-maker first. The canteen contract and the school's waste rules are decided by the school leadership, not by Canberra.	Reach: the method must reach the school. A petition to federal parliament would miss this target; a school campaign with a formal proposal to the principal reaches it.
Carry the survey result: 214 students, 78% in favour.	Voice: real numbers from your own school, not one opinion. This is strong evidence the leadership can check.
Plan a poster week, a waste audit, and a meeting with the principal; everything on school rules and everyone safe.	Lawful and safe: an awareness campaign inside the school is exactly that.
Set dates for the whole term: audit in week 2, posters in week 4, meeting in week 6, trial change in week 8,	Effort over time: a term-long plan, not a one-off burst.

Reasoning	Comment
review in week 10.	
Ask the canteen for packaging numbers again next term, and report back to students.	Check: success is measurable — less single-use packaging in the bins.

Verdict: on the standard “the school changes its practice”, a school campaign plus a formal proposal is the effective choice; the survey gives it voice, and the review gives it a check. A petition to parliament would score well on other issues but fails reach here.

Example 2 — scaffolded (evaluating a transnational campaign)

Evaluate Write for Rights using the same five questions.

Reasoning	Comment
The letters go to two audiences with a stake: the authorities holding the person, and the person at risk. Global volume makes the case hard to ignore.	Reach: aimed at the exact decision-makers, in more than 200 countries at once.
4.66 million actions in 2024; at least 376,500 cards and letters of support.	Voice: mass, counted, public support — the opposite of one opinion.
Writing is peaceful and open; the letters also protect the person named by making their case visible.	Lawful and safe: safe for senders, and designed to lower the risk to the person at risk.
The campaign has run every year for more than 20 years; cases repeat until something changes.	Effort over time: a standing campaign, not a burst.
Amnesty tracks outcomes and reports that more than 100 people’s lives have been changed.	Check: there is a public record of results.

Verdict: on all five questions the strategy scores highly — which is why it is this section’s case study. Its limit is honest and worth naming: letters alone cannot force a government to act, and critics are right that some cases run for years. The fairest reading is that letter-writing works as part of a wider strategy of public pressure, not instead of one.

Participation project — your artefact

This section is not complete until you have **made** something. Choose one contemporary issue (any scale from school to global), then do the three steps below. Your finished artefact is your evidence of participation.

Step 1 — Fill in the canvas. Complete all eight boxes of Figure 8 for your issue. The plastic-waste issue from Example 1 would fill boxes 1-4 like this: issue and evidence — overflowing bins plus our 214-student survey; goal — canteen switches to reusable options by next term; who decides — the principal and the canteen contractor; message — “214 of us want bins we are not ashamed of; switch the canteen.”

Your campaign planning canvas

Fill in all eight boxes before you act. Boxes 1-4 set the case; boxes 5-8 make it real.

1. Issue and evidence

What exactly is the problem, where is it happening, and what is your evidence? Name your sources.

2. Goal

What change do you want? Make it one clear, winnable ask - not 'fix everything'.

3. Who decides

Which person or body can actually make that change? Your audience is them - plus whoever influences them.

4. Message

One sentence someone could repeat after hearing it once. Facts + why it matters + the ask.

5. Methods

Pick methods that reach the decision-maker: letter, petition, awareness campaign, submission - combine several.

6. Timeline and roles

What happens each week, and who does what? Effort over time is what separates campaigns from bursts.

7. What you will make

The artefact itself: the letter, the petition text, the posters, the presentation. Keep it as evidence.

8. How you will check

Decide now what success would look like and how you will find out: a reply, a published answer, a change.

Box 7 is your participation artefact - the actual letter, petition or campaign material you produce, not a description of it.

Eight numbered boxes in two columns - issue and evidence, goal, who decides, message, methods, timeline and roles, what you will make, and how you will check - each with a short prompt; a planning canvas to complete before acting.

Figure 8. Your campaign planning canvas.

Step 2 — Make one artefact. Choose one:

- a **letter** to a member of parliament or a councillor about your issue, using the exact shape of Figure 4; or
- a **petition draft** that meets the rules in Figure 5 (addressed to the right house, a stated view, a clear request); or
- an **awareness-raising campaign for your school** about a global issue — for example, a poster series for Write for Rights or a climate campaign, with a one-page plan saying where the posters go and how you will measure attention (E03).

If you send the letter or start the petition for real, do it with a teacher's or parent's knowledge. The Petitions Committee's advice line and draft-checking email (Figure 5) exist exactly for this.

Step 3 — Self-check. Run your artefact through Figure 9 and tick every box before you hand it in. Keep the artefact and your filled-in canvas together.

Before you hand it in: the artefact self-check

Tick every box. The boxes match the five questions in Figure 3, plus the rules for your method.

☐

My artefact is finished and real

The letter is written or the petition text drafted - real, not described.

☐

It names one issue and gives evidence

A reader can see the problem and where my facts come from.

☐

It reaches the right people (Reach)

It goes to the person or body that can make the decision.

☐

It shows real support (Voice)

It carries numbers, evidence or lived experience, not one opinion.

☐

It is lawful and safe

Everything stays within the rules, and no one taking part is at risk.

☐

It can be kept going (Effort over time)

There is a plan beyond the first week: dates, roles, next steps.

☐

It follows the rules of its method

A petition meets the rules; a letter has the right address and a real name.

☐

I can check what it achieved (Check)

I know what response to look for - a reply, a published answer - and when.

Keep a copy of your artefact and your filled-in canvas together - they are your evidence of participation.

A checklist of eight tick boxes for the finished artefact: finished and real; names one issue with evidence; reaches the right people; shows real support; lawful and safe; can be kept going; follows the rules of its method; and has a check for what it achieved.

Figure 9. The artefact self-check.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Figure 1 shows eight methods. Name three that a 16-year-old could begin this term, and for each give the “Reaches” line from its card.

Q2. Place each action at its main scale (school / local community / national-state / global): (a) registering a Clean Up Australia Day site at your local park; (b) writing a letter for Write for Rights; (c) lodging a submission to a parliamentary inquiry; (d) a poster campaign in your school hallways.

Q3. A classmate’s whole plan for a littered local park is: “I’ll post one video online and see what happens.” Apply questions 2 (Voice), 4 (Effort over time) and 5 (Check) from Figure 3. For each, say what is weak and give one fix.

Q4. In Figure 4: which letter block carries (a) the evidence, (b) the ask, (c) the proof that a real person wrote it?

Q5. True or false? Correct the false ones. (a) The Petitions Committee rewrites petitions it disagrees with. (b) A petition that meets the rules is presented to the House and referred to the responsible minister. (c) The full text of a presented petition is published in Hansard.

Q6. (a) Give two numbers from Figure 6 that show Write for Rights is transnational. (b) From Figure 7, name one organisation a Year 9 student could join and say what they would actually do.

Un scaffolded

Q7. The only shaded playground in your suburb is closing for a redevelopment. Choose one method of participation and justify it with three of the five questions in Figure 3. Name the one question your plan is weakest on, and say how you would strengthen it.

Q8. Explain two reasons why mass letter-writing can pressure a government, and one reason why it can fail. Use the Write for Rights case study for evidence on both sides.

Q9. “On sustainability, citizen action matters as much as government action.” Discuss this claim using two organisations from Figure 7 and one limit of citizen action.

Q10. For an issue you choose, draft three sentences of a letter: (a) a subject line naming one issue; (b) one evidence sentence with a named source; (c) one ask sentence saying exactly what you want the member to do.

Source-based inquiry

Q11. Read Source A, a model petition written for this section with the House rules in mind.

Source A — model petition (written for this section; rules checked against the Parliament of Australia petitions pages, retrieved 26 August 2026)

To the House of Representatives: We, the undersigned, ask the House to require all Australian Government events to stop providing single-use plastic water bottles by 2027. Single-use plastic is a growing waste problem: Australia produces about 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste each year and recovers only 13% of it (Clean Up Australia). Signed: [names and signatures]

- (a) Identify two features of Source A that match the rules shown in Figure 5. (b) Name one improvement to make before collecting signatures, and the free source of advice Figure 5 mentions. (c) If the petition meets the rules, list the two places its full text will appear after presentation.
-

Answers

Q1. Any three of the eight, with matching “Reaches” lines; e.g. sign or start a petition — the House or the Senate; write a submission — the inquiry committee; run a school campaign — your school community.

Q2. (a) local community; (b) global; (c) national-state; (d) school.

Q3. Voice: one post is one opinion — fix: attach a count (a survey, a signed list). Effort: one video fades in a week — fix: a small schedule (three posts, a clean-up day). Check: “see what happens” measures nothing — fix: name a target (the council’s parks team) and a response to look for.

Q4. (a) block E; (b) block F; (c) blocks A and G together (your details, your signature).

Q5. (a) False — the Committee does not edit petitions or take sides; it checks form and content only. (b) True. (c) True (Hansard and the Petitions List).

Q6. (a) Any two of: actions from more than 200 countries and territories; 5.8 million actions in 2023; 4.66 million actions in 2024. (b) e.g. National Tree Day — join a local planting on the last Sunday in July.

Q7. Answers vary; a strong answer names the decision-maker (the council), picks a matching method (petition or submission to the council; letters to councillors), and admits its weakest question honestly.

Q8. Pressure: volume shows real political cost; visibility makes the case harder to ignore (and comforts the person at risk). Failure: letters cannot force action — some governments accept the cost, and some cases run for years.

Q9. For: Clean Up Australia and National Tree Day move millions of citizens and change real places; citizen pressure pushes governments further. Limit: volunteers cannot make or enforce laws — binding rules (like waste law) still need parliament.

Q10. Answers vary; check the shape against Figure 4 blocks C, E and F.

Q11. (a) It is addressed to the House; it states a view and asks for action (a clear request). (b) Get advice on the draft before collecting signatures — the Petitions Committee invites email drafts (advice line 02 6277 2152). (c) Hansard and the Petitions List.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. A 16-year-old can, for example: (1) **enrol early** — Reaches: the electoral roll (AEC); (2) **sign or start a petition** — Reaches: the House or the Senate; (3) **volunteer** — Reaches: your local community. All three need no adult permission beyond the ordinary, and all appear in Figure 1 with dated Australian examples.

Q2. (a) A registered clean-up site is **local community** action. (b) Write for Rights is **global** — the same campaign runs in 200+ countries. (c) A submission to a parliamentary inquiry is **national-state** — it engages a Commonwealth committee. (d) A poster campaign in your hallways is **school** scale. The issue (waste) is the same; only the reach changes.

Q3. Voice: one video is one opinion; it shows no evidence of support. Fix: carry a number — a 50-name signed list or a quick survey. **Effort over time:** a single post fades in a week. Fix: a small schedule — post, then a clean-up day, then a follow-up. **Check:** “see what happens” has no target and no measure. Fix: name the body that decides (the council’s parks team) and the response to look for (a reply, a works order).

Q4. (a) **Block E** — the national plastic-waste figures plus what the writer sees at school. (b) **Block F** — “what you are doing about this problem, and whether you would support laws...” (c) **Blocks A and G** — your name and address at the top, your signature at the end: a real person, not a form.

Q5. (a) **False.** The Committee does not edit petitions, check their facts, or say whether it agrees; it checks form and content against the rules. (b) **True** — presented to the House, then referred to the responsible minister for a response. (c) **True** — the full text is published in Hansard and on the Petitions List.

Q6. (a) “Supporters in more than 200 countries and territories” and “5.8 million letters, emails and petition signatures in 2023” (or the 2024 total of 4.66 million actions). Both show a campaign that crosses national borders at scale — transnational. (b) Example: **ResourceSmart Schools** — a Year 9 student leads a module project, such as cutting single-use plastic in the canteen, while the school earns its certificate.

Q7. Model answer: the decision-maker is the local council, so the method is a **petition to the council** plus letters to councillors. **Reach:** the council controls the site — the petition goes to the body that decides. **Voice:** signatures from park users show real, counted support. **Lawful and safe:** petitioning is a long-standing right and peaceful by design. Weakest question: **Check** — a council process can stall; strengthen it by asking for a written response and a date, and putting the question on a council meeting agenda.

Q8. Reasons it pressures: (1) **volume** — millions of actions make the political cost of ignoring a case visible; (2) **visibility** — authorities know the world is watching, and the person at risk is less isolated. Reason it can fail: letters **cannot compel** — a government may accept the cost and refuse anyway, which is why some cases run for years and why Amnesty treats letters as one tool inside wider public pressure.

Q9. The claim is right in part. Citizen action delivers things governments cannot: Clean Up Australia has mobilised millions of volunteers to clean real streets and waterways since 1990, and National Tree Day has planted 28 million trees since 1996 — outcomes no minister can order. Citizen action also sets the agenda and keeps pressure on governments. But its limit is real: volunteers cannot make or enforce binding rules. Only parliaments can set waste law or emissions rules, so citizen action matters most when it pushes government action — as the two together, not as a replacement.

Q10. Model (issue: e-waste): (a) “RE: A collection point for household e-waste in [suburb].” (b) “Australia recovers only 13% of its plastic waste, and e-waste is one of the fastest-growing waste streams (Clean Up Australia).” (c) “I ask you to support funding for a staffed e-waste collection point in [suburb], and to tell me what you decide.”

Q11. (a) Two matching features: it is **addressed to the House of Representatives**, and it **states a point of view and asks for action** (“ask the House to require...”). (b) Improvement: have the draft checked before collecting signatures — Figure 5 notes the Petitions Committee invites email drafts for advice (petitions enquiry line 02 6277 2152). (c) After presentation the full text appears in **Hansard** and on the **Petitions List**.

Sources (all retrieved 26 August 2026): Australian Electoral Commission — enrolment page and 2025 federal election participation statistics; Parliament of Australia — Petitions hub, Senate petitions page, and House Standing Committee on Petitions (role of the Committee); eSafety Commissioner — Youth Advisory Council pages; Amnesty International Australia — Write for Rights campaign pages; Clean Up Australia — about pages; Planet Ark — National Tree Day pages; Sustainability Victoria — ResourceSmart Schools pages; Australian Youth Climate Coalition — about page and Legacy Impact Report 2025. Model letter, model petition and canvas written for this section.

Building evidence-based arguments and choosing how to communicate them

Curriculum link — VC2HC10S08

- VC2HC10S08.E01
- VC2HC10S08.E02
- VC2HC10S08.E03
- VC2HC10S08.E04
- VC2HC10S08.E05
- VC2HC10S08.E06
- VC2HC10S08.E07

Everything you have learned in this book — how laws are made, how rights are protected, how citizens take part — becomes useful only when you can do two things with it: build an argument that survives checking, and get that argument to the people who need to hear it. This section teaches both moves. First, how to **construct** an evidence-based argument (Parts 1, 3, 5). Second, how to **communicate** it — choosing the method most likely to work, and judging that choice by evidence (Parts 2, 4, 6, 7). The section ends with an argument task in which the argument itself is the product.

Definitions first — one contested term, defined for this section

The title of this section asks you to decide which method of communication will work *most effectively*.

“Effective” is a **contested term** — a word over whose exact meaning people disagree — and it is contested in a particular way: it is **frame-dependent**, meaning its meaning depends on what you count as success.

Two people can agree on everything a campaign did and still disagree about whether it was effective, because one counts attention gained and the other counts behaviour changed. This section therefore fixes a frame and says so openly:

- In this section, a method of communication is **effective** when it reaches the audience it aimed at *and* helps achieve the purpose it was chosen for. You judge effectiveness by evidence of what actually happened — not by how good the product looks, and not by how much its maker enjoyed making it.

Other frames exist and are not interchangeable with this one. Every question in this section is answerable on this frame alone.

Four more terms are defined where they first appear: **evidence**, **claim**, **audience** and **assumption** (Part 1), **counter-evidence** (Part 1), **internally displaced people**, **persecution** and **resettlement** (Part 3), **deliberation** and **resolution** (Part 6), and **submission** (Part 7). Every task here is marked on the quality of your evidence and reasoning — never on which side of a debate your conclusion lands on. Two opposite conclusions can both earn full marks.

Theory

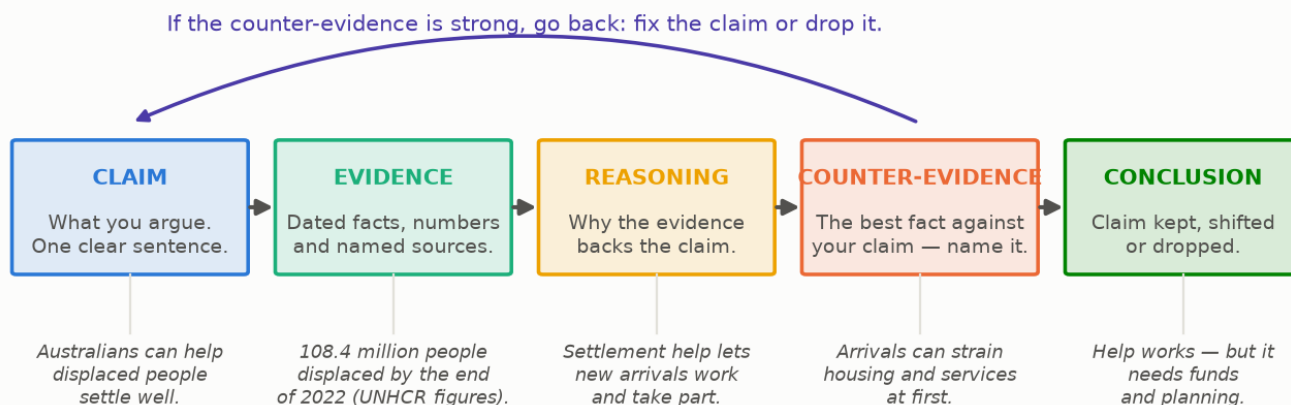
Part 1 — The anatomy of an evidence-based argument

An argument, in this section, is not a fight. It is a claim offered with reasons that other people can check. Four terms first. A **claim** is the one-sentence point you are arguing. **Evidence** is dated facts, numbers and statements from named sources that can be looked up and checked by someone else. An **assumption** is something your claim takes for granted — something that must already be true for the claim to make sense. Your **audience** is the people you want to reach; a claim that makes sense to you can still fail an audience that does not share your assumptions.

An evidence-based argument has five parts, and each one can be checked (Figure 1).

The anatomy of an evidence-based argument

Five parts. Every part can be checked by someone else.



Example — one argument about the displacement crisis, one part per column:

Also check your assumptions: what must already be true for the claim to make sense?

An argument is evidence-based when each part is stated so that another person could check it.

A diagram of the five parts of an evidence-based argument in a row: claim (what you argue, one clear sentence), evidence (dated facts, numbers and named sources), reasoning (why the evidence backs the claim), counter-evidence (the best fact against your claim, named), and conclusion (the claim kept, shifted or dropped). Under each part is one example sentence from a single argument about global displacement. A violet arrow loops back from counter-evidence to claim, labelled: if the counter-evidence is strong, go back, fix the claim or drop it. A line underneath reads: also check your assumptions — what must already be true for the claim to make sense?

Figure 1. The five parts of an evidence-based argument, with one worked example running across them.

Three habits separate strong arguments from weak ones:

1. **Name your counter-evidence.** Counter-evidence is the best checked fact you can find *against* your own claim. Naming it makes your argument stronger, not weaker: it shows you tested the claim rather than decorating it. If the counter-evidence turns out to be stronger than your evidence, follow the loop in Figure 1 — fix the claim or drop it.
2. **Audit your assumptions.** Write down what must already be true for your claim to make sense, then check each item. Arguments usually fail on an assumption nobody said out loud.
3. **Use different perspectives.** The curriculum asks you to build arguments out of your civics and citizenship learning — its knowledge and its concepts — *and out of perspectives that differ from your own*. An argument built from only one perspective is fragile: the first person with a different view finds the hole you never looked for. Seek out the strongest version of the opposing view and answer it — do not answer a weak version you invented.

Part 2 — Methods of communication, and how to choose between them

A good argument can be wasted in the wrong form. The same claim can be a speech, a poster, a petition, a letter or a social media post — and the choice changes who hears it and what they can do next. Figure 2 lists seven methods you can choose from. (An **infographic** — a page that explains something mainly through images, numbers and very short text — belongs with the poster family.)

Methods of communication you can choose from

Each method suits some purposes and some audiences better than others.

Method	What it is	What it is good at
Speech or talk	Presenting your case to a live audience	Answering questions on the spot
Poster or infographic	One page of image and short text	Being seen fast — noticeboards and feeds
Petition	A signed call for action, given to a decision-maker	Showing how many people agree
Letter to a member of parliament	A written case sent to an elected representative	Reaching the people who vote on laws
Social media campaign	Posts, tags and video around one message	Reaching many people fast, at low cost
Fundraising appeal	Asking people to give money to a cause	Turning sympathy into spending power
Community event or stall	A visible, in-person activity	Drawing attention and letting people ask

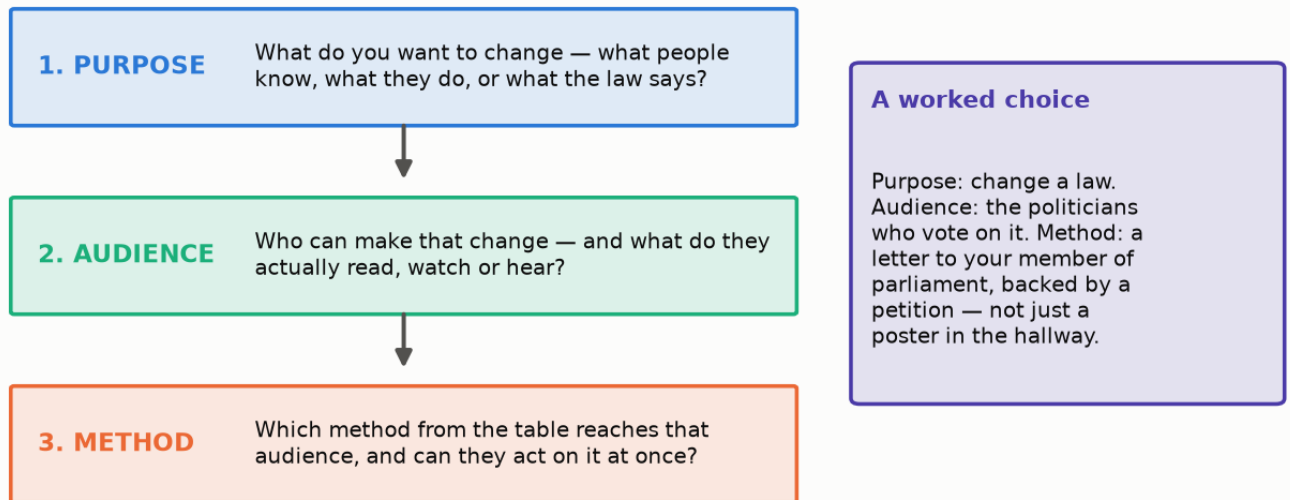
You will judge which method fits your purpose and audience in Part 2 and Part 7.

A table of seven methods of communication. Speech or talk: presenting your case to a live audience; good at answering questions on the spot. Poster or infographic: one page of image and short text; good at being seen fast, on noticeboards and in feeds. Petition: a signed call for action given to a decision-maker; good at showing how many people agree. Letter to a member of parliament: a written case sent to an elected representative; good at reaching the people who vote on laws. Social media campaign: posts, tags and video around one message; good at reaching many people fast at low cost. Fundraising appeal: asking people to give money to a cause; good at turning sympathy into spending power. Community event or stall: a visible, in-person activity; good at drawing attention and letting people ask questions.

Figure 2. Seven methods of communication and what each is good at.

Choosing between them is not a matter of taste. Ask three questions, in order (Figure 3).

Choosing a method: three questions, in order



Judge a method by evidence of whether it worked — not by how much you enjoyed making it.

A flow of three numbered questions for choosing a method of communication. One, purpose: what do you want to change — what people know, what they do, or what the law says? Two, audience: who can make that change, and what do they actually read, watch or hear? Three, method: which method from the table reaches that audience, and can they act on it at once? Beside the flow, a worked choice in a box: purpose, change a law; audience, the politicians who vote on it; method, a letter to your member of parliament backed by a petition, not just a poster in the hallway. The footer reads: judge a method by evidence of whether it worked, not by how much you enjoyed making it.

Figure 3. Choosing a method: purpose, then audience, then method.

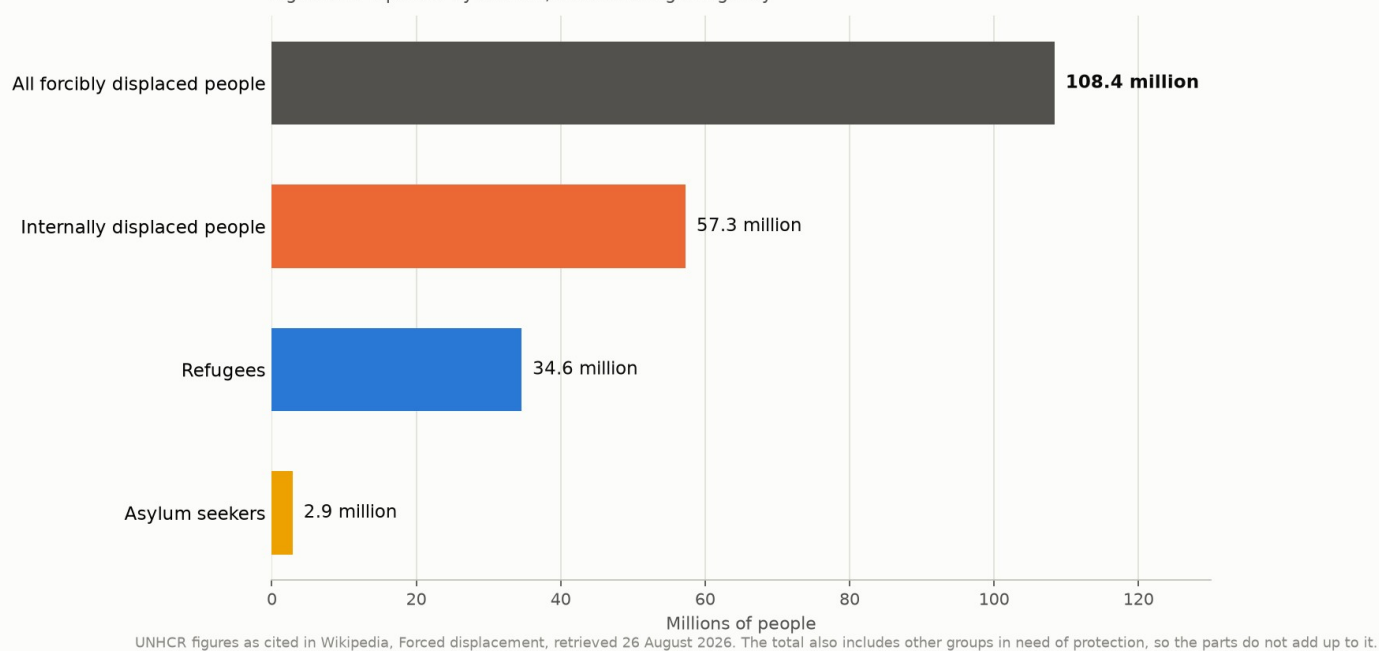
Notice the order. You cannot pick a method until you know your **purpose** — what you want to change: what people *know*, what they *do*, or what the *law* says. And you cannot judge a method until you know your audience — who can make that change, and what they actually read, watch or hear. A poster in the school hallway can reach students; it cannot reach the politicians who vote on laws. Keep the footer of Figure 3: a method is judged by evidence of whether it worked.

Part 3 — A global crisis mapped: forced displacement

Now the knowledge part of an argument. This section uses one real global crisis as its working case: **forced displacement** — people forced to leave their homes by war, persecution or disaster. The United Nations agency for refugees, UNHCR, counted **108.4 million** forcibly displaced people worldwide by the end of 2022 (Figure 4).

Forced displacement worldwide, end of 2022

Figures as reported by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency



A horizontal bar chart of forced displacement worldwide at the end of 2022, in millions of people: asylum seekers 2.9 million; refugees 34.6 million; internally displaced people 57.3 million; all forcibly displaced people 108.4 million. A note explains the figures are as reported by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and that the total also includes other groups in need of protection, so the parts do not add up to it.

Figure 4. Forced displacement worldwide, end of 2022 (source on the figure).

Three groups in Figure 4 need separate definitions — they are often mixed up in public debate:

- A **refugee** is a person outside their own country who cannot return because they have a well-founded fear of **persecution** — that is, being targeted and put in danger for who they are or what they believe (the definition Australia is bound by under the 1951 Refugee Convention — see section 2C).
- An **asylum seeker** is a person who has asked to be recognised as a refugee and whose claim has not yet been decided. Every refugee was first an asylum seeker; not every asylum seeker is found to be a refugee.
- **Internally displaced people** are people forced from their homes but still inside their own country. They are the largest group in Figure 4 — 57.3 million of the 108.4 million.

The total is bigger than the three groups added together because UNHCR's count also includes other groups in need of protection. That gap is itself a lesson in reading numbers: check what a total contains before you divide it up.

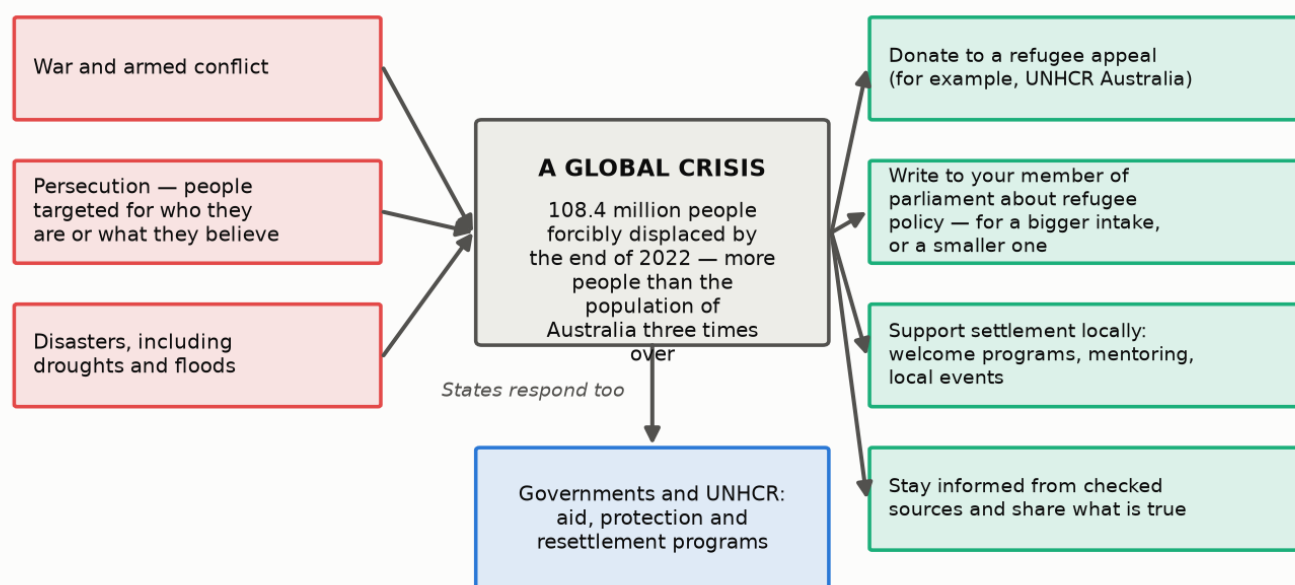
What causes this crisis, and what can be done about it? Figure 5 maps both — and it is the shape your own flow chart can take for the task in Worked example 1.

A global crisis mapped: forced displacement

Causes on the left, citizen responses on the right. This is the shape your own flow chart can take.

CAUSES

HOW CITIZENS CAN RESPOND



Australia is bound by the 1951 Refugee Convention (see section 2C); its yearly refugee intake is set by the government.

A flow chart of the global displacement crisis. Three cause boxes on the left: war and armed conflict; persecution, meaning people targeted for who they are or what they believe; and disasters including droughts and floods. Arrows lead to a centre box: a global crisis — 108.4 million people forcibly displaced by the end of 2022. From the centre, arrows lead to four citizen-response boxes on the right: donate to a refugee appeal, for example UNHCR Australia; write to your member of parliament about refugee policy, for a bigger intake or a smaller one; support settlement locally through welcome programs, mentoring and local events; and stay informed from checked sources and share what is true. A lower box notes that governments and UNHCR also respond, with aid, protection and resettlement programs. The footer notes that Australia is bound by the 1951 Refugee Convention (see section 2C) and that its yearly refugee intake is set by the government.

Figure 5. A global crisis mapped: causes on the left, citizen responses on the right (source on the figure).

Two things to notice about Figure 5. First, citizens are not the only responders: governments and UNHCR carry the biggest load — aid, protection, and **resettlement** programs, where refugees are moved to a new country that gives them permanent protection. Australia's part in this is set by the government each year: in 2015–16, Australia's refugee intake was capped at 13,750 places. What that number should be is a live policy debate — reasonable people argue for a bigger intake and for a smaller one, and both sides get heard through the methods in Part 2 (letters, petitions, campaigns). Second, the citizen responses listed include people on every side of that debate. That is deliberate: an evidence-based argument is about *how* you argue and *what* you argue from, not about which side you must land on.

The causes in Figure 5 connect to what you have already studied: war and armed conflict (the global context of section 1D), persecution (the reason the Refugee Convention exists — section 2C), and disasters such as droughts and floods (section 1D).

Part 4 — A poster that shows real rights

Communication is not only about global crises. The curriculum also asks you to make a poster that *demonstrates* rights — the rights Australians and Victorians hold. The key word is *demonstrates*: the poster must show rights that

actually exist, held by real people, under named law. A poster full of invented rights fails the task no matter how good it looks.

Where do those rights come from? Two sources you have already met:

- The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, with 48 countries voting in favour, none against and eight abstaining. It lists 30 articles of basic rights. It is a declaration, not a treaty: it sets a standard rather than binding countries by itself (section 2C explains how international instruments become Australian law).
- The **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)**, which received royal assent on 25 July 2006 and came into full effect on 1 January 2008. The Charter is a Victorian law that protects rights including the right to life, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, privacy, and equality before the law. Section 2B covers the Charter in full, including what it can and cannot do.

Figure 6 shows a model poster and the design decisions behind it.

A model poster for the human rights task

One poster, and the design decisions behind it.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Rights held by Victorians under the Charter

Right to life
The law must protect your life.

Freedom of expression
You may say what you think, within the law.

Peaceful assembly and association
You may gather peacefully with others.

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic) — see section 2B for the full list

Find out what your rights mean — ask, read, speak up

Why this poster works

- One big title, readable across a room
- Three or four rights only — not the whole list
- Each right in plain words a Year 9 student could use
- One call to action, not five
- The source named, so the rights can be checked
- Colour helps, but words carry the message

Your poster must show the rights Australians and Victorians hold — Charter rights, and/or rights from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

*A model poster and an analysis of it. The poster is titled **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS**, subtitled *rights held by Victorians under the Charter*, and shows three rights in plain words: *right to life, the law must protect your life; freedom of expression, you may say what you think within the law; peaceful assembly and association, you may gather peacefully with others*. Under them, the poster names its source, *the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*, and gives one call to action: *find out what your rights mean — ask, read, speak up*. Beside the poster, six checks explain why it works: *one big title readable across a room; three or four rights only, not the whole list; each right in plain words a Year 9 student could use; one call to action, not five; the source named so the rights can be checked; colour helps, but words carry the message*. The footer notes *the poster must show the rights Australians and Victorians hold, from the Charter and/or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*.*

Figure 6. A model rights poster, and the design decisions behind it.

The design decisions are as important as the content. A poster is seen for seconds, usually from a distance, by people who did not choose to read it. So: one big title; a handful of rights in plain words, not the whole list; one call to action;

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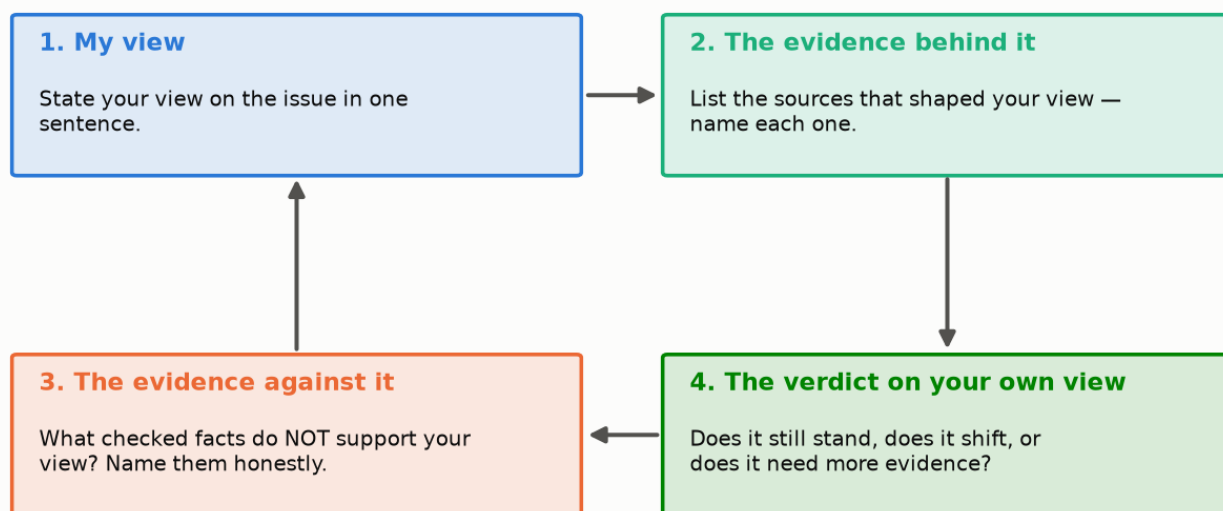
and the source named, so anyone can check the rights are real. Every choice serves the purpose and the audience from Part 2.

Part 5 — Reflecting on how you came to your view

Before you argue, find out where your view actually came from. The curriculum asks you to use reflective tools to examine how you came to your perspective on a contemporary issue, what evidence you used — including evidence that does *not* support your perspective. Figure 7 is the tool this section uses.

A reflective tool: how did I come to my view?

Use it before you argue — and after.



Step 3 is the one most people skip. An argument that names its own counter-evidence is stronger, not weaker.

A reflective tool in four connected boxes, in a cycle. One, my view: state your view on the issue in one sentence. Two, the evidence behind it: list the sources that shaped your view, naming each one. Three, the evidence against it: what checked facts do not support your view — name them honestly. Four, the verdict on your own view: does it still stand, does it shift, or does it need more evidence? Arrows join the boxes in a cycle. The footer reads: step 3 is the one most people skip; an argument that names its own counter-evidence is stronger, not weaker.

Figure 7. A reflective tool in four steps, used before arguing and after.

Step 3 is the point of the tool. Most people can list what supports their view; far fewer can name the checked facts that go against it. Being able to do that is not a weakness in your position — it is the mark that your position has been tested. Notice also that step 4 has three possible verdicts, and two of them involve changing your mind. A reflective tool that can only confirm what you already believed is not a tool; it is a mirror.

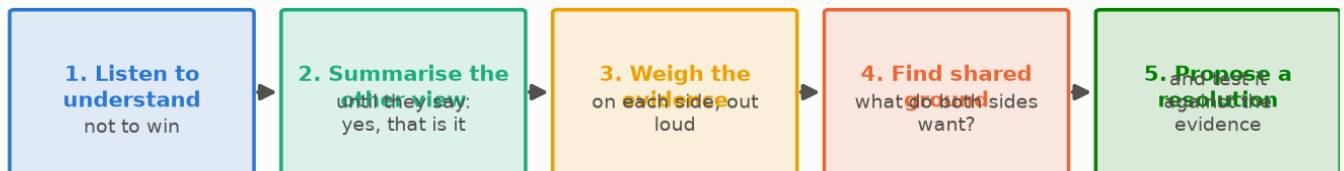
Part 6 — Deliberating towards a resolution

Arguments are usually presented by one person to an audience. **Deliberation** is different: it is slow, careful weighing of reasons *with* other people, done to decide together. A **resolution** is a proposed way of settling the issue being deliberated. You met deliberation's close relative, consensus-building, in section 5A; here the skill is the same — deciding together when no one can simply order the answer.

Figure 8 gives the five moves of a deliberation, used *after* you have listened to your classmates' views.

Deliberating towards a resolution

Five moves, after you have listened to your classmates.



A resolution is a proposed way of settling the issue. Judge it on evidence and on whether it could actually work — not on who suggested it.

Deliberation is how citizens decide together when no one has the power to simply order the answer (see section 5A).

Five steps of deliberation in a row. One, listen to understand, not to win. Two, summarise the other view, until they say: yes, that is it. Three, weigh the evidence on each side, out loud. Four, find shared ground: what do both sides want? Five, propose a resolution and test it against the evidence. Below, a note: a resolution is a proposed way of settling the issue; judge it on evidence and on whether it could actually work, not on who suggested it. The footer reads: deliberation is how citizens decide together when no one has the power to simply order the answer (see section 5A).

Figure 8. Five moves of deliberation, after listening to classmates.

Move 2 is the test: you may answer the other view only once its owner agrees your summary is fair. Move 4 matters because most real disputes share ground — both sides of the refugee-intake debate, for example, usually agree that people fleeing danger deserve help of some kind and that Australia cannot help everyone everywhere. The dispute is about *what to do*, given those shared facts.

Apply the moves to the crisis from Part 3. Three resolutions are commonly proposed for how Australia should respond to global displacement. Each is stated here at its strongest, with the hardest question its supporters face — so you can practise deliberating on them without being told what to think:

1. **Raise Australia's refugee intake and invest more in settlement services.** The strongest case for it: it directly protects people in danger, and settlement help lets new arrivals work and take part, which returns the cost over time. The hardest question for it: where the extra housing, services and funding come from, and how quickly communities can absorb change.
2. **Keep the intake about as it is, but spend more on aid and protection near the crises.** The strongest case for it: each dollar helps far more people closer to home, where most displaced people actually are. The hardest question for it: aid camps are not permanent homes, and some people in danger need protection now, not aid.
3. **Lower the intake and tighten control of who arrives and how.** The strongest case for it: a smaller intake, its supporters argue, keeps settlement services from being stretched and keeps public support for the program that remains. The hardest question for it: whether turning people away is compatible with the protection obligations Australia signed up to (section 2C), and who bears the cost of that choice.

Your job in deliberation is not to pick the resolution you like. It is to weigh the evidence on each, find the shared ground, and test whichever resolution you propose against what is known. That is what “an effective resolution” means in the curriculum's elaboration E04: effective *on the evidence*, not effective *because I won*.

Part 7 — Which method works? Campaigns, and a law-change case

The last three elaborations (E05–E07) ask you to analyse media and campaign methods, judge which methods of communication are most effective, and decide whether some methods work better in particular campaigns. On our definition from the front of this section, that means looking for *evidence of what happened*. Start with three real campaigns — all born in Australia, all still running, all using different methods (Figure 9).

Three real campaigns, three different methods

All three began in Australia. All are still running.

Campaign	Began	Purpose	Main method	Result so far (verified)
Earth Hour	Sydney, 31 March 2007, with WWF	Raise attention for climate change and nature	Lights off together for one hour, 8:30–9:30 pm, late March each year	Took part in 188 countries by 2019; over 190 in 2024
Movember	Melbourne, 2003 (first campaign in 2004)	Fund men's health and start conversations about it	Growing a moustache in November as a talking point, plus events and online pages	\$837 million raised; over 1,200 health projects funded
Plastic Free July	Western Australia, 2011	Change everyday single-use plastic habits	A public promise to refuse single-use plastic, with guides and school resources from the Plastic Free Foundation	174 million participants globally since the start

Sources: Wikipedia, Earth Hour and Movember; plasticfreejuly.org, About us — all retrieved 26 August 2026.

A table of three real Australian-born campaigns. Earth Hour: began in Sydney on 31 March 2007 with WWF; purpose, raise attention for climate change and nature; main method, lights off together for one hour, 8:30 to 9:30 pm, late March each year; result so far, took part in 188 countries by 2019 and over 190 in 2024. Movember: began in Melbourne in 2003 with the first campaign in 2004; purpose, fund men's health and start conversations about it; main method, growing a moustache in November as a talking point, plus events and online pages; result so far, \$837 million raised and over 1,200 health projects funded. Plastic Free July: began in Western Australia in 2011; purpose, change everyday single-use plastic habits; main method, a public promise to refuse single-use plastic, with guides and school resources from the Plastic Free Foundation; result so far, 174 million participants globally since the start. The footer names the sources and the retrieval date.

Figure 9. Three real campaigns, three different methods (sources on the figure).

Read Figure 9 the way this section has taught you: purpose first, then method, then evidence of result.

- **Earth Hour's** purpose is attention — get climate change and nature noticed. Its method fits: a shared event (lights off for one hour) that cameras and news outlets can show, repeated every year. The evidence it worked: spread from one city in 2007 to 188 countries by 2019 and over 190 by 2024. Turning lights off does not fix climate change by itself — that was never the purpose. Attention was.

- **Movember's** purpose is funding plus conversation about men's health — prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental health and suicide prevention. Its method fits: growing a moustache in November makes strangers ask a question, and the answer leads to events and online giving pages. The evidence: \$837 million raised and over 1,200 health projects funded.
- **Plastic Free July's** purpose is changed behaviour — everyday habits around single-use plastic. Its method fits: a public promise to refuse single-use plastic for the month, backed by practical guides and school resources. The evidence: 174 million participants worldwide since it began in Western Australia in 2011.

Three different purposes, three different methods — that is the answer the evidence gives to E07: *yes, some methods work better in some campaigns than others*. Figure 10 puts the pattern in a grid, matching method families to purposes, with a real example in each strong-fit cell.

Which methods fit which purposes?

A fit is a match between a method and what you want it to do.

	Raise awareness	Change behaviour	Raise funds	Change a law or policy
Shared events and media coverage	Earth Hour: lights off, cameras on	can help	rarely used	can help
Public promises with practical help	can help	Plastic Free July: promise plus how-to guides	rarely used	rarely used
Appeals and fundraising events	can help	rarely used	Movember: moustache plus giving pages	rarely used
Submissions, letters, petitions and polls	can help	can help	rarely used	Social media age law: 15,000 submissions; expert letter; youth poll

Key: green = strong fit with a real example · grey = can help · faint = rarely used. Most real campaigns mix several methods — judge the mix against the purpose.

The social media age law is the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024 — see Part 7.

A grid matching four method families against four purposes. Method families down the side: shared events and media coverage; public promises with practical help; appeals and fundraising events; submissions, letters, petitions and polls. Purposes across the top: raise awareness; change behaviour; raise funds; change a law or policy. Strong-fit cells, marked green, carry real examples: shared events with raise awareness — Earth Hour, lights off, cameras on; public promises with change behaviour — Plastic Free July, promise plus how-to guides; appeals and events with raise funds — Movember, moustache plus giving pages; submissions, letters, petitions and polls with changing a law or policy — the social media age law, 15,000 submissions, an expert letter, a youth poll. Other cells are marked can help or rarely used. A key explains the markings, and the footer names the social media age law as the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024.

Figure 10. Which methods fit which purposes — each strong fit carries a real example.

A law-change case: the social media minimum age. The bottom-right cell of Figure 10 is a real Australian case of communication changing a law. In late 2024, the Commonwealth Parliament passed the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024*. It requires certain social media platforms — including Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube and X (listed formally as Twitter) — to take reasonable steps to stop Australians under 16 from holding accounts, with penalties of up to \$49.5 million for platforms that fail. Parliament approved the law on 29 November 2024; it received royal assent on 10 December 2024; and the platform restrictions began on 10 December 2025. There is no parent-consent option: the duty sits on the platforms, watched over by the eSafety Commissioner you met in section 3B.

Before the vote, communication methods from Figure 2 all went to work on this one issue — and this is the case to analyse for E05 and E06:

- A **Senate inquiry** received about 15,000 **submissions** in a single 24-hour period. (A submission is a written view sent to a parliamentary inquiry for it to consider.)
- A media campaign by News Corp newspapers ran under the name “Let Them Be Kids”, arguing against the ban.
- An open letter signed by about 140 researchers and experts set out concerns about the law.
- Polls and surveys gathered young people’s own views, including one involving more than 17,000 young respondents.

This is a politically live issue, so this section gives you the institutional facts and both sides at their strongest, and takes no side — exactly the method of Part 6:

- **The strongest case for the law:** children’s brains are still developing, and the harms linked to social media — bullying, addictive design, harmful content — fall hardest on the youngest users; parents cannot control this alone when platforms are designed to hold attention; and a clear age limit forces platforms to design safer products, the way earlier laws forced other changes to protect children.
- **The strongest case against the law:** social media gives some young people real benefits — connection, support and information, especially for those who feel isolated; a ban may push use into hidden or unregulated spaces rather than stopping it; and the law hands both government and big companies new power over who gets to speak and be heard online, with enforcement still unproven.

Both sides appeal to young people’s wellbeing, and both use the methods of Figure 2 — which is the point of studying the case: you can see *how* arguments travel and be assessed, without being told *which* conclusion to reach.

Worked examples

Example 1 — scaffolded (E01: a flow chart showing a global crisis and citizen responses)

Task. Using the displacement crisis from Part 3, build a flow chart showing what caused a global crisis, and the ways citizens can respond.

Step	What you do	What it looks like for this crisis
1. Name the crisis and its scale	One box, one checked number with a date and a source	Forced displacement: 108.4 million people by the end of 2022 (UNHCR)
2. List the causes	Two to four cause boxes feeding into the crisis box	War and armed conflict; persecution; disasters including droughts and floods
3. Name who else responds	One box below or beside, so citizens are not made to look like the only responders	Governments and UNHCR: aid, protection and resettlement programs
4. List citizen responses	Three to four response boxes fed by arrows from the crisis box	Donate to a refugee appeal; write to your member of parliament for a bigger <i>or</i> smaller intake; support settlement locally; stay informed from checked sources
5. Check the shape	Causes → crisis → responses; every box readable in ten seconds	Compare your chart with Figure 5

What earns the marks here: causes and responses that are *this* crisis’s (not generic), a dated and sourced number, citizens shown alongside governments, and a chart someone else could read without you explaining it.

Example 2 — scaffolded (E06/E07: working out which method will communicate best)

Task. It is November 2024. The social media minimum-age law is before the Parliament. Suppose your class wants Parliament to hear young people’s views before the vote. Determine the most effective method, using the frame from Figure 3.

Step	What you do	Worked answer
1. Purpose	What do you want to change?	Not awareness — the issue is already famous. You want a law to be made with young people's views inside the decision
2. Audience	Who can make that change, and what do they actually read?	MPs and senators voting in late November; they read inquiry submissions, letters from their own voters, and poll results
3. Candidate methods	List options from Figure 2	Inquiry submission; letter to a member of parliament; petition; social media campaign; poll of young people
4. Evidence check	What shows each method reaches that audience?	The Senate inquiry received about 15,000 submissions in 24 hours — evidence submissions are read at exactly this moment. Letters from voters in the member's own electorate are a known channel. Polls were used in this very debate (over 17,000 young respondents in one)
5. Determination	Pick the method or mix, and justify it against purpose and audience	A youth poll written up as a submission to the inquiry, promoted by a short social media campaign so students know the inquiry exists. The poll supplies the evidence; the submission puts it where the voters read; the campaign feeds both
6. Effectiveness test	How will you judge it afterwards, on this section's frame?	Did the submission reach the inquiry before the deadline, and were young people's views reflected in what the inquiry reported and what Parliament then did?

What earns the marks here: a purpose stated before a method is chosen, an audience identified by who actually votes, methods ranked by *evidence they reach that audience* — and an effectiveness test that could be applied after the event. Notice the answer does not say whether the law is a good idea. It does not need to: the skill is the choosing.

Practice questions

Scaffolded

Q1. Using Figure 1: (a) name the five parts of an evidence-based argument; (b) which part do most everyday arguments leave out? (c) Explain why naming that part makes an argument stronger, not weaker.

Q2. Using Figure 2, choose the best method for each purpose and give one reason from the table: (a) tell every student about a new school lunchtime rule by Friday; (b) raise money for a refugee appeal; (c) ask your federal member to support more settlement services in your area.

Q3. Using Figure 4 and Part 3: (a) how many people were forcibly displaced worldwide by the end of 2022? (b) name the two largest groups inside that total; (c) why do the parts not add up to the total? (d) In your own words, state one difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker.

Q4. Using Figure 5: (a) name two causes of forced displacement; (b) name two citizen responses shown; (c) add one citizen response of your own that you could actually do this term, and say which purpose from Figure 3 it serves (what people know, what they do, or what the law says).

Q5. Using Figure 6 and Part 4: (a) name the three rights on the model poster and the Victorian law that protects them; (b) give two design decisions that make the poster work and explain why; (c) why must a rights poster name its source?

Q6. Using Figure 8 and Part 6: (a) name the five moves of deliberation; (b) pick one of the three resolutions on refugee intake from Part 6 that you disagree with, and write the move-2 summary of it — a summary its supporter would accept as fair.

Un scaffolded

Q7. Build a complete evidence-based argument on this claim: “*Australian citizens can make a real difference to a global crisis.*” Include all five parts from Figure 1. Your evidence must contain at least two dated facts from this section, your counter-evidence must be a checked fact (not an opinion), and you must list at least one assumption your claim depends on.

Q8. Compare Earth Hour and Plastic Free July using the frame of this section: (a) state each campaign’s purpose; (b) state each campaign’s main method; (c) explain why each method fit its purpose; (d) give the evidence that each campaign worked. Conclude by saying what the comparison shows about elaboration E07 (whether some methods work better in some campaigns than others).

Q9. On the social media minimum-age law: (a) state the strongest case for the law and the strongest case against it, each in three or four lines; (b) then say which method of communication from Part 7 you judge to have most shaped the outcome — the inquiry submissions, the media campaign, the expert letter, or the youth polls — and give your evidence. Your mark depends on your reasoning, not on whether you support the law.

Q10. Use the reflective tool (Figure 7) on a contemporary issue you hold a view about. Write out all four steps: your view in one sentence; two named sources or facts that shaped it; one checked fact that does *not* support your view; and your verdict — does your view still stand, does it shift, or does it need more evidence?

Argument task

This is the product of the section: the argument itself is the task. Complete steps 1–6, and hand in the artefact from step 4 with the written work from steps 2, 3, 5 and 6 attached.

1. **Choose an issue** from anywhere in this book’s curriculum — a global crisis (Part 3’s displacement case, or one of your own, such as one studied in section 1D), a rights question (Part 4), or a law-change debate (Part 7). Your teacher must approve it.
2. **Build the argument.** All five parts from Figure 1: claim, evidence (at least two dated, checked facts with sources), reasoning, counter-evidence (a checked fact, not an opinion), conclusion. List your assumptions.
3. **Choose your method.** Answer the three questions of Figure 3 in writing: purpose, audience, method — and justify the method against the audience with at least one piece of evidence that the method reaches them.
4. **Make the artefact.** One of: a poster demonstrating real, sourced rights (as in Part 4); a flow chart of a global crisis and citizen responses (as in Part 3); a three-minute speech; a petition plus a letter to a member of parliament; or a one-page social media campaign plan.
5. **Deliberate.** Take your argument to a classmate who disagrees with you. Use the five moves of Figure 8, and write half a page on what — if anything — changed in your argument as a result.
6. **Reflect.** Complete the four steps of Figure 7 on your own finished position.

Checklist before submitting: every fact dated and sourced · counter-evidence named, not hidden · assumptions listed · purpose and audience stated before the method · method justified by evidence it reaches the audience · reflection includes a fact against your own view.

Marking note. This task is marked on the quality of your evidence, reasoning and method choice — never on which side your conclusion takes. Two students with opposite conclusions can both earn full marks; two students with the same conclusion can earn very different marks.

Answers

Q1. (a) Claim, evidence, reasoning, counter-evidence, conclusion. (b) Counter-evidence. (c) Naming it shows the claim has been tested against the best fact against it, so the audience can trust the conclusion survived checking; hiding it leaves the hole for someone else to find. **Q2.** (a) Poster or infographic — seen fast on noticeboards and in feeds. (b) Fundraising appeal — turns sympathy into spending power. (c) Letter to a member of parliament — reaches the person whose vote and local decisions matter; a petition could be added to show numbers. **Q3.** (a) 108.4 million. (b) Internally displaced people (57.3 million) and refugees (34.6 million). (c) The total also includes other groups in need of protection. (d) An asylum seeker has asked to be recognised as a refugee and is waiting for the claim to be decided; a refugee has been recognised, or meets the definition. **Q4.** (a) Any two of: war and armed conflict; persecution; disasters including droughts and floods. (b) Any two of the four responses in Figure 5. (c) Own answer; check that it names a purpose. **Q5.** (a) Right to life; freedom of expression; peaceful assembly and association — Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic). (b) See fully-worked solutions for two acceptable decisions with reasons. (c) So the rights shown can be checked — a poster of invented rights fails the task. **Q6.** (a) Listen to understand; summarise the other view; weigh the evidence; find shared ground; propose a resolution and test it. (b) Own answer; the test is whether the supporter of that view would say “yes, that is it”. **Q7–Q10.** See fully-worked solutions. **Argument task.** See fully-worked solutions for a model outline.

Fully-worked solutions

Q5(b). Model pair of decisions. First: the poster shows only three rights, not the Charter’s full list — because a poster is seen for seconds, a short list gets read while a full list gets skipped. Second: the poster names its source — because the task is to demonstrate rights that really exist, and a named law is what lets anyone check them.

Q7. Model argument. **Claim:** Australian citizens can make a real difference to a global crisis. **Evidence:** (1) By the end of 2022, 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide (UNHCR figures), and Australia’s refugee intake — capped at 13,750 places in 2015–16 — is a government decision that citizens can argue about by letter, petition and campaign. (2) Australian-born campaigns show citizen communication scaling up: Earth Hour, which began in Sydney in 2007, reached over 190 countries by 2024. **Reasoning:** intake levels and settlement funding are decided by politicians citizens can reach; and campaigns begun by ordinary Australians have changed what millions of people notice and do — so citizen action is a real input into how the crisis is handled, not a gesture. **Counter-evidence:** the crisis is global and huge — 108.4 million people — and no Australian citizen action can end wars or persecution, which are the root causes. **Conclusion (kept but shifted):** citizens cannot solve the crisis alone, but they clearly change two things that matter: how much protection Australia offers, and how much attention and funding the crisis receives. **Assumption listed:** that Australia’s democratic channels — letters, petitions, inquiries, campaigns — actually reach decision-makers (supported in Part 7 by the 15,000 submissions received by the Senate inquiry in 24 hours).

Q8. (a) Earth Hour’s purpose is attention for climate change and nature; Plastic Free July’s purpose is changed everyday behaviour around single-use plastic. (b) Earth Hour’s method is a shared event — lights off for one hour — built for cameras and news coverage; Plastic Free July’s method is a public promise backed by practical guides and school resources. (c) Each method fits its purpose: attention needs something visible and repeatable that media can show, which is exactly what one hour of darkness across cities provides; behaviour change needs a personal commitment plus practical help, which is exactly what a promise-plus-guides gives. Each method would fit the other purpose badly: switching off lights changes nothing about plastic habits, and a private promise generates few pictures. (d) Evidence: Earth Hour spread from one city in 2007 to 188 countries by 2019 and over 190 by 2024; Plastic Free July reports 174 million participants globally since 2011. **Conclusion for E07:** the comparison shows some methods work better in some campaigns than others — the method that fits the purpose works; the impressive one for a different purpose would not.

Q9. Model response. (a) **For:** children’s brains are still developing, and harms such as bullying, addictive design and harmful content fall hardest on the youngest users; parents cannot manage this alone when platforms are built to hold attention; and a clear age limit forces platforms to design safer products, as earlier laws forced other safety changes. **Against:** social media gives some young people real benefits — connection, support and information, especially when isolated; a ban may push use into hidden or unregulated spaces rather than stopping it; and the law gives government and big companies new power over who may speak and be heard online, with enforcement unproven. (b) *One*

acceptable judgement: the inquiry submissions most shaped the outcome. The law was being written while the inquiry ran, so submissions arrived at the exact moment decision-makers were weighing the design of the law — about 15,000 in a single 24-hour period, including the views of young people gathered by polls. Awareness methods (the media campaign) could set the climate, but only the inquiry channel put arguments directly into the process that produced the final text. *Other judgements can earn marks if the evidence given supports them — for example, ranking the youth polls highly because they supplied the numbers both sides quoted. The mark is for the reasoning.*

Q10. Model reflection (one of many acceptable). **My view:** the under-16 social media limit will do more good than harm. **Evidence behind it:** (1) the Senate inquiry heard from about 15,000 submissions in 24 hours, many from parents describing harms; (2) the law’s supporters include researchers who signed an open letter about children’s development. **Evidence against it:** more than 17,000 young people had their views gathered in one poll, and many young people reported that online connection matters to their wellbeing — which I cannot dismiss and still call my view tested. **Verdict:** my view still stands, but it shifts in one place: I now think enforcement and review matter more than I first did, because the strongest fact against my view is about what happens after the ban, and nobody has that evidence yet.

Argument task — model outline (for a student who chose displacement). Issue: Australia’s response to forced displacement. Claim: Australia should invest more in local settlement services because settlement is where citizen action works best. Evidence: 34.6 million refugees at end 2022 (UNHCR); intake capped at 13,750 in 2015–16; settlement support named as a citizen response in Figure 5. Reasoning: intake numbers divide people (Figure 5 lists citizens writing for a bigger *or* smaller intake), but settlement help is something citizens can do directly and check. Counter-evidence: settlement spending competes with other services, and arrivals can strain housing at first (Figure 1’s example column admits this). Conclusion: settlement investment is the part of the response citizens can most clearly improve. Method: letter to the local member plus a petition (purpose: change spending; audience: the member whose electorate services are affected; evidence the method reaches them: letters from local voters are the channel Worked example 2 ranks highest). Artefact: the letter and petition. Deliberation record: after a classmate summarised the case for spending near the crises instead, the claim was shifted from “instead of aid” to “as well as a stable aid budget”. Reflection: all four steps completed, including the housing-strain fact against the claim.

Curriculum traceability

Elaboration	Where it is built and practised
.E01 graphical representation / flow chart of a global crisis’s causes and citizen responses	Part 3 (Figures 4–5); Worked example 1; Q4; Argument task step 4
.E02 a poster showing the rights Australians and Victorians hold	Part 4 (Figure 6); Q5; Argument task step 4 (poster option)
.E03 reflective tools — among them, admitting evidence that cuts against your own view	Part 5 (Figure 7); Q10; Argument task step 6
.E04 deliberating on a resolution that could work, after hearing classmates’ views	Part 6 (Figure 8); Q6; Argument task step 5
.E05 analysing media and campaign methods on global issues	Part 7 (Figures 9–10); Q8; Q9
.E06 judging which methods communicate best when responding to a contemporary issue	Part 2 (Figures 2–3); Part 7; Worked example 2; Q9
.E07 working out whether some methods work better in some campaigns than others	Part 7 (Figures 9–10); Q8; Argument task step 3

The content description **VC2HC10S08** is referenced by code at the top of this section; every elaboration is drawn on, and none is taught out of context — each appears where its skill is actually used.

Sources (all retrieved 26 August 2026): Wikipedia, “Earth Hour”; Wikipedia, “Movember”; Wikipedia, “Forced displacement” (UNHCR figures); Wikipedia, “Immigration to Australia”; Wikipedia, “Universal Declaration of

Human Rights”; Wikipedia, “Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006”; Wikipedia, “Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024”; Plastic Free Foundation, plasticfreejuly.org, “About us”. Sections of this book drawn on: 1D (Australia’s global role and disasters), 2B (rights and the Charter), 2C (the Refugee Convention and refugee definitions), 3B (the eSafety Commissioner and online safety), 4B (testing sources), 5A (consensus and deliberation).