

Concepts and skills

The civics and citizenship toolkit

Civics and **citizenship** is the study of the **rights and responsibilities** that Australians have in our society. It looks at how we can work together to shape our nation into one that is fair and just for all. By building an understanding of these rights and responsibilities we can develop our own sense of what it truly means to be Australian.

Civics and citizenship teaches us to 'agree to disagree'. That is, we learn to form our own opinions but accept that other people will have different views. To do this, we must first learn to gather information about various issues before we come to conclusions.

As open-minded citizens we can promote the values of freedom, respect, compassion and equality that allow us to live in harmony.



14A

What are the civics and citizenship concepts?

14B

What are civics and citizenship skills?



chapter 14

Source 1 Parliament House in Canberra is where elected federal politicians meet to make important decisions about how our nation is run.

14.1 Civics and citizenship concepts

Civics and citizenship students can use a wide range of concepts to help them understand the workings of Australia's political and legal systems. These concepts may be used together or as separate ideas. As you learn to use each of these key concepts you will begin to think like an active citizen.

The six key concepts of civics and citizenship are:

- **democracy**
- **democratic values**
- **the Westminster system**
- **justice**
- **participation**
- **rights and responsibilities.**

Democracy

A democracy is a system of **government** run by the people, for the people. In most democratic societies, citizens are involved in the running of society by electing people who will represent them in government. Representatives of the people then develop policies and make **laws** on behalf of the people who have elected them.

The concept of democracy has been around for a long time, with many civilisations and societies throughout history. The term democracy comes from the Greek words 'demos' (meaning citizen) and 'kratos' (meaning rule). The people of ancient Greece practised what is known as a **direct democracy**. A direct democracy involves citizens meeting together to make laws for their society.

Today, most democratic societies such as Australia are **representative democracies**. This means we elect representatives to make laws on our behalf. In Australia, citizens over the age of 18 are required to vote for candidates in elections for federal, state and local government. Our system of voting is compulsory, unlike other democracies such as the United Kingdom or the United States where participating in elections is optional.



Source 1 The Australian House of Representatives is made up of the people we have elected to represent us in our democracy.

Democratic values

Democratic values are the beliefs and ideals that are held by our society as a democracy. Such values include respect, equality, fairness and freedom (see Source 2). It is important to understand democratic values when examining Australia's political system. By understanding democratic values and their purpose, we can assess if a government is operating as a true democracy.

For example, in Australia (like many democratic nations), freedom is a very important part of society. In Australia we are free to say and do many things. For example, we are free to protest if we do not agree with something or if we feel passionately that something should change. We are free to practice whatever religion we want to, including no religion.

These freedoms are a very important part of living in a democracy as they allow us to participate and have a say in the way our country is run. If we couldn't safely participate in our society, then it wouldn't be a democracy at all.

Democratic value	Definition
respect	treating others with consideration and valuing their views, beliefs and rights
equality	rights and privileges for all, without discrimination based on gender, race, religion, age, sexual orientation or level of education; all citizens have the right to the same opportunities
fairness	all people are treated fairly, or without injustice, and are given equal opportunity; also known as a 'fair go' in Australia
freedom	rights, privileges and responsibilities for all without interference, or control from other citizens or government

Source 2 Democratic values

The Westminster system

Australia's system of government is based on the Westminster system. The Westminster system is a form of parliamentary government originating in the United Kingdom. It is named after the area of London where the British **parliament** is located (see Source 3). The Westminster system has been adopted by a number of countries, including Canada and New Zealand. It includes:

- a lower house of parliament that has been elected democratically by the people
- a head of state or sovereign (such as the Queen or Governor General) whose job is mainly ceremonial
- a head of government (such as a prime minister) who leads the majority of representatives in the lower house
- an executive or cabinet made up of members of parliament (MPs)
- an independent civil service that serves the government in power
- an independent **judiciary** (made up of the courts), which upholds the rule of law.

In Australia, the Westminster system is used by both our federal and state governments.



Source 3 Westminster Palace, Houses of Parliament, London

Justice

The concept of justice can have many different definitions. The idea of justice can mean different things to people from different societies and cultures. For some it might mean payback, while for others it might mean fairness. However, the concept of justice in Australia ultimately means that people should treat each other in a manner that is fair and balanced.

Our legal system has strong ties with the concept of justice. In fact, it is sometimes referred to as 'the justice system'. In Australia, when people break the law and are convicted by the courts it is said that they have been 'brought to justice'.

As we will begin to learn, the key features of the Western Australian legal system and the Australian legal system are designed to deliver justice to all. Through its key principles and procedures (such as the right to a fair trial), the legal system encourages the delivery of justice to all citizens, whether they be guilty or innocent. Our laws and rights are also written and enforced so that we can enjoy a fair and just society.

The government's ability to publicly deliver justice to its people is an important part of retaining the trust of citizens. It is also an important factor in stopping people from breaking the rule of law, by knowing that there are consequences for **crimes** and that the legal system is in place to protect us from injustice.



Source 4 Australia's legal system is designed to serve justice to citizens.

Participation

The concept of participation is an important part of living in a democracy. It refers to the way good citizens contribute to or take part in society. In Australia, we participate in the running of society in a number of ways, such as by voting in an election or referendum, serving on a **jury** or paying taxes. These things help our government to deliver services to our community, which we in turn will benefit from.

One of the most important ways we can participate in a democracy is by voting in an election. By voting for the issues that are important to us, we have the power to influence the way our country is run.

Other ways of participating in a democracy might include:

- protesting or demonstrating about important issues (to make your opinions known to the rest of the community)

- participating in a political discussion
- signing petitions that aim to make a change to society
- contacting your local member of parliament (such as by writing letters or emails)
- campaigning for a person or party who is trying to get elected
- becoming a member of parliament.

As a part of democratic societies, participation is important in giving citizens a sense of ownership or accountability in the running of society.



Source 5 People can participate in a democracy by protesting issues they feel are important.

Rights and responsibilities

The concept of rights and responsibilities refers to our entitlements and duties as citizens. The rights and responsibilities we experience in Australia are an important part of living in a democracy. Our rights ensure we are able to have a say in the way our country is run and are treated fairly in the process. On the other hand, our civic responsibilities ensure we contribute to our society in order to keep it going as a strong democracy. A list of some of these rights and responsibilities is shown in Source 7.

In the United States, the rights of the citizens are protected by their Bill of Rights. This **Bill** (or legislation) makes sure the freedoms of US citizens are protected, including the freedom of speech and the freedom to assemble or gather in protest. In Australia, we do not have a Bill of Rights that officially protects our rights. Rather, our constitution says we have a number of rights (see Source 7), including the right to vote. In Australia, we have no official protection for our right to freedom of speech, but the democratic values held by our society ensure that this privilege is rarely prevented.



Source 6 Voting in elections is both a right and responsibility of Australian citizens.

Rights	Responsibilities
the right to vote	voting in elections
protection against acquisition of property on unjust terms	jury service
the right to trial by jury	paying taxes
the right to freedom of religion	obeying the law
protection against discrimination	

Source 7 The rights and responsibilities of Australian citizens

Check your learning 14.1

Remember and understand

- 1 What is a democracy?
- 2 What kind of democracy is Australia?
- 3 Name and describe two democratic values.
- 4 What is justice?
- 5 What rights do we have in Australia that are protected by our constitution?

Apply and analyse

- 6 Why is it important for citizens to participate in a democracy?
- 7 What other values do you think are important to our democratic society?

Evaluate and create

- 8 Research the government of another democratic society (such as New Zealand, Canada or Japan). How is its form of government similar to or different from Australia's form of government? Present your findings as a poster or audiovisual presentation.
- 9 Consider the statement 'Australia should have its own Bill of Rights'. Using the Internet to conduct research, develop an argument both for and against this statement.

14.2 Civics and citizenship skills

Active citizens learn to question, interpret information and argue their point of view. For civics and citizenships students, the classroom is a place where you learn to share your opinions and see things from different perspectives. You should take this approach when examining the identity and democratic system of Australia, as well as the legal rights and responsibilities of its citizens.

Studying civics and citizenship requires you to analyse information and ask a range of questions to find out more about a topic. You will learn to question and research information asking what, why, when, how and who to uncover the truth about an issue. Through investigating an issue you are able to develop your own point of view, whilst understanding the reasons why others have different opinions.

As shown in Source 1, there are four stages in any civics and citizenship inquiry. They are:

- 1 Questioning and researching
- 2 Analysing
- 3 Evaluating
- 4 Communicating and reflecting



Source 2 Learning to question and interpret information is an important skill for civics and citizenship students.



Source 1 There are four stages in any civics and citizenship enquiry. At each stage, we use a number of different skills. Each of these skills is like a tool in a toolkit.

14.3 Questioning and researching

Developing questions

Civics and citizenship students ask lots of questions. They don't believe everything they read and carefully consider why someone takes a certain point of view or acts in a certain way. For example, when they see politicians talking in the media, they listen to their arguments and seek out different points of view.

They also check facts and look at the arguments for and against a certain issue before reaching their own conclusions. When civics and citizenship students state their own viewpoint, they support their views with evidence such as statistics, cases from the past, quotes from what others have said and sound reasoning.

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Developing civics and citizenship questions

As active citizens, we should ask questions about the society we live in rather than just accepting it or taking things for granted.

You can learn to investigate a civics and citizenship issue, such as the keeping of asylum seekers in detention centres, by starting your questions with the words 'what', 'where', 'how', 'why', 'what impact' or 'what should'. When examining a source, whether it is a cartoon, video footage, newspaper article or election slogan, the following approach may be helpful.



Source 1 A political cartoon about the controversial issue of keeping asylum seekers in detention centres for an unspecified period of time, often years.

Step 1 Brainstorm a list of questions and then try to answer them. Some questions, such as, 'What is happening?', might be easily answered, whereas other questions, such as, 'Why is it happening?', might need further research.

Step 2 Look at the source itself to try to understand the context. The 'who' question is important here. 'Who is saying this?' can be just as important as, 'What is being said?' Identifying where the source comes from can quickly alert you to whether the truth of their statements should be examined more carefully.

Step 3 The 'how' question is also important. In this example you might ask, 'How are the asylum seekers being detained and processed?', but you also might ask, 'How does this source (cartoon) affect me?' Are there any emotions such as fear, persuasion or humour that are being used to influence your judgement?

Apply the skill

- 1 Where could you look to find answers to the question, 'What is the issue with detaining asylum seekers?'
- 2 Why is it important to know the author of the source when discovering the truth about an issue?
- 3 Why is examining how the source affects you sometimes more important than basic descriptive questions such as, 'What is happening'?
- 4 What tactics have been used to convey the cartoonist's message about the issue of asylum seekers in detention centres?

Collecting information and data

Sources provide information for civics and citizenship students. They can take many different forms, from written records in books or online, to live video and audio recordings. Some examples of sources include case transcripts and judgments, newspaper articles, letters, tweets, blogs or Facebook posts, cartoons and interviews.

Locating a range of relevant sources is a valuable skill, which usually involves a number of different search methods, such as:

- using online search engines such as Google
- following social media such as Facebook and Twitter
- looking at newspaper and magazine articles in print or online
- contacting local members of parliament or asking people with expertise in the subject
- speaking with other class members or family members to gain an insight into their views on a particular issue.

Using technology to locate relevant sources

Although books and newspapers are valuable sources of information, most research today is conducted online. In order to ensure that sources gathered online are accurate, reliable and relevant, a number of guidelines should be followed:

- Search engines such as Google are useful research tools but much of the material on these sites is unreliable and inaccurate. When using search engines, be sure to define your search using keywords. Your librarian or teacher are good people to ask for help with this.
- A reliable way of searching for sources is to use sites linked to educational institutions, government departments, reputable companies, universities and educational institutions. A quick way of telling if a site is reputable is to look at the domain name in the URL (internet address).
- Avoid blogs posted by unknown individuals. If you happen to find information relevant to your investigation on a blog or social media site, always verify it by using a more reliable source.
- Never cut and paste information from the Internet without referencing where it is from. Taking someone else's work, ideas or words and using them as if they were your own is called plagiarism and is against the law, as well as school rules.

Check your learning 14.3

Remember and understand

- 1 When do citizens ask questions?
- 2 Why is it important to ask questions as citizens?
- 3 What should we be wary of when looking for information to answer questions?

Apply and analyse

- 4 As an active citizen, develop a question to ask about the following scenarios:
 - a A local politician promised to fix and reopen the local pool but nothing has happened.
 - b Young people in the local area are bored and desperate for things to do.
 - c The number of children that can read in one state of Australia is decreasing.

Evaluate and create

- 5 Identify an issue in your local area. Develop three questions to ask your local politician about that issue.



Source 2 Littering is an example of a local issue you may want to ask your local politician about.

14.4 Analysing

Analysing information and ideas from a range of sources

A useful source is one that will add to your understanding of a civics and citizenship inquiry. The source needs to be relevant to the topic and reliable. The following are good questions to ask in order to determine whether a source is useful:

- Is it a reliable source?
- Is there enough information and sufficient detail to help me answer the inquiry question?
- Does the information support evidence from other sources?
- Is it balanced or does it present one point of view (bias)?
- Is it based on fact or opinion?
- Is the information current?

Separating fact from opinion

Sources are only really useful if they help you to form an opinion. In many cases, this means separating fact from opinion. A fact is something that can be proved: when an event took place, what happened and who was involved. An opinion is based on what people believe is likely to be true. A simple way to detect whether a statement is fact or opinion is to look closely at the language used. The use of words such as 'might', 'could', 'believe', 'think' and 'suggests' all indicate that an opinion is being expressed.

For example:

- Fact: Australia detains asylum seekers for an unspecified period of time.
- Opinion: Keeping asylum seekers in detention centres is unethical as they have not committed a crime.



Source 1 Separating fact from opinion in civics and citizenship is an important skill.

Check your learning 14.4

Remember and understand

- 1 What is the difference between a fact and an opinion?
- 2 How can we tell if a source is useful?

Apply and analyse

- 3 Matt wants to know more about the government's policies on education. He has found a few blogs on the subject but doesn't know where else to look. What advice would you give Matt.

14.5 Evaluating

Evaluating different points of view and negotiating to resolve issues

In civics and citizenship it is important to understand not only what opinion is being expressed but why it is being expressed. It is useful to consider why a person may have a certain point of view. For example, the family of a victim of crime may say to the media that a sentence given to a criminal was insufficient and unjust. This may be true, but it's important to consider how the opinion of these family members might be influenced by the emotions of losing a loved one. Listening and being respectful of opinions that may be different to our own is an important skill to learn in civics and citizenship.

Planning a course of action

A democratic process exists when everyone has an opportunity to have their say. This might include giving all members of a group the opportunity to contribute to a discussion, making sure that all group members have access to information and taking a vote.

A democratic process exists when everyone has an opportunity to have their say. This can include giving all members of a group the opportunity to contribute to a discussion in order to communicate their opinion. Often in a democratic system, it is also useful to make sure that all group members have access to any relevant information regarding the discussion or issue. Once all group members have had their say the group will then conduct a vote.

Once the vote has been completed and all members of the group have reached an agreed outcome, a plan must be developed that will be used for that action or issue.



Source 1 One way to reach a decision that reflects the majority view is to take a vote.

Check your learning 14.5

Remember and understand

- 1 What is a democratic process?
- 2 Give an example of a democratic process in action.
- 3 Why is it important to recognise different points of view?

Apply and analyse

- 4 A PE teacher has given a class a choice of what sport they are allowed to play during a double period. The class is divided between people who want to play netball, people who want to play football and people who want to play hockey. Suggest a process to help the class make a fair decision.

Evaluate and create

- 5 Create a handbook or class wiki providing tips on how to make class decisions when not everyone agrees.

14.6 Communicating and reflecting

Presenting conclusions

In every subject, there is a common language that is used. Certain terms form part of important concepts and are essential in helping us understand these concepts. Source 1 lists and defines some commonly used terms in civics and citizenship; additional civics and citizenship terms can also be found in the glossary at the end of this book. If you come across a term that you are unsure of, you should use a dictionary, the Internet or your teacher to help you understand what it means. It is a good idea to keep a glossary of subject-specific terms, as well as any other new words that you come across, in your workbook.

Term	Definition
citizenship	a person's status as a citizen; a citizen is a person who legally lives in a geographical area such as a town or country; in a wider context, citizenship encompasses the rights and responsibilities citizens exercise
civics	the study of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and how government works
government	the elected members of parliament who make decisions for a nation or state; the government is made up of the party or coalition that has won a majority of seats in the lower house of parliament; the lower house of federal parliament is the House of Representatives; the upper house is the Senate
multiculturalism	the way in which people of many different cultures, races and religions live peacefully with one another as equals
parliament	the national or state law-making body that is made up of elected representatives in both the upper and lower houses with a head of state; in Australia, the national parliament is referred to as the Commonwealth or federal parliament
parliamentary democracy	a system of government where people elect representatives to parliament in order to make laws which reflect the views of the majority of voters

Source 1 Some useful civics and citizenship terms

Reflecting on our role as citizens

Australian citizens have many rights and responsibilities as members of a democratic society. We have a right to live freely in a society where we allow others to live freely. As individuals, we should always think about what we can do to make the world a better place. This goes above and beyond simply obeying the law, but rather a higher level of social consciousness that helps us make our world more beautiful through the positive changes that we make to it. Australian citizens are global citizens, and understand that the decisions we make can affect the entire planet and its inhabitants. Ultimately, we are free to choose what kind of a world we live in.

Check your learning 14.6

Remember and understand

- 1 Explain the following terms using your own words:
 - a citizen
 - b civics
 - c government.
- 2 What can you do when you come across a term you do not understand?

Apply and analyse

- 3 List three ways you could help to improve your local community.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Develop a class project that you think would help your local community. It can be anything from picking up litter to raising money for a local charity. Suggest a plan of action for this project and reflect on this in terms of how it might help you to fulfil your role as an active citizen in your community.