



The 4Cs of Learning: Content, Context, Concept and Connection

The **4Cs** are **not four separate boxes**. They show how learning moves from **knowing something**, to understanding **where and why it matters**, to recognising the **larger idea underneath it**, and finally to carrying that understanding into a new situation. A learner should therefore be able to move from **Content** → **Context** → **Concept** → **Connection**, rather than merely collect information.

CONTENT — What am I learning?

Content is the knowledge, information, skills, processes and subject-specific material that the learner is actually learning. It is the *what* of learning. In Literature, content might include a text, characters, events, literary techniques and vocabulary. In Science, it might include cells, forces, reactions or experimental procedures. In History, it might include events, dates, people, evidence and causes. Content gives the learner the **dots that need to be understood before they can be connected**.

Inquiry prompts: *What is happening? What do I need to know? What am I learning to recognise, explain, analyse or do? What evidence or information do I need before I can form an interpretation?*

CONTEXT — Why, where, when, how and to whom does it matter?

Context is the set of circumstances surrounding the content that gives it meaning.



LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT — How does the learning move from “here” to the wider world?

A **local context** places learning within a learner’s immediate or closely experienced world—such as the **family, school, neighbourhood, community, city or country**—so that an idea can first be understood through a situation that feels concrete and meaningful. A **global context** widens that same inquiry beyond the immediate setting to examine how the issue appears across **different societies, cultures, places, systems and time periods**. The purpose is not simply to compare “local versus global,” but to discover **what remains similar, what changes with context, whose experiences differ, and whether an idea that appears true in one setting still holds when the scale changes**. This is what makes learning transferable: the learner moves from “**How does this matter here?**” → “**How does it appear elsewhere?**” → “**What changes when place, culture, scale or circumstances change?**”

Inquiry prompts: *Where can I see this in my immediate world? Who is affected locally and how? Does the same issue appear elsewhere in the world? What remains similar and what changes? Whose perspective becomes visible when I change the scale? Would my conclusion still hold in another culture, community or country? What can the local teach us about the global—and what can the global make us notice that we had missed locally?*

Something does not happen in an intellectual vacuum. Place, time, culture, social structures, historical conditions, purpose, audience and circumstances can change what an event, statement, action or idea means. Context therefore moves the learner beyond “**What happened?**” towards “**Why did it happen this way, here, at this time, and why does it matter to these people?**”



The same content can acquire very different meanings when its context changes. Context therefore prevents learners from making quick judgements without first understanding the circumstances surrounding what they are studying.

Inquiry prompts: *Where and when is this happening? Why is it happening in this way? What conditions surround it? Who is affected? To whom does it matter? How might its meaning change in another time, place, culture or situation?*

CONCEPT — What larger idea am I really thinking about?

A concept is an abstract idea that allows the learner to move beyond the particular **content**. Facts tell us about a particular case; concepts allow us to recognise patterns across many cases. Ideas such as **perspective, communication, change, systems, relationships, power, identity and representation** enable learners to think beyond one example.

This is why conceptual learning produces **transfer**. A learner may eventually forget a particular example but retain a powerful way of thinking: *Who has power here? What changed? Whose perspective is shaping this account? How is meaning being communicated?*

Inquiry prompts: *What bigger idea sits underneath these facts? What pattern am I beginning to see? If I removed the names, dates and specific example, what idea would remain? Where else could this idea help me think?*

KEY CONCEPT — What is the big transferable idea?

A **Key Concept** is **broad, abstract and highly transferable**. It can travel across different texts, topics, disciplines and real-life situations. It does not belong to only one lesson or even one subject.

For example, **Perspective** can be explored in Literature, History, Science, Art or everyday life because human beings encounter and interpret reality from different positions,



experiences, values and knowledge. Similarly, concepts such as **communication, connections and creativity** can travel far beyond one particular text or task.

A Key Concept therefore operates like a **large intellectual lens**:

What big idea can I carry with me when the content changes?

Inquiry prompts: *What larger idea connects this learning to other learning? Would this concept still make sense if the topic completely changed? How does this concept help me interpret situations beyond this particular example?*

RELATED CONCEPT — What more specific idea helps me investigate the Key Concept here?

A **Related Concept** is **narrower and more discipline-specific**. It brings the broad Key Concept closer to the particular kind of thinking required within a subject.

If the Key Concept gives us the **large lens**, the Related Concept helps us **focus that lens**. Related Concepts allow a learner to investigate the broad idea through the language and methods of a particular discipline.

So the relationship is not:

Key Concept = important

Related Concept = less important

Rather:

Key Concept = broad and transferable

Related Concept = focused and discipline-relevant



Inquiry prompts: *Which specific idea within this discipline will help me investigate the larger concept? Through what aspect of the text, event, system or problem can I examine the Key Concept more closely?*

Why is PERSPECTIVE a Key Concept, while POINT OF VIEW is usually treated as a Related Concept?

The difference is essentially **lens versus position**.

Perspective is the broader lens through which someone interprets and makes meaning of reality. It can be shaped by experience, knowledge, culture, values, assumptions, beliefs and circumstances. Perspective therefore asks:

HOW am I understanding what I encounter, and what shapes that understanding?

This idea travels almost anywhere. A scientist can have a perspective on evidence. A historian can examine competing perspectives on an event. An artist can represent a perspective on society. Two communities can interpret the same development from different perspectives.

Because the idea is **broad, abstract and transferable across disciplines**, **Perspective functions as a Key Concept**.

Point of view is more specifically the position or standpoint from which something is seen, experienced, narrated or communicated. It asks:

WHO is seeing, speaking, experiencing or presenting this—and from what position?

This makes point of view particularly useful within Language & Literature because we can investigate the narrator's point of view, a character's position, whose voice is foregrounded, whose voice is absent, or how changing the speaker changes the meaning communicated. It therefore works at a **more focused, disciplinary level**, which is why **point of view is treated as a Related Concept**.



The distinction becomes especially clear when two people occupy the **same position** but interpret something differently.

POINT OF VIEW = WHERE I am standing.

PERSPECTIVE = the LENS through which I interpret what I see.

Position can influence the lens—but **it does not determine it.**

CONNECTION — Where can this understanding travel?

Connection is the moment learning leaves the original example. The learner connects the content and conceptual understanding to another text, discipline, situation, culture, experience or unfamiliar problem.

A weak connection simply notices similarity: *“This reminds me of something else.”*

A strong conceptual connection transfers the **thinking**: *“The same concept appears here, but under different circumstances. Does it still work in the same way?”*

Connection is therefore where we discover whether learning has genuinely travelled.

Inquiry prompts: *Where else does this idea appear? What changes when the context changes? Can I use this concept to understand an unfamiliar situation? What connection have I not noticed yet? Does the new example strengthen, challenge or complicate what I thought I understood?*

The complete thinking journey

CONTENT — *What am I learning?*



CONTEXT — *Why, where, when, how and to whom does it matter?*





KEY CONCEPT — *What big transferable idea am I thinking through?*



RELATED CONCEPT — *What more focused disciplinary idea helps me investigate it?*



CONNECTION — *Where else can I take this understanding?*

The real shift is therefore:

“I know this.” → “I understand why it matters.” → “I recognise the idea beneath it.” →

“I can use that idea somewhere I have never seen before.”