



Progression in Geographical Skills

A guide for Opening Worlds Teachers

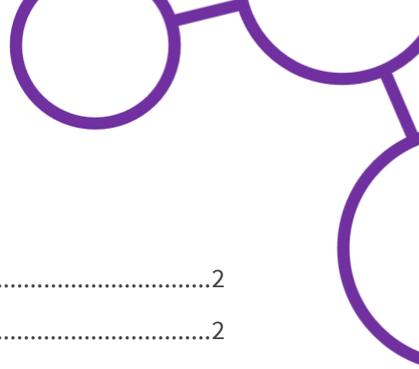


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1 What are geographical skills?

Geographical skills are the methods that geographers use to find out about the world. These include the range of skills for geographical enquiry (asking questions, finding data, analysing data, communicating findings). Geographers put particular emphasis on finding out about the world through different types of maps, photographs, diagrams and other types of spatial data. They also use fieldwork to investigate the world around them directly. There is some overlap between geographical skills and mathematical skills (e.g. drawing graphs) but in geography we use real-world data and it is always spatially located. Extended writing is often used to present findings.

2 What's the Opening Worlds approach to geographical skills?

In Opening Worlds materials, geographical skills are integrated throughout the booklet and PowerPoint slides for each unit. This is important because geographical skills are never an end in themselves – their aim is to show pupils **how geographers create or communicate new geographical knowledge**. Therefore, whenever possible, children should learn to use and to practise them as an integral part of building their own geographical knowledge.

For example, in Year 3 Autumn 1 children are examining a range of photographs and maps of the River Indus as they learn what is similar and different about the river along its length. How does this fit in to their overall geographical learning of substantive and disciplinary knowledge? They are gaining a great deal of new **knowledge** about the River Indus and they are thinking about it through the **disciplinary lens of change across place and space**, but because they are pausing to look at photographs and maps, they are learning and practising **geographical skills** as they do so.

Just as with geographical knowledge, geographical skills need explicit teaching and regular practice if they are to become integrated into learners' long-term memories. The first time a new skill is introduced, it is taught and reinforced in small steps. Then it is practised regularly in a range of different contexts. For example, the eight-point compass is introduced in Year 5 Autumn 2 (Oceans), and then recap slides are included at the point of need in subsequent units. These can be used, as needed, until the new skill is firmly embedded in children's skills toolkit. Keep reminding pupils that when they use geographical skills and practise geographical vocabulary, they are learning what real geographers do.

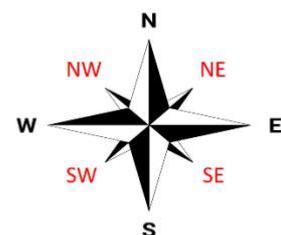


There is yet another reason why the Indus river fills with so much 1 water and grows so big. Can you work this out from the photograph 2 above? It shows another river flowing into the Indus. We call the 3 smaller rivers that flow into bigger rivers **tributaries**. 4

On this map, follow the line of the River Indus as it flows from Tibet, 5 into northern India and then into 6 Pakistan. Most of the river is in 7 Pakistan. When the river reaches 8 the coast, it flows into the **Arabian** 9 **Sea**. The map also shows some 10 tributaries that flow into the Indus. 11 How many tributaries can you find? 12



5



Let's check we remember



3 How are geographical skills integrated in the units?

Geographical skills are integrated in all units, as appropriate for the knowledge context and children’s level of development. For example, simple directional language (e.g. left, right, near, far) is learned in Key Stage 1 then reinforced in Year 3 units. More precise ways of talking about location, for example the 4-point compass, are emphasised in Year 3 and 4 units, then more advanced skills, such as the 8-point compass, are introduced and practised in Year 5 and 6. The skills are always used to help the children learn about the world, not as an end in themselves.



The table below shows this progression in more detail.

	Using ground photos	Using aerial/satellite photos	Using/making diagrams	Making maps or sketches	Using world/country maps	Using thematic maps	Using simple directional language ¹	Using 4-point compass	Using 8-point compass	Using 4-figure grid references	Using 6-figure grid references	Using symbols and key	Using key lines of latitude/longitude	Asking questions	Using tables of figures	Using /making graphs	Digital mapping	Fieldwork	
KS1	•	•		•	•		•	•				•							•
Y3	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•				•	•			•	•		•
Y4	•	•	•	•	•	•		•				•	•		•	•	•		•
Y5	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•
Y6	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•

4 FAQs

How does fieldwork fit in with geographical skills?

Fieldwork is an important part of geographical enquiry to learn about the world around us. Ideally, all year groups should undertake some fieldwork each year as part of their geography lessons. This fieldwork can be conducted in the local area within normal lesson times, or as an extended lesson, and does not have to involve special equipment or transport costs. There are many opportunities for fieldwork around the school buildings and grounds or within walking distance, for example visiting a local river/stream (Year 3 Autumn 1 Rivers) or visiting a local high street (Year 3 Spring 1 Settlement) or. According to school context, a visit to a less familiar landscape would be ideal – for example a coastal location for inland schools (Year 4 Spring 1 Coastal Processes). In Year 6, a longer enquiry unit involves

¹ For example: near, far, left, right, above, below

fieldwork in the local area, or further afield. This is a flexible opportunity to support your context and interests.

Guidance to support you with planning and integrating [geography fieldwork is available on the website.](#)

What about Ordnance Survey maps?

The Ordnance Survey (OS) is Great Britain's national mapping agency. It has produced maps of Great Britain since 1791 (see <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/>). While many types of paper and digital maps are available internationally and in the UK, OS maps have a particular place in English geography teaching and are part of the Geography National Curriculum in England for Key Stage 2. These can only be purchased separately.

We recommend that you have at least one class set of OS maps in school so that they can be used in geography teaching. Your OS maps will be needed in Year 6 of the Opening Worlds geography programme where they carry out a geographical enquiry of your own design in the summer term. This will be building on, consolidating and extending a great deal of prior geographical learning, both substantive and disciplinary, including geographical skills.

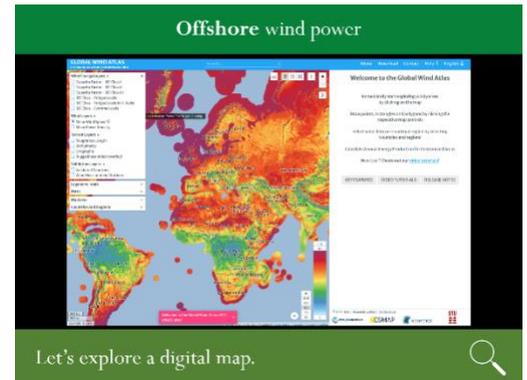
Various different formats of maps are available, so you can choose those that are most suited to your children's needs. Don't rush to choose and procure them until you have planned your local geographical enquiry for Year 6.

What about using atlases and globes?

In the Opening Worlds booklets, we provide a rich resource of local, national and world maps, also thematic maps including topographical maps (showing height of land) and maps showing other geographical themes such as population density. In many ways the booklets mirror the resources of an atlas. However, it is also important for pupils to understand how to handle a simple atlas, to look places up in the index and find them on the page, so we recommend that all Opening Worlds schools have a class set of atlases available. Various types of atlases suitable for Key Stage 2 children are available. As flat maps are always a distortion of the Earth's curved surface, it is also important for children to use globes and we recommend that each classroom has a globe available if at all possible. Both atlases and globes can easily be used to complement Opening Worlds booklets and PowerPoints. We prompt opportunities for their use in the teachers' notes on PowerPoint slides.

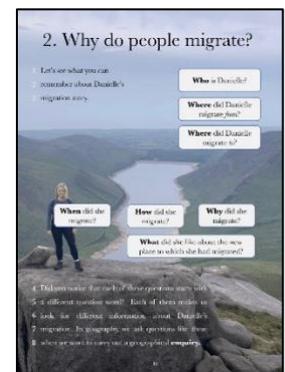
What about digital mapping and technologies?

Increasingly, spatial data is stored and produced in electronic forms. Many children will have seen maps on smartphones or car navigation systems. We recognise this by providing images of electronic maps as a resource in some Opening Worlds geography modules (e.g. Year 4 Spring 2 Tourism) and we also include reference to relevant online maps and sources in our teachers' notes. When appropriate, opportunities to explore digital maps online are included in the PowerPoint slides, for example The Global Wind Atlas in Year 6 Autumn 1 (Energy and climate change). Digital technologies can also be a useful resource when undertaking fieldwork.



What is geographical enquiry?

Geographical enquiry involves asking questions, collecting data, analysing data and communicating findings. Enquiry in geography has some similarities to scientific method but is distinct in its focus (always a place/space dimension) and the breadth of its data collection (selecting from a wide range of numerical, visual and word-based methods of collecting data). In *Opening Worlds* materials, the teaching of geographical enquiry skills is integrated in different units (e.g. asking questions in Year 5 Spring 1 Migration, interpreting tables of figures in Year 4 Summer 2 Deserts). All these skills come together in the Year 6 Summer enquiry unit.



How can I develop my own understanding of geographical skills?

As an *Opening Worlds* school you have access to training and resources on many aspects of teaching geography. In addition, there are many published resources which can be helpful to develop your understanding of geographical skills, especially map skills and fieldwork skills. As a starting point, have a look at the following resources:-

- Ordnance Survey Education <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/education>
- Geographical Association <https://www.geography.org.uk/>
- Royal Geographical Society <https://www.rgs.org/schools/>