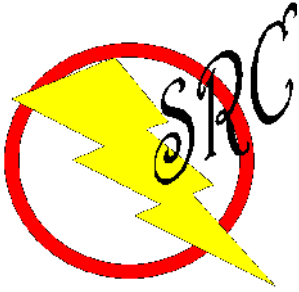


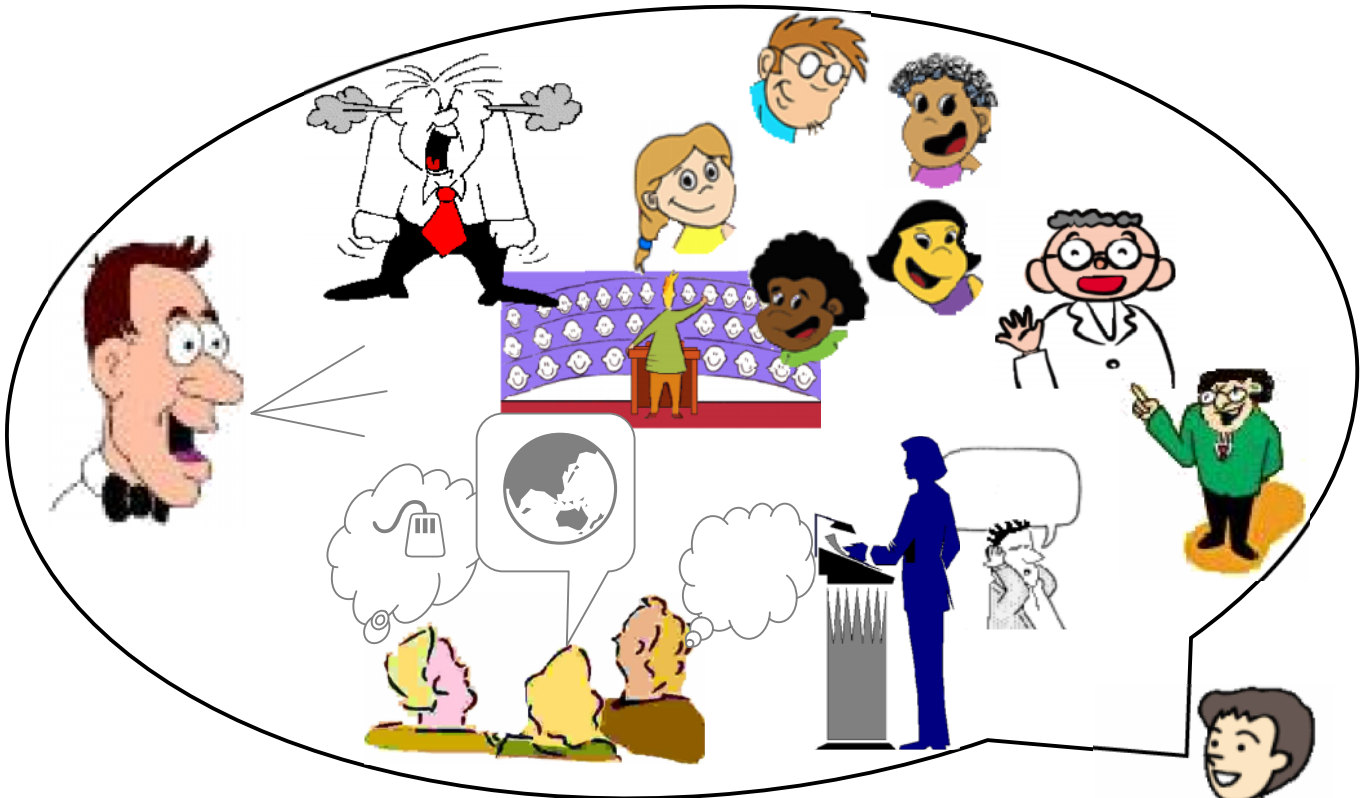


Second Strike

Resource Kits for Student Representative Councils



Representation



“No Voice - No Chance!”



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The contributions from the D.A.R.T. Project have been included with permission from Banyule City Council Youth Service.

Acknowledgements:

First and foremost, thanks go to the students of Student Representative Councils, Student Unions, Student Parliaments, Junior Student Councils, Student Forums and all the other names student representative groups go by. If it were not for your brilliant creativity and your willingness to share your ideas and stories, this kit would be considerably thinner.

Secondly, thanks are due to all students AND Teacher Advisers involved with SRCs around Australia. Yours is possibly the hardest job in the school and we deeply appreciate that commitment.

Thirdly our thanks go to schools who are willing to try new things. These are schools that make being on SRC a fun thing because they do not construct meaningless barriers. These are the test grounds for SRC ideas, which more timid schools then take on as their own.

Fourthly, we would like to acknowledge the huge contribution to this kit from Banyule City Council Youth Service by way of advice, experience and the use of their program, the D.A.R.T. Project, from where all the first hand knowledge of running an in-school forum has come from.

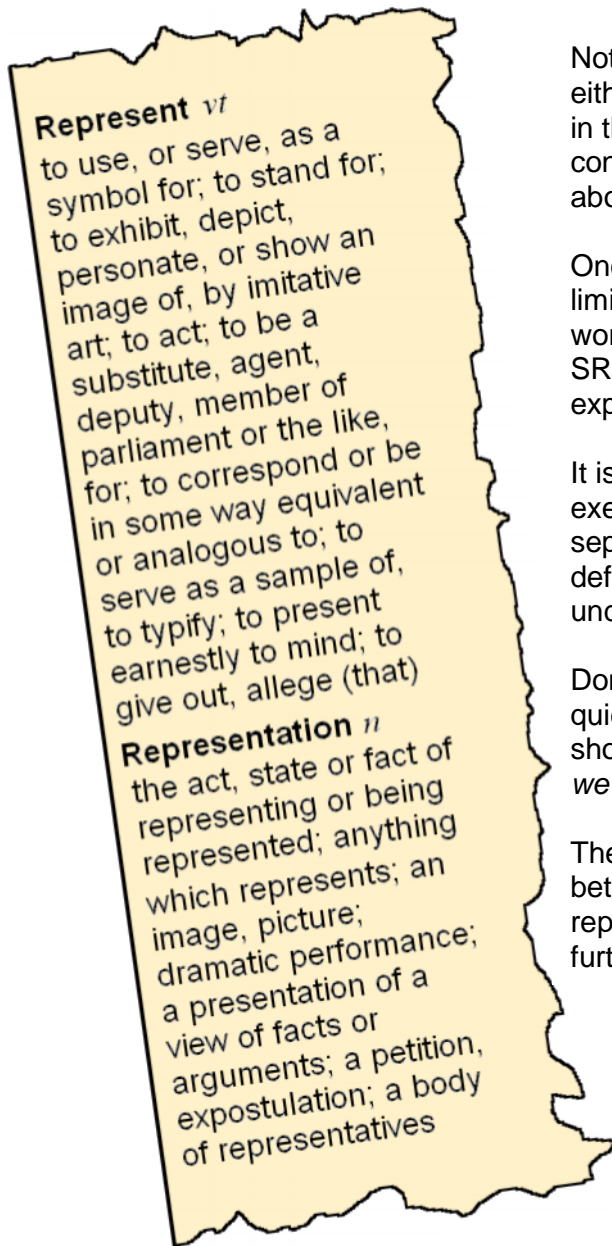
Last but by no means least, our thanks go to Prudence Meggitt, who has spent hours of time editing these kits, and has taught us how to use a comma properly.

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Are You Representative?:

Dictionary definition from the **Chambers Concise Dictionary**:



Not the most helpful? No, we didn't think so either. There is perhaps a couple of points in this dictionary definition that might contribute to a discussion within your SRC about what representation actually is.

Once again, the dictionary shows its limitations. The true meaning behind the word will have to be determined by your SRC through discussion and experimentation.

It is maybe worth using this definition as an exercise within that discussion. First try to separate out all those elements of the definition that are not relevant to your understanding of representation.

Don't spend much time at all with this, it's quick to get boring. The real question should be "what does representation mean we have to do?"

There is also a need to make the distinction between 'representation' and 'democratic representation', which this kit explores in further detail.

The job of the Student Representative Council is to democratically represent the students. Firstly this means you are not working for the teachers or the school administration – they are not your employers, the students are.

Secondly this means you are not in the job to try and run the projects that *you* are excited about, though you should not ignore them either.

Your job is to:

1. Discover what the students who elected you actually want, and
2. Try and achieve those things for them – within reason – and discuss their ideas and opinions with them and other students.

Your ideas still count too, you are a student deserving of representation just like anyone else. But you must not put your plans before others, especially if there is little or no support for your ideas outside of the SRC.

A Democratic Representative **MUST**

1. Be elected by the people he or she represents

Basically, you have to be asked by the people you represent to represent them. You can't assume the role and declare yourself their representative without their consent, nor can you just be appointed to it. Many schools have a system where their student leaders are appointed; that's fine but it's not democratic representation.

Many schools have a system where there is a student vote but the results are then filtered or adjusted by someone not from that student group, such as the Principal. The reasons behind doing this are understandable, but once again it is not democratic.

If you were elected by the year eleven students, this is the group you represent, no-one else. In short, if they didn't get the opportunity to ask you to represent them then you cannot claim to do so. If they were just away on the day or didn't vote specifically for you, then technically they had the opportunity and didn't take it up. This would be their bad luck and you are still their representative.

If the student council elects a leader, then this person can claim to represent the all the student population that is represented by the student council.

At some schools the student leaders are taken from only the senior year levels. If grade one students don't have any representatives on the student council then a grade six often gets assigned to represent them. Again, this is not democratic.

If an SRC was to *appoint* a student from outside the student council to represent the schools views at, say, a conference, this person can still claim to be a democratic representative. This is a kind of ambassador position. As elected representatives the SRC have the right to extend the will of the students to an individual to act on a body other than the SRC, such as school council, State SRC, or National Association for the Rights of Palm Trees. It doesn't work if they get appointed by anyone else to attend. Provided they remain accountable to the SRC – and thereby the whole student population – they can be democratic representatives.

2. Have the time and resources to communicate with the people he or she represents

Democracy does not = elections. Yes elections are a vital part, but if you leave it at that then your so-called representative has been elected to do whatever *they* want, when the point is for them do what *you* want.

So representatives must be able to regularly hear the ideas and opinions of the electorate so that they have the ability to act with full knowledge of the desires of the people they represent.

This doesn't mean that they just do whatever the majority says. A representative has the responsibility to make decisions based on many things, including their own personal beliefs, but must use everyone's views as part of the process.

3. Have a fixed term

Each representative must have a fixed date when they cease to be the representative and must once again ask for permission to be the representative. In short, you have to keep getting elected. If you don't have a fixed term for your representative, there is no way to make them truly accountable. You have effectively elected a dictator.



SURVEYS

Quick Survey

This is a one question poll of the school. Students, teachers, anyone who wants to can answer. And they can answer more than once if they choose, and if that suits your aim. The format should be designed to encourage short answers for quick movement of the survey.

The question itself needs to be carefully phrased or you will end up with a bunch of meaningless words in response. If the question is too open or too closed, you leave your respondents nothing to work with. If it is unclear they won't bother. If the question suggests an answer itself it may bias the results and defeat the whole purpose.

A good question is:

"What's one idea you would most like to see the SRC work on?"

A better question is:

"Of the following three ideas, which one do you think the SRC should be working on and why? 1) Building a swimming pool, 2) Organising a Carnival, 3) Changing the Uniform"

Answers should be able to be anonymous. There is a fear that this anonymity gives rise to a lot of joke ideas or people abusing the process with rudeness or stupidity. Second Strike struggles with this perception because we keep coming back to the one basic answer: "So what?" Let them. They've had a laugh and feel great, you've lost nothing. You throw out the submissions clearly designed for offence, some of the others might help spark your own creativity and if not then that's ok. You won't be starved of ideas because a few people see it as a joke so let them have it if they want it.

OR...

... run the Quick Survey as a competition. Offer a CD voucher as the prize for the most creative idea, for the one the SRC decides to work on, or for the most suggested idea and draw the winner from a hat. This encourages people to put their name on the form and encourages better thought out ideas, at the same time discouraging ideas designed to offend, without openly forbidding it. For this method to be most effective, your Quick Survey response sheet needs to clearly mark that including their name is optional, but it is essential to compete for the prize.

Methods for collecting your Quick Survey Responses:

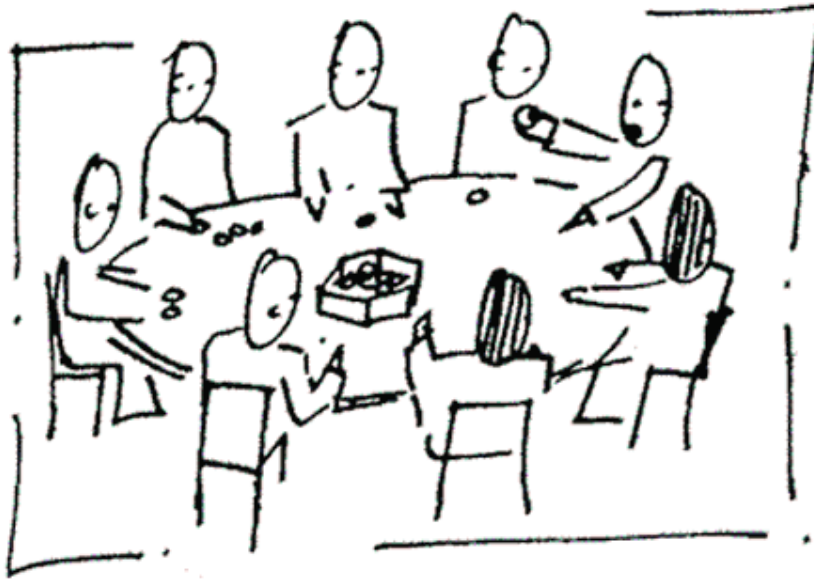
- Collection class by class

- Wandering the school at lunchtime with a clipboard in hand

- Posters up saying "return to...[contact name]"

- Suggestion Box

- Sample survey - randomly select 30 students per year level



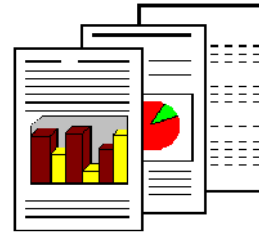
FORUMS

A forum is a place for people to come together to discuss ideas and opinions. Every year around Australia there are many student forums on a wide range of topics inviting students from a great number of schools to meet and engage in some fantastic discussions. Some of these forums and conferences even claim to be 'the voice of young people' or to represent the views of secondary students.

Who goes to these forums? Student leaders or the top 5% of the school, pretty much every time. This isn't representative! The student who is just about to get expelled for smoking was not asked for an opinion, neither was the exchange student or the English as a Second Language class, or the vast majority of the school. How can your school leaders represent the views of **ALL** young people if they haven't spoken with them all? Or even most of them?

How can you even expect your SRC to represent the views of the students in the school if they don't actually know what they are?

You can conduct these conferences yourself. Run it in-school and invite every student to participate. Having the evidence that you are a true representative is a very powerful negotiating chip when trying to accomplish something within the school or beyond the school.



Report:

The easiest and most obvious action is to compile all the discussion points into a report and make this report available to all the participants and anyone else who wants to or should hear what your students are thinking.

1. Start by grouping each of the notes and opinions from the discussions according to topic.
2. Write a short introduction to each topic, perhaps include the prompt questions you used to get the group started and keep focused. Or maybe mention what your aim was when you listed this particular topic for discussion.
3. List a few of the statements and opinions in each topic to give a feel for how it really happened.
4. Group some statements together if they seem similar and write a paragraph explaining them. For example:
"It seems most students are happy with the current standard of teaching health and human relations subjects but felt there were a few areas to improve on."
This way, you don't need to list every single opinion if they are basically the same. Highlight a few interesting points as you go, such as:
"One student commented that he really liked the subject but felt the videos used were very outdated."
5. You may need to rephrase some statements if they are a little rough in their formation or if they are impolite. Sometimes including the exact wording of the person can be a more powerful way of making the opinion heard, including their slang and any examples etc. Other times it can be unclear or distracting. Keep to the original intent of the opinion and you're safe.
6. List any specific recommendations given by participants or that participants seemed to be heading towards. For example:
"The government should give teachers more training in Health and Human Relationship classes."
Or if the comment is written, "I bet teachers never had to sit through one of these classes, they'd be better at teaching it if they had."
this can become:
"Teachers should participate in a range of Health and Human Relationship classes before teaching them."
7. Write a summary for each discussion topic based on the comments of the participants. What do you think that these people are saying overall? Is there agreement on anything? If the students have a range of opinions that disagree with each other, point this out, what percentage do you estimate does agree on something?
This is where you can also list the recommendations that you think had the most support or most represent the feelings of the participants.
8. Separate out the material you have now written into sections with specific sub-headings:
Introduction Discussion Recommendations Summary
9. Give the report a cover page and an overall **introduction** and an overall **summary**. Perhaps get your organising team to sign a page of the original.