

Lesson 38 – Opinions & Advice

Conversation #1 – Asking for and Giving Opinions

Laura is a teacher who has some creative ideas about education. She is being interviewed about her opinions on TV. Listen to the interview to learn expressions for talking about opinions.

Interviewer: So tell me, what are your thoughts on the new standardized tests?

Laura: To be honest, I believe standardized tests are one of the worst aspects of our educational system.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Laura: In my opinion, these types of exams make students focus on just memorizing a bunch of facts in order to get a good grade – and then the kids don't enjoy school.

Interviewer: But it seems to me that if we didn't have tests, students wouldn't be motivated to study.

Laura: Well, from my point of view, children should be encouraged to develop a love of learning for its own sake – not just to take a test.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate on that – or give us an example of how it works in your own classroom?

Laura: Some people may disagree, but I think that children are capable of directing their own learning process. So instead of taking a final exam, for example, each of my students does a final project on a topic of their choice.

Interviewer: If you ask me, that sounds a lot more interesting – and less stressful!

Laura: Exactly – and it also eliminates that competitive aspect of who got the “best grade” or the “worst grade.”

Interviewer: So you're saying that you don't evaluate the students?

Laura: No, that's not what I meant. I do evaluate their projects and give them feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Interviewer: Have you ever had students who didn't like your method?

Laura: I've had a few who have found it a little hard to adjust... but in my experience, once the students get used to my teaching style, they really enjoy it!

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

There are a number of ways to ask for someone's opinion. Most of them involve the words **think/thoughts, feel, opinion, or views**:

- **"What do you think of/about...?"**
- **"How do you feel about...?"**
- **"What are your thoughts/views on...?"**
- **"Where do you stand on...?"**
This phrase is usually used for controversial issues
- **"What's your opinion about...?"**

Here are some basic ways to express your opinion:

- **"I think..." / "I believe..." / "I'd say..." (that)**
In spoken English, the word "that" is optional, and most people don't use it:
Ex) I think that we should invest more in education.
I think we should invest more in education.
- **"It seems to me that..."**
This is a gentle way to express an impression. You can use it to say something that you are not 100% confident about, and which could be open for debate:
Ex) "It seems to me that more and more people are unhappy with their jobs these days."
- **"In my opinion..." / "In my experience..."**
"Opinion" means you are expressing your thoughts/beliefs; "experience" means that you have real present or past experience with the topic or situation
- **"To be honest..."**
This expression is often followed by a criticism or negative opinion:
Ex) "To be honest, this article isn't very good."
- **"If you ask me..."**
This phrase is often used to express your opinion when NO ONE has specifically asked you about it!

Sometimes, you want to put special emphasis on the fact that this opinion is YOURS, and that you recognize that other people might not share your opinion – or might disagree. To do this, you can begin your statement with one of these phrases:

- **“Personally, I think...”**
- **“Some people may disagree, but I think...”**
- **“From my point of view...”**
- **“The way I see it...”**
- **“As far as I'm concerned...”**
- **“Speaking for myself...”**

In the conversation, the interviewer asks Laura for some additional details about her opinions. He uses some of these phrases:

- **“What do you mean?”**
- **“Could you clarify?”**
- **“Could you elaborate on that?”**
- **“Could you give an example?”**

Another conversational technique to clarify information is repeating or re-stating what the other person has said. Here are some expressions for confirming the other person's ideas:

- **“You mean...”**
- **“So what you're saying is that...”**
- **“If I understand you correctly, you're saying that...”**

All of these can be said as either questions or statements. For example:

- **“So what you're saying is that we should get rid of standardized tests?”**
- **“So what you're saying is that we should get rid of standardized tests.”**

Notice the difference in the way they are pronounced. We typically use the statement form when we are confident that our re-statement is correct, and use the question form when we have a little bit of doubt that we have understood the other person's thoughts correctly – or when we are somewhat surprised by their idea.

To respond to this re-statement, if the person has accurately repeated your idea, you can simply say “Yes,” “Right,” or “Exactly.” But if you want to make a correction, you can say:

- “No, that’s not what I meant. / No, that’s not what I’m saying.”
- “No, not exactly. What I mean is... / What I’m trying to say is...”

Conversation #2 – Asking for and Giving Advice

Dennis is a professional financial adviser. He has a radio show where people can call in and ask for help with their financial problems.

Dennis: Hi Helen, you’re on the air! What can I help you with?

Helen: Hi Dennis, thanks for taking my call. My problem is that I just can’t manage to save money. I’d like to buy a house someday, but I always seem to spend my entire paycheck by the end of the month. What should I do?

Dennis: First of all, have you tried keeping track of your spending? I suggest writing down all your expenses for the next month, so that you can find out exactly where your money is going.

Helen: I’m not sure I’m organized enough to track every dollar. I mean, I have a general idea of how much I pay for rent, food, and gas... oh, yeah, and there’s also my student loan payments.

Dennis: How much debt do you currently have?

Helen: About \$50,000 in student loans, plus like \$8,000 on my credit card.

Dennis: Well, you’d better pay that credit card debt down as soon as possible – otherwise it’ll keep accumulating interest, and you’ll end up paying twice as much in the end!

Helen: One problem is that I work as a waitress, and I don’t earn much. That makes it hard to get ahead.

Dennis: If I were you, I would either look for another job or an additional source of income. Have you considered starting a business on the side? If not, you should look into it.

Helen: Should I also start investing in the stock market? Some people make a lot of money that way, right?

Dennis: Yes, but I'd recommend investing carefully in diversified funds that will increase in value over time – whatever you do, don't put all your money into a single company, because if that company fails, you could lose everything!

Helen: My dad tells me I should also have a savings account just for emergencies. About how much money should I set aside for that?

Dennis: I suggest having about 6 months of living expenses saved up – that should be enough for most emergencies. And of course, make sure you have health insurance and car insurance – just in case!

Helen: Okay – I'll try to do everything you've suggested. Thanks for your help!

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

Here are a few phrases for asking someone for advice:

- **“What should I do?”**
- **“What would you do if you were me?”**
- **“What do you suggest/recommend?”**

To reply, there are three different ways to give advice – by using questions, by making statements, and by giving commands. Using questions is the most indirect way; it is good for giving advice on sensitive topics, when advising a person who you don't know very well, or when suggesting possibilities to someone who has not directly asked for your advice.

How to give advice using questions:

- **“Have you tried...?”**
I can't find time to exercise. What should I do?
Have you tried going to the gym before work?
- **“Have you considered...? / Have you thought about...?”**
I always get nervous when giving presentations.
Have you considered taking a class in public speaking?

- **“How about...?”**

*I live by myself, and it sometimes gets very lonely.
How about getting a dog?*

- **“Why don’t you...?”**

*I’m exhausted. I’ve been working way too much.
Why don’t you take a vacation?*

If you want to be a little more direct, you can give advice using statements:

- **“I suggest...” / “I recommend...”**

*“I’m going to visit Boston. What should I do there?”
“I suggest taking a tour of the historical center of the city.”
“Thanks. Do you know of any good hotels?”
“I recommend the Hilton on Cambridge Street – it’s nice, but very affordable.”*

- **“If I were you, I’d...” / “If I were in your shoes/position, I’d...”**

*Use these phrases to describe what you would do if you were in that situation:
“Oh no! My final exam is on the same day as a job interview! What should I do?”
“If I were you, I’d ask the teacher if I could take the exam a day earlier.”*

- **“You should...” / “I think you should...”**

*Ex) “My sister’s been mad at me for weeks. She won’t answer my phone calls.”
“I think you should write her a letter.”*

- **“You’d better...”**

*This phrase is the most forceful and direct in this category.
Ex) “I have a terrible toothache.”
“You’d better see the dentist before it gets any worse.”*

You can also give advice using imperatives/commands. These are “stronger” and they are typically only used with people who you know well, or when you want to be extremely direct – like if the person doesn’t want to listen to the more indirect forms of advice. Here are some examples:

- **“Try to save more money.”**
- **“Stop eating fast food.”**
- **“Start going to bed earlier.”**
- **“Make sure you...”**

Ex) Make sure you bring money for a taxi, because there are no buses after midnight.

- **“Whatever you do, don’t...”**

Use this phrase when ONE piece of advice is especially essential:

Ex) Whatever you do, don’t eat the seeds of this fruit – they’re poisonous.

You’ve finished Lesson 38! Today’s speaking task is to talk about a few pieces of good advice you’ve received, and a few pieces of good advice you’ve given to someone else. Click here to record your message:

<http://www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish>