# Seminars: agreeing, disagreeing, and giving opinions

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| **Student focused learning outcomes:**  By the end of the session, you will be better able to:   * understand the purpose of a seminar * recognise the elements of a successful seminar * identify key language used in seminar discussion * use key language in seminar discussions * prepare for a longer seminar |

## Task 1

Discuss these questions.

1. What happens during a seminar?
2. What is the purpose of a seminar?
3. How do you think seminars in the UK might be the same/different to those in your country?
4. How do you feel about participating in seminars:
   1. in your country?
   2. in the UK?
5. Do you have any specific worries about participating in a seminar here?

Adapted from Wallace, M.J. (2004) Study Skills in English. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

### Interaction within a seminar

The success of a seminar depends on:

* how the individual members of the group interact
* how the whole group interacts

## Task 2

1. Make two lists of ideas in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **For a successful seminar discussion:** | |
| Individual members should … | The whole group should … |
|  |  |

1. Present your group’s ideas to the class.

### Agreeing and disagreeing

When one of the participants expresses an idea or opinion, you must decide what your own thoughts are and how to respond.

#### Agree

* Do you agree completely, or do you think he/she is only partly right?
* Do you have any arguments, facts etc. which support or go against the speaker's point of view?

#### Disagree

* There is nothing wrong in disagreeing with a speaker, but always respect other people's views. Take note that in many academic discussions, disagreement is not always as direct as it is in some cultures.

#### Don't know

* You may be looking for more evidence, or you may not quite have understood what the speaker is trying to say.

## Task 3

Compare your ideas.

1. How do you feel about disagreeing with other people’s ideas and opinions during a seminar?
2. How do you feel about people disagreeing with your points?

**STUDY SKILLS**

In many disciplines, the purpose of a seminar is to discuss ideas, not primarily to learn facts, although facts are important as evidence to support the ideas.

In seminars, you will be expected to express and justify your own views, not simply to repeat information from books and lectures.

### Language for giving opinions, agreeing, and disagreeing

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Strong / confident opinions I’m sure that …  I really believe that … | Neutral opinions In my opinion ……  Personally, I think ……  I feel that… | Tentative opinions It seems/appears to me that …  I tend to think that. |
| Agreeing Yes, I think so, too.  I completely/entirely agree.  Yes, that’s right. | Disagreeing No, I don’t (really) agree (with you).  I’m afraid I disagree.  But there’s no evidence for that. | Partial agreement / expressing reservations I suppose so, but ….  That’s true to some extent but ……  I see what you mean but … |

## Task 4

You are going to practise giving your opinion, agreeing, and disagreeing.

1. Firstly, think about the following question.

Which is the most significant invention since 1800?

* The bicycle
* Computers
* Nuclear power

1. Rank the three inventions, then make brief notes to justify your decision.
2. Share your views. Use the opinion, agreeing and disagreeing language above.
3. Read the results of a survey asking listeners to rank 10 inventions: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/youandyours/technology_launch.shtml>.
4. Discuss the results of the survey with your group. Remember to use the appropriate language for giving your opinion, agreeing, and disagreeing.

### Asking questions and interrupting

In a seminar or discussion, you may want to:

* ask questions.
* interrupt another speaker.

## Task 5

Think about the following questions.

1. For what reasons might you want to ask a question?
2. How do you feel about interrupting? Why might you need to do this?

Share your ideas.

### Language for asking questions and interrupting

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| To ask a question or add a point May I ask a question?  I have a question I’d like to ask.  May I say something here?  I’d like to add something here if I may.  I have a point I’d like to make. | To interrupt somebody during the discussion Can I interrupt (you) for a moment?  Excuse me, but…  Excuse me for interrupting, but…  Sorry to interrupt, but…  If I could just come in briefly… |
| If you feel that an interruption is inappropriate, you can say Excuse me, but I’d just like to finish this point.  Sorry, but I’m just about to finish my point.  Sorry, but if I could just finish what I was trying to say.  Could I please just finish my point? | To pick up and continue what you were saying before the interruption Anyway…  As I was saying…  So-o-o…  Going back to what I was saying…  Going back to what I was saying about … |

## Task 6

Discuss these questions. Try to use some of the language above.

1. What piece of technology would you most like to see invented? Why?
2. What piece of technology do you think should not have been invented? Why?

## Task 7

Reflect on your experience of the discussions you have had during this session.

1. How often did you participate?
2. Did you use any of the useful language for the discussions?
3. What do you feel your strengths and weaknesses were in the discussions?
4. Look at the marking criteria for the assessed seminar you will participate in at the end of the course. In which areas do you most need to develop?

### Independent study tasks

In *Seminars: referring to articles 1, y*ou will participate in a seminar. To do that successfully, you will need to first complete the following study sessions: *Seminars: Useful language (group study)* and *Seminars: Preparing for a discussion (individual study)*.

Your tutor will now assign you a text (A or B) to read in the individual study session. These texts are available on *Seminars: preparing for a discussion (individual study)* on Blackboard. **You should only read the text you are assigned.**