

COURSE MATERIALS

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SPEAKING SKILLS

MODULE 3

INTERACTING IN COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES: LANGUAGE FUNCTION AND USAGE

**Secció d'Anglès
FIB**

3.1 LEVELS OF FORMALITY

In English, as well as in many other languages, there are some expressions, within one function, that you can use at any time. It doesn't matter who you are talking to, or when, or where. These are called **neutral** expressions. 'Thank you', for instance, is one of many neutral expressions in English. It can be used whenever you want to thank anyone. But there are some expressions especially suitable at certain times, and rather unsuitable at others. For example, you probably don't greet your employer in the same way as you greet your best friend. You are most likely to use **formal language** to greet someone in authority, and **informal language** to greet someone you know well.

In order to communicate efficiently, you need to decide whether to use formal or informal language according to what situation you are in. That determines what kind of language you use. Remember that most technical communication (academic, professional) is likely to require neutral or formal registers.

Situation	Language
Formal	formal
Informal	informal
neither very informal nor very formal	neutral

When deciding how formal or informal a situation is, you must consider the following factors:

- a) **the setting** (where you are and when)
- b) **the topic** (what you are talking about)
- c) **your social relationship** (who you are talking to: e.g. a friend, a stranger, an employer, etc.).
- d) **your psychological attitude** (what you feel about the topic or the other person).

Remember that it is not right to take just one factor into account. The level of formality depends on all four factors.

EXERCISES

1. Listen to a lecturer describing to new students the ways in which computers can be useful to them. Fill in the table below, which shows how different people need different software.

	Social Science	History	Engineering	Computer Science	Languages	Business Studies	General Sciences
programming							
word processing							
database				X			
spreadsheet							
DTP							
statistics							
financial software							
CAD							
simulations							
operating systems							

DTP: Desktop publishing.

2. Although very friendly, the tutor's spoken English is quite formal because of the academic content of his talk and his intention to be clear and unambiguous. Can you list some of the features of this formal style?

3. Now you are going to listen to two conversations between two students.

a) At the library: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABEcliFXkp8>

b) Freshman and senior students

In what ways do you think the spoken English you are about to hear might differ from that of the previous listening exercise? Now listen and list some of the features of the style used in this conversation.

4. Can you provide some examples?

- a different form of 'yes' and "no"
- bad grammar
- a way of asking for information when you have absolutely no idea?
- other elements of informal style

TASK**Functions at different levels of formality**

Complete the following table with appropriate expressions

	Informal	Neutral	Formal
<i>Asking for permission</i>		Do you mind if...?	With your permission I'd like to...
<i>Requesting</i>	You haven't got ... have you?		
<i>Complaining</i>		I have a complaint about...	
<i>Introducing someone</i>			Let me introduce...
<i>Asking for someone's opinion</i>	What about...?		
<i>Saying you are not sure</i>		I'm not sure.	

Practice: What would you say in these situations?

- a) At a managerial meeting, it is suggested that Mr French, who works under you, should be promoted to chief sales executive. You approve.

What do you say?

1. *Great!*
2. *That suggestion has my full support.*
3. *I can thoroughly recommend Mr French for the position.*

What else could you say?

- b) At a meeting of an international association, the member organizations are asked to increase their financial support in order to solve the association's financial problems. One of the delegates does not approve:

Delegate: *I'm dead against that idea. There must be other ways of working this thing out.*

Is this appropriate? If not, what is appropriate?

- c) You are a junior executive in a large company which has announced pay increases for its employees. You ask various people for their opinion on the increases.

What do you ask each one?

1. a friend who shares your office
2. a colleague you don't know very well
3. the head of another department of the company
4. your secretary

- d) You are attending a scientific conference on energy, and talking to another delegate. What would you say?

1. *I'm convinced that solar power will eventually solve many of our present energy problems.*
2. *I'm of the opinion that solar power will eventually solve many of our present energy problems.*
3. *If you ask me, solar power will eventually solve many of our present energy problems.*

What else could you say?

- e) At an executive meeting someone has a proposal to make. What would s/he say?

With the recent increase in staff, we should do something about improving recreating facilities. ...

1. *Would you agree with that suggestion?*
2. *OK by you?*
3. *I wonder if you would agree with that suggestion.*

- f) You are in a seminar with a number of people whom you have not met before. One of them states that the standard of living has risen considerable in the past forty years. Is anyone saying anything inappropriate?

Participant A: *That may be so, but is the distribution of wealth as it should be?*

Participant B: *OK, but it's risen a lot more for some than for others.*

Participant C: *Could be, but I still think there's too much profit in too few hands.*

- g) Your board is considering the installation of automated processes for some of the production lines in your factory. Not everyone is in favour:

A: *Well, personally, I think that these processes have yet to prove themselves.*

You disagree. What would you say?

1. *I don't see why. ...*
2. *You can't mean that!...*
3. *I see things rather differently myself. ...It's quite clear that they are efficient and highly cost-effective in the long run.*

What else could you say?

3.2 LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

In this section we are going to deal with some of the commonest situations you may encounter in both the academic and professional world. You will learn the most appropriate expressions for each language function. Remember that you must bear in mind what you have learnt about levels of formality.

1. TELEPHONING


1.1 Starting the call

Exercise 1. Supply the missing words in these conversations.


- 1 **Ms Brunet** Sales Department, good morning.
Mr Keller _____ Helena Steiner, please?
Ms Brunet Hold on. I'll get her.
- 2 **Ms Steiner** Hello, Sales.
Mr Keller _____ Helena Steiner, please.
Ms Steiner _____
- 3 **Switchboard** Curtis Holdings.
Mr Keller Extension 2938, please.
Ms Delmont Accounts Department.
Mr Keller _____ Jean Delmont?
Ms Delmont Yes, _____. How can I help you, Mr Keller?

Exercise 2. Listen to two different telephone calls and complete the forms below.

Conversation 1

SALES PROSPECT		 GALAXY COMPUTER SUPPLIES		FIRESAFE CABINETS	
CUSTOMER DETAILS				ACTION NECESSARY	
NAME	José Rosales			send brochure/ sales literature	NO
POSITION				send quote	YES
COMPANY	EVP			arrange a sales visit	NO
ADDRESS	Madrid, Spain			phone back	NO
FAX	14306687				
TEL.					
AREAS OF INTEREST (TICK)					
<input type="checkbox"/> BZ 9 <input type="checkbox"/> BZ 10 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BZ 11					

Conversation 2

ORDER REQUEST		 GALAXY COMPUTER SUPPLIES		FIRESAFE CABINETS	
QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION	REF. No			
6	Photoconductor units	76905 AstroK			
CUSTOMER DETAILS			ORDER RECEIVED BY		
Contact name	Christof Terrian	Name	Mary Sacher		
Company	RDF France	NO	Fax		
Address	111 Rue du Clamart, 94162 Vélizy-Villacoublay France	NO	Telex		
		YES	Letter		
		NO	Phone		
		YES	Urgent		

1.2 Telephone manners and expressions

Exercise 3

- A) Look at dialogue One. It sounds impolite. Why?
- B) Dialogue Two is a more polite way of saying the same thing. With a partner, fill in the gaps in Dialogue Two.

Dialogue One	Dialogue Two
A: I want to speak to Fred Jones.	A: _____. Fred Jones, _____.
B: He isn't here.	B: I'm _____. He isn't in the office at the moment.
A: So when will he be there?	A: Could you _____ he'll be _____?
B: I don't know.	B: I'm _____ I don't know.
A: OK. Take a message.	A: Could I _____ message, please?
B: Who are you?	B: Of course, _____, please?
A: I'm Mike Lam	A: _____ Mike Lam.
B: And what do you want me to tell him?	B: Thank you. And what is the _____?
A: Tell him to call me back before 5:30	A: Could you _____ to call me before 5:30, if _____?

C) On the left are some expressions you are likely to hear on the telephone. Match them with the explanations on the right.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| a) The line is busy | 1) Would you like to wait until the line is free? |
| b) It's for you | 2) I'll connect you |
| c) Will you hold? | 3) He's talking on another telephone |
| d) He's on another line | 4) He isn't answering his phone |
| e) I'm returning your call | 5) He's talking to someone else |
| f) There's no answer | 6) What is your name, please? |
| g) I'm calling on behalf of Tom Stark | 7) The person phoning wants to talk to you |
| h) I'll put you through. | 8) Tom Stark asked me to call you |
| i) Who shall I say is calling? | 9) ... speaking |
| j) This is... | 10) You called me earlier; now I'm calling you back |

Speaking Activity 1. Role-play

My Business English

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdDTNE3Xu-A>

Check expressions for telephone exchanges on "My Business English". In pairs, choose one of these telephone calls to act it out. One person looks at the information under Student A and the other uses the information under Student B.

CALL 1

Student A

Your company's new leaflets are still at the printers. You expect them to arrive today. A customer calls with a request. Write down the details.

Student B

Phone the sales department of the company and ask them to send you an up-to-date leaflet of the company's new products and prices.

Plan the conversation:

1. Name of company
2. New products
3. Solution...

CALL 2

Student A

Phone one of your partners in another branch of your company and ask him/her to give a demonstration in your department about the results of their current projects.

Student B

Your partner in another branch of your company phones you with a request to give a demonstration on the results of your current projects. Say yes and write down the details.

Plan the conversation:

1. Date
2. Details: timing, approach...

TELEPHONING- VIDEO SESSION WORKSHEET

- 1) **First contacts.** Watch video Version 1. As you watch, note down what Nick does badly. Use the checklist to help you.

Checklist—preparing for a telephone call

Preparation Does he prepare for the call?

(version 1):

(version 2):

Purpose Is the purpose of the call clear?

(version 1):

(version 2):

People Are the introductions adequate?

(version 1):

(version 2):

Information Is the information clearly communicated?

(version 1):

(version 2):

Tone Is the atmosphere positive?

(version 1):

(version 2):

Now watch version 2. Use the checklist above to make any comment on the second version.

- 2) **The right person.** Watch video Version 1. What does Gregg do wrong?

Watch Version 1 again. Use the checklist to help you identify the problems more clearly.

Checklist—opening a call

Introduce self

(version 1):

(version 2):

Ask for connection

(version 1):

(version 2):

Check name of person you are calling

(version 1):

(version 2):

(Small talk)*

(version 1):

(version 2):

Introduce subject of call

(version 1):

(version 2):

Listen actively to responses

(version 1):

(version 2):

* This is appropriate once you know the person you are calling.

Watch Version 2. What does Gregg do differently this time? Look at the checklist and identify the points at which Gregg does these things.

3) **Closing the call.** Watch Version 1 and do the following tasks:

- a) Why does the call take so long to finish?
- b) Identify the moments when Gregg should have recognized Diane's signals that she wanted to end the call.
- c) Diane tries to signal her need to get off the phone. She does this through the words she uses, and also through her intonation. Listen to the closing extract of Gregg and Diane's call and note the intonation of the words in italics.

Gregg: Um... Do you want me to go over the arrangements for the reception?

Diane: No, that's all right. I've got every confidence in you. *So...*

Gregg: Yes, It's going to be a busy couple days.

Diane: Certainly is. *Anyway, Greg...*

Gregg: But should be a lot of fun

Diane: Yes, I'm looking forward to it. *Right, then...*

Gregg: So, I suppose I should let you get on with it.

Diane: Yes, I'm afraid I'm really snowed under.

Gregg: Right, anyway, I'm sure it's going to be a real success...

Diane: I'm sure too. *Well, I look forward to seeing you on Friday.*

Gregg: Yes, I'll be at the airport.

Diane: Gregg, I must go now. Someone's just come in for a meeting. Thank you for phoning.

Gregg: *Oh, all right. Goodbye.*

Diane: *Bye.*

Gregg: *Bye.*

Now, watch Version 2 and answer the question:

- d) When does Gregg realize the call needs to be short? What does he do?

Telephoning: Word file

Here are some useful expressions that are used on the telephone.

Identifying your company Electronix, can I help you Good morning, Hewlett Packard	Identifying yourself This is... <i>(name)</i> <i>(name)</i> ... speaking It's... <i>(name).</i> * * <i>(Just giving your name can sound abrupt in English)</i>
Asking for your connection I'd like to speak to... Could you put me through to...? Could I speak to someone in the ... department?	Explaining the purpose of a call It's about... / It's concerning... The reason I'm calling is... It's in connection with... I'm returning your call
Making the connection Just a moment I'm putting you through Could you hold on?	Excuses I'm afraid he / she's in a meeting (at the moment) out of the office. He / she won't be back until Monday He / she's away for a week.

Calling back Could you ask her to call me back? Could you ask him to get back to me? This is... returning your call I'll call you back Can I call you back?	Structuring the call There are two things I wanted to mention The first thing is Just one more point...
Asking for clarification I'm sorry, I didn't catch that Could you repeat that?	Closing the call So let me just go over that (confirmation) I think that covers everything / Is there anything else? (closing signals) Thank you for calling / for the information (thanking)
Messages Can I take a message? Could I leave a message? Could you tell him / her I called?	Repeating Could you just go over that again? Let me just repeat that...
Encouraging Of course Go ahead	Saying goodbye Nice talking to you. I'll speak to you tomorrow. Look forward to hearing from you again soon.

2. SCHEDULES AND APPOINTMENTS

2.1 Making appointments

1. Put these sentences in the correct order to make a short conversation.

- Yes, please. Would Tuesday the 26th be convenient?
- It's quite all right. I'll look forward to seeing you on Thursday the 28th, then.
- I'm calling about our appointment on the 25th. I'm afraid I can't make it.
- Thank you. Goodbye.
- Yes, I can manage the 28th. I'm sorry to be a nuisance.
- It doesn't matter. Would you like to fix another time?
- I'm afraid I'm tied up on the 26th. How about the 28th?

2. Look at the conversation above and underline the expressions used for:

- *changing plans.*
- *suggesting a time.*
- *refusing.*
- *accepting.*

3. Supply alternative words for these phrases in bold type.

a) We need to **arrange** a time for the next meeting.

f _____

b) **Are you free** next Wednesday?

H _____

c) I'm afraid I'm **busy**.

t _____ up.

d) When would **suit you**?

be c _____

e) I can **make** Friday.

m _____

f) I'm afraid I can't **come** to Tuesday's meeting.

m _____ it

2.2 Arranging a meeting

1. Fill the spaces in the conversation using the correct form of five of the verbs below.

have	interview	look	meet	say	visit	do	leave	eat	make
------	-----------	------	------	-----	-------	----	-------	-----	------

Mary: I need to see you about the design of the new catalog. Some time next week. Monday if possible.

Bill: OK. Let me have a look at my schedule. How about 11:00?

Mary: No, that's no good. I'm (1) _____ a presentation to the board at 11:15. What about lunchtime?

Bill: I'm afraid I'm (2) _____ lunch with a client.

Mary: Are you (3) _____ anything in the afternoon? I think we need to discuss this as soon as possible.

Bill: Well, I'm (4) _____ for Boston at 5:00. Could we make it 4 o'clock?

Mary: That doesn't give us much time, Bill. How about after lunch?

Bill: I'm sorry, but I'm (5) _____ the client's factory after lunch.

Mary: OK then, Monday afternoon at 4:00.

Speaking Activity 2. Role-play (Fixing a time)

Caller

Fill in your diary for next week.
You need to arrange a meeting with your partner. Phone him/her to fix a time.

Receiver

Fill in your diary for next week.
You need to arrange a meeting with your partner. S/he phones to fix a time.

3. GIVING ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following dialogue deals with some advice on how users can protect their computer from viruses and other related problems. Read the situation described in the box and then look at the dialogue. Some parts are missing. Try to complete them with a partner. Then listen to the dialogue and check your answers.

Mike and Dan are two university students in the computer lab. They're trying to finish their course project. Dan starts to have problems with his file, which may have been infected by a computer virus, and Mike tries to help him. Dan doesn't know much about computers and Mike is almost an "expert".

D: How's your project going?

M: I'm almost finished. Never thought it'd take so long. What about you?

D: I've still got some work to do. I hope I can hand it in by the deadline... Oops!

M: _____

D: I don't know what's happened with my file. I keep getting odd messages. And my work is in a very weird format.

M: Let me see...uh-uh.

D: What happened?

M: I think your file may be infected by a virus.

D: _____

M: Do you use an antivirus program?

D: I don't need one. I never share files with anyone else. And I only connect to the college network. It's very secure.

M: Well, most viruses enter through the network. Everyone uses it. And through email, of course. You should be very careful.

D: What should I do?

M: _____

D: Update it?

M: Of course. It'll be of no use if it can't recognize the latest viruses. And new viruses appear every day.

D: _____

M: Don't trust them, please. They're hoaxes!

D: Hoaxes?

M: _____

D: Worse?

M: ...some of them tell you to erase important files of your operating system or they can be Trojans.

D: Trojans?

M: Yeah. Trojan horses. Apparently harmless files that enter your computer, but in fact they can be viruses in a disguise. Very dangerous.

D: _____

M: Don't trust any messages warning you about viruses. And don't open any attachments from people you don't know. Also be careful when downloading files from the Internet. Especially executable files, programs, from certain sources.

D: How do I know?

M: _____

D: A virus scanner?

M: A program that searches for viruses in your files. Some internet applications also do that. If they find a virus, you should then use an antivirus program to clean the file.

D: _____

M: That's right. That's why prevention is so important. You should have backup copies of your important data, keep your antivirus updated...

D: So that I don't have to worry about opening files and messages.

M: _____

D: Like?

M: An antivirus program, of course, and a copy of it on a disk. Backup copies of important files. And an external disk to reboot, that is restart, your computer, in case your operating system is damaged. At the computer center they'll give you specific advice, follow it. You should be, I'd say, a bit paranoid about security.

D: Paranoid?

M: _____

A. In the dialogue above, participants ask for and give advice. Put these expressions from the dialogue in the correct column.

Giving advice	Asking for advice

- *"You should be very careful"*
- *"Also be careful when downloading files from the Internet."*
- *"What should I do?"*
- *"If in doubt, don't download the file or run it through a virus scanner."*
- *"You should be, I'd say, a bit paranoid about security."*
- *"But how can I protect my computer?"*

B. Formal or informal?

How formal do you think the dialogue is? Justify your answer by referring to the elements in the communicative situation

- Formal
- Neutral
- Informal

Word file: Asking for and giving advice

There are other ways of asking for and giving advice, ranging from formal to informal:

➤ **Asking for advice**

+Formal

- I was wondering if you could advise me on...? / about...?
- I was wondering if you could give me some advice on...? / about...?

- Can/Could you advise me on...? /...about?
- Can/Could you give me some advice on...? /...about?

- What would you do in my position? / if you were me?

- What do you reckon / think / believe I should do?

- What should I do?

+Informal

➤ **Giving advice**

+Formal

- I was wondering if you'd ever thought of...
- I think your best course would be to do...
- I'd advise you to do...
- Might it be an idea to ...
- You might (like to) try...
- You could consider ...
- If I were you, I'd do...
- I suggest you do...
- Have you ever thought of...?
- Don't you think it might be an idea to...?
- I think you ought to ... should ...
- I think you'd better....
- You'd better...
- Why don't you?

+ Informal

Speaking Activity 3. Helping users to protect their computer / to purchase an appropriate laptop

- a) Below is a list of common problems users may encounter if they are not careful. Do you know what they refer to? Get together with other partners and discuss them using the following prompts.
1. Go through the different examples of risky uses of computers and make sure you understand what they mean.
 2. In what ways do they pose a threat to safe computing? What dangerous consequences may they have?
 3. How can users identify or prevent these problems? What advice can you give to other users?

COMPUTER SECURITY THREATS:

- *“Phishing” or email messages requesting you personal information such as bank account number, etc.*
- *Careless use of passwords*
- *Opening non-reliable attachments*
- *Allowing spyware into your computer (by downloading programs, exchanging movies and music files, etc.)*
- *Using pirated software*
- *Not having an updated antivirus program and a firewall*

- b) Consider the importance of these criteria in order to buy an appropriate laptop:

- *Power*
- *Processor*
- *Multimedia connection*
- *IBM-type vs. Apple*
- *...*

4. GIVING INSTRUCTIONS / GIVING A DEMO

When giving instructions, you may use the following expressions:

Sequencers

⇒ First(ly), then, next, after that, finally

Instructions

⇒ You have to..., you mustn't..., you needn't..., you don't have to...

⇒ If you do X..., Y do/does...

Y will do ...

(e.g. If you press this key, the computer prints out the reading ⇒ general truths

If you press this key by mistake, you'll lose all the data ⇒ warnings)

Speaking activity 4. Giving a demo on how a computer application is used.

- Get in pairs and choose an application, program, computer game you can use.
- Give instructions to others to use as you give a demonstration.
- Get ready to give the demonstration in class

5. DISCUSSING AND NEGOTIATING

5.1 Expressions used for giving opinions

Asking for opinions:

What do you think of...?
How do you feel about...?
What's your opinion of...?

Expressing opinions:

I think...	
I believe...	+STATEMENT
In my opinion,...	
In my view,...	
It seems to me that...	
I'm convinced that... (formal)	
I'm of the opinion / view that... (formal)	
I consider... (formal)	
From my point of view, I think...	+STATEMENT
As far as I'm concerned...	
If you ask me,... (informal)	
I'd say... (informal)	

5.2 Agreeing/ disagreeing

Exercise 1

Read the following transcript of a meeting and underline those expressions used by the speakers to:

- state opinions
- agree
- disagree

Klaus Ehlers: OK, first of all ... er, could I ask if anyone has any questions, er, on this survey the working party has carried out in the Madrid office?

Andrea Thompson: Er, yes. Can I just check the figures? Were there really 2,560 sheets in one month?

Klaus Ehlers: Oh yes, absolutely. They were carefully counted.

Andrea Thompson: Could you say what sort of papers they were?

Klaus Ehlers: Er, well, they varied. There were memos, questionnaires, instructions, up-dates, letters, reports, surveys. All kinds of paperwork.

Mariluz Rivera: Yes, it's quite true there were over two and a half thousand sheets of paper. But before we begin our discussion, Klaus, I think the vital thing to point out is the number of copies included in that figure. In fact there were 720 original sheets, the rest were copies.

Peter Wang: It seems a fantastic amount of paper, but I have always understood that company policy stressed the importance of internal communications.

Klaus Ehlers: I agree, Peter. It has. But we must find a balance which is practicable. Madrid is clearly drowning under a sea of paper.

Andrea Thompson: So what recommendations has the working party come up with?

Klaus Ehlers: We feel that the emphasis should be moved to face-to-face communication. Departmental managers should be encouraged to hold more meetings. Video-conferencing could also be more widely used between branches and subsidiaries. This would radically cut the number of fourth and fifth copies in circulation.

Peter Wang: Don't you think this would be expensive? Especially for routine messages. Why not use fax?

Mariluz Rivera: But excuse me, Peter. I can't agree with you. They just create more paper. In my view it's since the wide use of fax machines that the paper problem has got out of hand. It's too easy ...

5.3 Taking part in interaction: interrupting, questioning, getting clarification

Interrupting

Sorry to interrupt (you) but...

May/Can I interrupt (you) for a second...

May/Can I break in for a second...

I'd like to make a point...

Hold on a moment! (informal)

Questioning

If you want to ask a question politely, make a request to ask a question or express your desire to ask a question rather than asking directly:

May / Could / Can I ask a question?

I'd like to ask a question.

Speakers are also expected to allow time for questions and discussion at the end of a presentation. This question-and-answer stage can be considered a very important aspect of the presentation. Often the speaker misunderstands a question, because the point is lost in an over-long sentence. A practical solution is to keep your question short. Don't forget that the

presenter may not be sure, when you start to speak, that you are asking a question. So you need to make clear:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| a) that it's a question | e.g. <i>'I have a question...</i> |
| b) what the topic is | <i>...about assessment on the course.</i> |
| c) what the point is | <i>What is the overall balance between the examinations and the project work?'</i> |

- ⇒ It is sometimes suggested that the speaker should repeat or summarize each question from the audience, before beginning to give an answer. *Why is this advice given?*
- ⇒ Questions and answers are not always straightforward. The speaker who is asked a question may understand the question but be unable (or unwilling) to give an answer, in which case, they may avoid giving a direct answer. Below are some examples.

If you want to avoid an answer

- (X) is important but it's too complex for us to deal with here.
- I think we have to focus on (Y) rather than (X).
- It's too early for us to say whether...
- We don't have enough evidence to show that...
- That's not something I've had time to deal with, but...

- ⇒ The listener may also want to say that the answer they have received is inadequate:

If another question follows up

- That's not really what I was asking. My question was about...
- Perhaps I didn't make my question clear. In fact what I asked was...
- I think you've answered a slightly different question.
- I've understood that but what I actually had in mind was...

These expressions are relatively polite and formal. What words could you omit from each example to make them more direct? What type of words are they?

Getting clarification

When using a foreign language, we have to get used to dealing with situations where we do not understand, or partly understand, what the speaker has said. If you are taking part in a seminar or meeting, where time may be short, it is important to make it clear to the speaker precisely what your problem is. If you ask a very general question, you may find that the speaker simply produces a repetition of what s/he said before.

There are several ways of getting clarification, and you may use these common expressions:

Non-comprehension:

- I'm sorry, I didn't understand/catch what you said about (X).
- I'm sorry, could you repeat what you said about (X)?
- What does (X) mean?

Partial comprehension:

- What (exactly) did you mean when you said (X)?
- Could you be more specific about (X)?
- Could you expand a little on what you said about (X)?
- Could you give an example of...?
- Could you explain in more detail what you said about (X)?

Getting confirmation:

- So you're telling me that I can't...?
- So what you're saying is that...?
- So you mean that...?

Exercise 2

Decide into which group (stating, agreeing, disagreeing) these expressions would fit best.

1. I couldn't agree more.
2. In my opinion it's too late.
3. Of course.
4. Quite so.
5. I'm not at all sure.
6. I really can't agree.
7. I'd go along with that.
8. Exactly / Absolutely.
9. Not entirely.
10. Correct.

Exercise 3

Match the expressions on the left with the expressions on the right that have the same meaning:

- | | |
|--|---|
| a) I think we should | 1. I suggest |
| b) What do you think about this? | 2. I need more time to think about that |
| c) How about? | 3. I'm sorry, I don't quite follow you |
| d) Good idea | 4. What's your opinion on this? |
| e) I'm not sure about that | 5. I'm sorry, but I can't agree with that |
| f) I'm afraid I have to disagree with that | 6. In my opinion, we should... |
| g) I'm afraid I'm not sure what you mean | 7. I agree |

Speaking Activity 5. Giving an opinion

A) React to the following statements by giving your opinion.

1. *"Mobile phones are being abused and are annoying. They were intended for communication, but have invaded every aspect of society. Individuals cannot have a face-to-face conversation without someone having to use his or her mobile phone!"*
2. *"I think that developers should concentrate their attention on educational software more than they do on computer games and game consoles."*
3. *"Information provided on the Internet cannot be trusted since anyone can publish anything without having to verify facts."*
4. *"It is not the hacker's fault; the computer designer should work harder on computer security."*
5. *"I don't think computers control our lives; and they never will"*

B) Discuss the following. *The use of computers in the classroom (secondary school / university)*