

Why have academic discussions?

- to help you understand a subject more deeply
- to enable you to share ideas and insights with others
- to hear the thoughts and ideas of other students
- to challenge and perhaps change your ideas
- to increase and clarify your knowledge
- to improve your ability to think critically
- to increase your confidence in speaking
- to improve your English speaking skills

Giving opinions

To make your ideas clear, you need to give your opinion. As this is an academic discussion, you need to support your opinion by giving reasons and evidence such as examples, statistics, or information from readings on the topic. If you have actual data or expert opinions to use during the discussion, you should refer to the source if possible.

- I think (that)...
- I believe (that)...
- I feel (that)...
- It seems to me (that)...
- My view is (that)...
- It is my view (that)...
- In my view...
- In my opinion...
- As far as I'm concerned...
- I would say (that)...
- For me, ...
- As I understand it...
- From what I understand...

Giving reasons

- This is due to...
- Because/Since...
- Due to the fact that...
- As a result of...
- As a consequence of...

Giving evidence

- For instance...
- For example...
- (Author's name) states that...
- Statistics from (source) indicate...

Asking for opinions

This allows other group members to join the discussion and gives them a chance to share their opinions, and say whether they agree or disagree with your opinion.

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

How to agree and disagree

In academic discussions, you will need to argue your point with reasons and evidence. An academic argument is always civilized and polite, which you should especially remember if you're disagreeing with a speaker's argument. You should try to disagree politely, by first acknowledging their opinion before saying why you disagree. It is also possible to simply disagree, but you should avoid doing this too often as it may seem rude.

Agreeing

- Yes.
- Yes, that's right.
- Yes, I agree with you.
- I agree (with/that)...
- That's what I think too.
- Absolutely.
- Yes, absolutely.

Acknowledging ideas

- Yes, OK, but...
- I see what you mean, but...
- I accept that, but...
- That may be true, but...
- I take your point, but...
- I can see your point. However...
- That's a good point, but
- I see what you're getting at, but...
- I see where you're coming from, but...
- I agree up to a point, but...
- Yes, but what about...

Disagreeing

- No, I don't really agree.
- I don't really agree with you.
- I don't agree with that at all.
- (I'm afraid) I don't think that's right.
- I'm not sure that's right.
- I wouldn't say that.
- I'm not so sure about that.
- But (surely)...
- But don't you think...
- That's not always the case because...
- That's not necessarily true because...
- This idea isn't supported by the evidence...

Asking for clarification

There may be times when you get confused or lost. In such instances, it can be useful to ask the speaker a question or ask for clarification. The verb to clarify means to make something clearer and so the response should help to make the information clearer and easier for the listener to understand. The speaker is likely to paraphrase the information and give additional detail to aid understanding.

Asking questions

- I have a question.
- I've got a question about...
- Could I ask a question?
- Sorry, could I just ask...?

Asking for clarification

- Sorry, I didn't understand what you said about...
- I didn't quite understand what you meant about/by...
- What did you mean about/by...?
- Could you explain...?
- Could you tell me more about...?
- I didn't quite follow that. Could you explain again?

Check your understanding

You will have to repeat or paraphrase what the speaker has just said. If you think you understand this is a definitely more useful approach than asking for clarification, as the speaker can just respond 'Yes' if you are correct, or correct any misunderstandings you have.

- So what you're saying is that...?
- So you mean that...?
- Are you saying that...?
- If I have understood you correctly, your point is that...?

Responding

Once you have asked for clarification or checked for understanding, it is useful to respond to show whether you now understand or not, so that the speaker can either continue or provide more explanation.

- Yes, I see.
- Yes, that's clear now.
- OK, thanks.
- That's fine now.
- Sorry, I still don't understand.
- I'm sorry, but could you explain that one more time?

Giving suggestions

- I suggest that...

- What about...?
- How about...?
- It might be an idea to...
- One option would be to...
- My advice would be to...
- I propose that...
- I think it would be best to...
- I think what we/you/they should do is...
- My feeling is we/you/they should...
- It would be a good idea to...

Expressing certainty/uncertainty

Academic language, even in discussions, tends to be fairly tentative, so you may also need to express certainty/uncertainty.

- I'm sure (certain) that...
- There's no doubt that...
- You may be right.
- It's likely that...
- It could be that...
- Possibly.
- I think that's debatable.
- I'm not sure (certain) that...
- I'm not so sure about that.
- I don't think I'd say that.

Taking your turn

You want to make a point that is relevant at this moment in the discussion. You need to enter the discussion politely, but firmly:

Can I just come in here?

You want to make a point, but the discussion moves on before you can contribute or finish. You can still make your point later:

To go back to my earlier point, ...

Coming back to what John said earlier, ...

I think I agree with the point you made earlier, Anne.

You start speaking at the same moment as another student. Both of you stop to let the other speak. It is polite to offer each other the chance to continue:

A: Sorry, carry on.

B: No, go ahead.

A: Thanks. I think ... [A makes his/her point and then invites B to speak] Sorry, you were going to say...

B: Yes, I think...

You notice that a quiet student is trying to speak, but other students keep speaking first. You can help the quiet student to get the attention of the group:

I think David has been trying to make a point.

David, did you want to make a point?