

# Voicing and Responding to Opinions

## Activity Type

Reading and Vocabulary Exercises: matching, table completion, preparing notes

Speaking Activity: guided discussion, freer practice (pair and group work)

## Focus

Discussion skills

Expressing and responding to opinions

Formulating an argument and a response

## Aim

To learn and practice presenting and responding to opinions in a discussion.

## Preparation

Make a copy of the four-page worksheet for each student.

## Level

Upper-intermediate (B2)

## Time

90 minutes

## Introduction

In this expressing opinions worksheet, students learn and practice expressing and responding to opinions in a discussion.

## Procedure

Give each student a copy of the four-page worksheet.

First, students read a brief introduction on the topic of discussions and presenting an opinion.

Students then read an excerpt from a seminar discussion where someone is expressing their opinion, paying attention to the underlined phrases.

Next, students write each underlined phrase from the seminar discussion under its corresponding function.

Exercise A - Answer key

1. As far as I am concerned...
2. What I mean by this...
3. As (name) points out... / Moreover

In pairs, students then brainstorm more phrases for each of the three functions and write them in a table. Afterwards, review the phrases as a class.

After that, students read the second part of the seminar discussion where someone responds to the opinion.

Students then write each underlined phrase from the discussion under its corresponding function.

Again, students brainstorm other phrases for each of the three functions with their partner and write them in a table.

Exercise B - Answer key

1. (Name) makes a good point. It is true that...
2. But that isn't actually a bad thing.
3. For example, according to...

(continued on the next page)

Note: This resource can be edited using a PDF editor.

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### Procedure continued

Next, divide the students into two equal groups (A and B).

Using the language from the worksheet, the students in Group A prepare an argument for social media use and Group B prepares an argument against.

Following this, students in the two groups prepare a response to the opposing side of the argument.

To help them with their preparations, students read through a list of arguments *for* and *against* social media use, and select one argument to present as an opinion and then another to present as a response.

Finally, students pair up with someone from the other group and have a discussion on the topic of social media following the procedure given.

As an extension, pairs have a discussion using other arguments presented in the worksheet or if they wish, they can use their own arguments.

Alternatively, you can ask students to pair with a new student for subsequent rounds.

Note: This resource can be edited using a PDF editor.

## Voicing and Responding to Opinions

Being able to participate actively and effectively in seminars is an important part of university education. This requires being comfortable expressing opinions and being able to disagree with others. The thought of doing this is enough to induce anxiety in many students because often they are not sure how to clearly communicate their point or they are afraid of causing offence when disagreeing. However, it can be made easier by focusing on three essential elements which are expressing an opinion, giving reasons for your opinion, and supporting your reasons with evidence. Read the excerpt from a seminar discussion to see how they work.

### Seminar Discussion Part 1

**Teacher:** OK class, you all read the articles on the issue of which animal makes a better house pet, so who would like to get the discussion started?

What's your view on the issue Somying? Are you a cat person or a dog person?

**Somying:** As far as I am concerned, I would never consider having a dog. Don't get me wrong because it's not like I don't like dogs. What I mean by this is that dogs are just simply too hard to take care of. I prefer cats. As Sara Haleblan points out very clearly in the LA Times, cats don't require a daily walk, and unlike dogs, they don't require toilet training. Cats also use litter boxes which is something that dogs don't do. Cats take care of their business in private. Moreover, cats don't need to be bathed as they are able to clean themselves with their tongues.

**A. Write each underlined phrase from the seminar discussion under its corresponding function.**

1. Expressing a valid opinion or reasonable point of view

.....

2. Presenting reasons for your opinion

.....

3. Backing up your reasons with supporting evidence

.....

**B. With a partner, brainstorm more phrases for each of the three functions and write them in the table.**

Expressing an opinion or point of view	Reasons for your opinion	Supporting your reasons with evidence

## How to disagree effectively and respectfully

As previously mentioned, some students may be reluctant to openly disagree with a point of view as they don't want to be seen as impolite. However, it is possible to disagree in a respectful way and keep the discussion going in a productive and constructive manner. Read the next part of the discussion to see how this can be achieved.

### Seminar Discussion Part 2

**Teacher:** OK. Thanks Somying. Some very good points there. Are there any dog lovers who would like to respond?

**Guido:** Yes! I would like to say something. Somying makes a good point. It is true that dogs require special attention. But that isn't actually a bad thing. People can derive many benefits from caring for animals. For example, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, providing the kind of care a dog requires leads to increased opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities, better cognitive function in older adults, and more opportunities to socialize.

**Teacher:** Well Guido, that is certainly a good counter to Somying's point.

### C. Write each underlined phrase from the discussion under its corresponding function.

1. Acknowledge their point or argument

.....

2. Present the reasons why you disagree

.....

3. Offer supporting evidence to show why you disagree

.....

### D. With your partner, brainstorm more phrases for each of the three functions and write them in the table.

Acknowledge their point or argument	Present the reasons why you disagree	Offer supporting evidence to show why you disagree

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### E. In your groups, read the corresponding instructions below.

**Student A:** Choose a point **for** social media use below and prepare an argument to present in a discussion. Then, choose a point **against** social media to use as a response to an argument. The form on the next page will help you to develop both your opinion and your response.

**Student B:** Choose a point **against** social media use below and prepare an argument to present in a discussion. Then, choose a point **for** social media to use as a response to an argument. The form on the next page will help you to develop both your opinion and your response.

### Arguments for Social Media

1. Makes it easier to keep in touch with people: users can reconnect with long-lost friends and make and maintain new friendships online.
2. Makes it easier for shy people to socialize: because social media can allow for some anonymity, less outgoing people can connect with others without fear of embarrassment.
3. Faster communication: as people carry their devices with them everywhere, it helps ensure that they will receive an urgent message quickly. This can prevent a lot of problems.
4. Eases loneliness: people who live in remote places, people with disabilities and the elderly who are often socially isolated have an outlet for easier and meaningful social contact.
5. Enriches lives: social media can provide fun and enjoyment, and it also makes it possible to connect with people from different backgrounds who share a similar interest.

### Arguments against Social Media

1. Social media facilitates cyberbullying: being online encourages people to act out more freely in anti-social ways such as making hurtful or offensive comments.
2. Makes us feel insecure: constantly seeing images of people having fun and doing amazing things can make us feel worse about our own lives and have a fear of missing out (FOMO).
3. Increases the risk of depression: more time spent on social media rather than real-world face-to-face communication can lead to isolation and loneliness which can cause depression.
4. Overloads us with information: although much of the information found in social media can be beneficial, much of it can be irrelevant to our lives and a lot of it is misinformation.
5. Negatively affects your work or academic performance: spending too much time online, especially on social media, causes people to neglect responsibilities connected to their work or studies.

Notes: .....

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## Voicing and Responding to Opinions

**Structure an argument to support your side of the issue using phrases from Exercises A and B. Do a quick search online to find supporting evidence for your argument.**

1. Expressing a valid opinion or reasonable point of view

.....

.....

2. Presenting reasons for your opinion

.....

.....

3. Backing up your reasons with supporting evidence

.....

.....

**Structure a response to an argument made by a student supporting the other side of the issue using phrases from Exercises C and D. Again, do an online search to find supporting evidence for your response.**

1. Acknowledge their point or argument

.....

.....

2. Present the reasons why you disagree

.....

.....

3. Offer supporting evidence to show why you disagree

.....

.....

**F. Now, pair up with a student from the other group and practice discussing the topic of social media using the 4-step procedure below.**

1. Student A presents an opinion for social media use, reasons, and supporting evidence.
2. Student B responds to Student A's opinion with acknowledgment, reasons, and evidence.
3. Student B presents an opinion against social media use, reasons, and supporting evidence.
4. Student A responds to Student B's opinion with acknowledgment, reasons, and evidence.