

2

Classes and Discussions Learning online

In this unit, students will:

- identify characteristics of successful participation in discussions and classes;
- consider problematic issues from different perspectives;
- practice summarizing the outcome of a discussion;
- examine the role of a chairperson in a discussion.

In this unit, students are encouraged to look at various approaches to participating in a class discussion. Some nationalities, at times, find it very challenging to voice their opinions and take turns in this environment, so this unit looks at some of the micro-skills involved in successful participation in a discussion. This unit also encourages students to think beyond their own personal point of view.

Task 1: A successful participant in group discussions

- 1.1** The purpose of this exercise is to get students to look at their own role in a discussion and identify what they need to do more of. Some of the points could fit into either category.

Key:

	The participant ...	Good	It depends	Poor
a	listens to what others say and builds on this, adding his/her opinion.	✓		
b	tries to get other people to change their mind and agree with his/her opinion.		✓	
c	always agrees with other people's opinions.			✓
d	does not say anything at all.			✓
e	explains his/her point in great detail, and at length.			✓
f	explains his/her points briefly.	✓		
g	is nervous about speaking, but makes himself/herself do it.	✓		
h	encourages others to speak, inviting them into the discussion.	✓		
i	only speaks when asked.			✓
j	asks other students to clarify what they mean, or to explain further.	✓		
k	changes his/her opinion during the discussion.		✓	

- 1.2** Monitor pairs during this discussion and ask some of them to share their ideas in plenary afterwards.

- 1.3** This encourages students to think about cross-cultural differences.

Task 2: Different perspectives on an issue


- 2.1** This exercise is designed to encourage students to think about one topic from a range of perspectives, going beyond a black-and-white view of the situation. Some interesting cultural elements might emerge, depending on how important the role of the school/professor is seen to be. Make sure students understand the idea of perspectives.

Answers:

Example answers:

- Professor: might consider other students in the class and how they are losing out because she/he cannot teach effectively
- Parents: might feel professor is not challenging child, or be biased about child's behavior
- Principal: might be concerned about school reputation
- Child psychologist: might consider it a challenge, and want to keep child in school to get to the root of the problem

2.2 Draw students' attention to the *Useful language* for comparing perspectives.

2.3  **5** Having already thought about the topic, students should be tuned in to the content of the recording.

Answers:

See transcript on page 64 (Course Book page 98) for answers.

Task 3: Reaching a balanced conclusion

3.1/3.2 In this exercise, as in Task 2, encourage lateral thinking. To scaffold the exercise more, you might wish to ask students initially to identify the key figures in each situation. As you monitor their discussions, remind students to think of the long-term consequences as well as the more immediate ones.

For example:

Statement 1:

- current school situation, where students may be running riot (short-term)
- general levels of respect in society dropping (long-term)

3.3 Emphasize that students should try to objectively discuss what the views of the different people involved might be before giving their personal view.

Note: Task 4 focuses on language for summarizing a discussion, at the end of which students are asked to summarize their discussions from Task 3. You may wish to omit this. If you don't intend to cover Task 4 in the course, ask groups to summarize their discussion of each statement at this stage.

Task 4: Summarizing the outcome of a discussion

4.1  **6 Answers:**

The group agreed.

4.2  **6 Answers:**

- 1 we finally all agreed that
- 2 It's true that
- 3 this action should only be taken if

4.3 Answers:

(Stressed words are underlined)

we finally all agreed that ... (3)

It's true that ... (1)

this action should only be taken if ... (4)

- 4.4 a)** The three phrases in Ex. 4.3 are reproduced in the *Useful language* box. You can use these to clarify the significance of the numbers in parentheses given for each phrase in the box (= the number of stressed words). Students could predict the stressed words in pairs, before a whole-class check with the professor. You may like to drill some of these expressions with the group, with the focus on stress.

Answers:

(Stressed words are underlined)

After much consideration, we decided that ... (3)

All things considered, we felt that ... (4)

On balance, we felt that ... (2)

We couldn't reach agreement on this issue ... (3)

Some of us felt that ... while others ... (4)

We recognized that ... (1)

We're fully aware that ... (2)

We have to acknowledge that ... (2)

So, although we agreed with the statement, we stressed that ... (5)

Note: If there was no pause between *so* and *although*, then *so* would not be stressed. The comma indicates a "spoken" pause.

You can highlight that the above stress patterns are "neutral." The speaker can shift the stress for contrastive purposes. For example, *On balance, we felt that ...* versus *On balance, we felt that ...*

- b)** 🎧 7 When students listen to the recording, they could follow the transcript and mark the stress in the appropriate place for consolidation. Alternatively, students could cover the transcript with a piece of paper, listen to the first contextualized example "unseen," repeat the target phrase from memory, then uncover the transcript and mark the stressed words. Repeat for the other examples.
- c)** Assign different statements to different groups. Encourage students not to script their summaries, but to rehearse them in their groups, incorporating the language from the *Useful language* box.

- 4.5** Any comments or questions students have for the summarizing group should be about the content of their summary, rather than feedback on their performance.

Task 5: Online learning

- 5.1 a)** In this task, students should put into practice the skills they have been working on in the scaffolded tasks so far. Ask who has had experience of online learning. You might like to ask some specific questions to get them going.

Examples:

Have you ever studied online?

Is online learning popular in your country?

Is it possible to study your subject online?

What are the main differences between learning online and learning face-to-face?

- b)** The reading texts will give students some ideas to add to their own. You might want to give them the readings as homework.

- 5.2/5.3** For the discussion, divide the class into groups of five or six and appoint a chairperson for each group. Choose individuals you feel will be comfortable in the role and will keep things going.

Go over the list of responsibilities of the chairperson with everyone, as at some stage each individual will take on that role. If you have a more reticent class, you could structure this activity more by setting it up as a formal debate in groups. One half of each group supports the motion; the other opposes it. You could also change the debate motion to: *Online learning is better than face-to-face learning.*

- 5.4** After students have filled in the appropriate form (Course Book Appendix 9b) and have fed back in pairs or small groups, round off with your own comments.

Give feedback to the class as a whole on the discussion. Pick up on points like group dynamics and interaction. Encourage proactive participation if students were passively waiting to be nominated during the classes.

- 5.5** Again, you should briefly discuss with students what they might write about for this diary entry. If students have time and access to equipment, they might wish to take up the suggestion of recording their diary entries.

For a rationale, see:

Ho, Y. (2003). Audiotaped dialogue journals; an alternative form of speaking practice. *ELTJ*. 57(3), 269–277.

Unit Summary

- 1 If the students discuss this outside the class, you may wish to start with a brief class discussion to raise interest in the topic.
- 2 **Answers:**
dominate, overview, participate, dominate, contribution, clarify, time, sum up

Web Resources

Effective vision: thinking techniques

An article that looks at different approaches and activities that help students to see problems and issues from different perspectives.

<http://www.effectivevision.co.uk/EVAHIThinkingTechniques1.pdf>

Hong Kong Polytechnic University: English for academic purposes

Students can go to the **Brainstorming** section to find useful language for discussing ideas.

<http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/CILL/eap/>