

Communicative English Language Skills II

Lecture 2

Speaking: Expressing Opinion in Discussions

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Speaking: Expressing Opinions

Dear students, welcome back to Communicative English Skills II. This is lecture 2.

- Last time, we reviewed the main skills from Communicative English Skills I.
- Today, we move from that review into a very practical focus: expressing opinions clearly and respectfully in spoken English.
- In this lecture, we look at how to share your views in:
 - ❖ Academic discussions
 - ❖ Workplace meetings
 - ❖ Everyday conversations

Specifically, I will guide you to say what you think, support it with reasons and examples, and respond politely to others.

Outline

The following concepts will be introduced in the lecture.

- Distinction between Fact and Opinion
- Argument structures:
- Language functions
- Hedging and softening language for polite interaction
- Discussion management
- Non-verbal communication
- Probing questions and critical thinking vocabulary

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

- State and support Opinions Clearly and confidently
 - Apply the OREx Structure
 - Engage in Polite Interaction
 - Facilitate Group Discussion
 - Prioritize Communication over Perfection
 - Practice Active Listening
- ***Note that: clarity (being understood) and confidence (speaking with assurance) are as important as grammar.***

What is an Opinion?

- An opinion is a personal belief, feeling, or judgment
- It is not necessarily a fact and cannot always be proven

Example:

- “Water boils at 100°C at sea level.”
- "I believe that group discussions are more effective for learning than studying alone."
- "I feel that face-to-face meetings are more productive for solving problems than sending long emails."
- Activity: Please write one fact and one opinion.

Opinion vs. Fact

A Fact is:

- A statement that can be proven true or false

e.g.

Addis Ababa Science and Technology University is located about 3 km north of Tirunesh Beijing General Hospital in the Akaki Kality sub-city of Addis Ababa.

Addis Ababa is the capital city of Ethiopia.

❖ Note that: ***Facts can support opinions but are not equal.***

Opinion

An Opinion is:

- A personal view that cannot be proven true or false

e.g., The library is the best place to study.

- English is the most useful language to learn worldwide.
- Online learning is better than face-to-face learning.

Activity

Label the statements below as either a fact or an opinion:

- Learning a foreign language is the most important skill for everyone in the world.
- Studies show that students who engage in daily practice score higher on language tests.
- Addis Ababa, which is the capital city of Ethiopia, is the seat for African Union.
- English is the most interesting subject in school.
- Ice melts at 0 degrees Celsius at sea level.
- Watching movies is a better way to learn English than reading books

Why Express Opinions Clearly?

Clear opinions:

- Shows confidence and participation
- Stimulates discussion and critical thinking
- Helps decision-making and teamwork
- Supports problem-solving and leadership
- Social benefits: showing respect for others' views builds relationships.
- ***Note that: silent agreement is less helpful than clearly but politely expressed views.***

When Do We Give Opinions?

- Have you ever expressed your opinion to others? If yes, when and in what context?
- We give opinions in:
 - Academic discussions, presentations, and seminars
 - Workplace meetings, interviews, and project discussions
 - Group work, debates, and problem-solving tasks
 - Community forums and everyday conversations

Functions of Opinion Language

- Opinion language helps us to:
- State and justify our views
- Ask for others' views
- Agree, partially agree, or disagree respectfully
- Clarify meaning and summarize key points in discussions
- In short: state → justify → invite others → respond → summarize

Functions of Opinion Language ...cnt'd

- State: "I think we should..."
- Justify: "because..."
- Ask: "What do you think?"
- Agree: "I agree because..."
- Disagree: "I see your point, but..."
- Clarify: "Do you mean...?"
- Summarize: "To summarize, we think..."

Basic Opinion Phrases

Common starters:

- “I think ...”
- “I believe ...”
- “In my opinion ...”
- “I feel that ...”
- “From my point of view ...”
- “As far as I’m concerned ...”
- “If you ask me ...”

Formal Opinion Phrases

For academic and professional settings:

- “From my perspective...”
- “It seems to me that...”
- “I would argue that...”
- “In my view...”
- “I contend that...”
- “It can be argued that...”

Formal Opinion Phrases...cnt'd

- Note that formal opinion phrases are suitable for essays, debates, and formal presentations.
- Example: “From my perspective, integrating project-based learning can improve student engagement. In my view, it also fosters deeper understanding and long-term retention of course content.”

Informal Opinion Phrases

- “I guess...”
- “I feel like...”
- “I think so...”
- “I’d say...”
- “To me...”
- “I’m pretty sure...”

Note that informal opinion phrases are appropriate for a more relaxed or casual contexts such as conversations with friends or everyday chats.

Activity: In pair please exchange quick informal opinions with your friend (e.g., favorite snack, weekend plans).

Stronger & Softer Opinion Statements

- Stronger:
- “I am sure our class discussions help everyone understand the topics more deeply.”
- “I strongly believe regular reading in English improves vocabulary and writing skills.”
- “I am convinced that practicing speaking every day builds confidence in communication.”
- “There is no doubt that clear examples make new grammar points easier to understand.”
- “I firmly believe that giving students time to share their ideas makes lessons more engaging.”
- We use stronger language (for persuading or emphasizing certainty).

Softer (Hedging):

- “It seems that group work helps many students.”
- “I might be wrong, but short homework is more motivating.”
- “I would suggest more speaking practice in class.”
- “Perhaps real-life topics make lessons more interesting.”
- “It could be argued that continuous assessment is fairer.”
- We use softer language (to invite discussion or show politeness) and it is more diplomatic.

Modal Verbs for Opinions

- “We should...”
- “We might...”
- “We must...”
- “We could...”
- “We ought to...”
- “We may...”

Modal verbs show different levels of certainty and politeness when expressing opinions. For example, “We must” expresses a strong obligation, while “We might” suggests a possibility.

In this lecture on expressing opinions in discussions, I am drawing mainly on Azar (2003) and Murphy (2012) for the grammar and sentence patterns we are using, such as “I think...,” “It seems that...,” and modal verbs like “might” and “should” for polite opinions.

Activity: Write two statements using a stronger expression and two statements using a softer (hedged) expression. You can use the same idea for both types of statements. Then exchange your statements with a friend for peer feedback.

Using OREx Structure

- OREx stands for:
- Opinion + Reason + Example
- Meaning:
- It is a simple structure used to express ideas clearly in speaking or writing by:
- Stating your opinion
- Giving a reason to support it
- Providing an example to make it clearer

OREx structure Explained....cnt'd

- Example:
- Opinion: "I think online learning is effective."
- Reason: "Because it allows flexibility."
- Example: "For example, students can attend classes from any location."
- This structure helps us organize our thoughts logically and communicate more persuasively.
- Example: "I think online learning is effective because it's flexible. For example, students can watch lectures later."
- Take a few seconds and write one OREx sentence on any topic.

4-Step Argument Structure

- State your opinion clearly
- Give a reason
- Provide an example
- Conclude or invite response

Example of a 4-step argument

- Online discussion boards are an effective way to support students' learning in this course. (Opinion stated)
- They give everyone time to think, organize ideas, and express opinions, even the quieter students. (Reason)
- For example, in last week's forum many students shared useful examples that we could not cover during the live session. (Example)
- In conclusion, online discussions are a valuable part of our learning, and I would like to hear whether you agree or have a different view. (Concluded/response invited)

Language for Giving Reasons (Justifying)

Useful connectors:

- because...
- since...
- as a result...
- due to...

Please state your own using these connectors to justify your opinions.

Language for Giving Examples & Evidence

- Phrases:
- “For example...”
- “For instance...”
- “The data shows...”
- “A study found...”
- “The findings support...”

It is important to use evidence in academic discussions to support ideas and make arguments more convincing.

Linking Words for coherence/Discourse Markers

- Linking words:
- Cause/effect: because, since, therefore, as a result...
- Contrast: however, on the other hand, in contrast, nevertheless
- Addition: moreover, also

These linking words organize ideas and help listeners follow the argument and help improve coherence in speaking and writing by connecting ideas smoothly.

Agreeing Politely

- “I agree with you because...”
- “That’s a good point.”
- “I share your view.”
- “I completely agree...”
- “I see your point.”

Partial Agreement

- “I agree to some extent, but...”
- “That’s true, however...”
- “I partly agree, but...”
- “I see your point, but...”
- “I agree that technology helps learning; however, it can distract students if unmanaged.”
- Based on the above statement, practice to express partial agreement and add a contrasting idea.

Disagreeing Politely

- *“I see your point, but I still think we need more time.”*
- *“I’m not sure I agree because the data is very limited.”*
- *“I understand, however I prefer a different approach.”*
- *“I respectfully disagree and would like to propose another option.”*
- *“That may be true, but it doesn’t apply in this situation.”*

Note that the use of respectful tone and positive body language when disagreeing is important.

Softening Disagreement (Hedging)

Hedging means using cautious or less direct language to avoid making absolute statements. Hedging reduces conflict and invites correction in discussions.

- “I might be wrong, but this topic seems a bit difficult.”
- “Perhaps we need more examples in this section.”
- “It could be that students need extra time to practice.”
- “I’m not entirely sure, but the instructions look unclear.”
- “Possibly the online exercises will help us improve faster.”

More Examples of hedging expressions ...cnt'd

- “It seems that students need more speaking practice.”
- “I think it might be better to start with a simple example.”
- “It could be possible that the instructions are not clear enough.”
- “As far as I know, the assignment is due next week.”

Opinion phrases in this lecture are adapted from common EFL grammar references (e.g., Azar, 2003; Murphy, 2012).

Disagreement: Right and Wrong Ways

- Correct:
- “I understand your point, but I think... because...”
- “I see your point, but I have a different perspective...” acknowledges before disagreeing.
- “That’s interesting; however, I believe... because...” shows respect while presenting another view.

Disagreement: Right and Wrong Ways

- Incorrect:
- “You’re wrong. That makes no sense.”
- “That’s completely wrong.” – dismissive and disrespectful.
- “You don’t know what you’re talking about.” undermines the speaker instead of the idea.

Interrupting Politely

- “Sorry to interrupt, but may I add something?” acknowledges the interruption respectfully.
- “Excuse me, could I just clarify one point?” signals a brief, purposeful interruption.
- “If I may jump in here...” politely asks to contribute mid-discussion.
- “Pardon me, can I share a quick thought?” softens the interruption with courtesy.

Asking for Others' Opinions

- “What do you think about this?” – directly invites someone’s perspective.
- “How do you see this issue?” – encourages sharing of personal interpretation.
- “Do you agree or have a different view?” – opens space for agreement or alternative ideas.
- “I’d like to hear your thoughts on this.” – shows respect and interest in their input.
- “From your perspective, how does this look?” – prompts reflection and personal insight.

Asking for Clarification

- “Could you explain that a bit more?” – invites the speaker to expand.
- “What exactly do you mean by...?” – seeks precision and detail.
- “I’m not sure I understand; can you clarify?” – signals confusion respectfully.
- “Can you give an example of that?” – requests illustration for better understanding.

Paraphrasing Others

- “So, you’re saying that...” – restates the idea in simpler words.
- “In other words, you mean...” – clarifies the message with different phrasing.
- “Let me put that another way...” – rephrases to ensure understanding.
- “If I can rephrase your point...” – checks comprehension while summarizing.

Building on Others' Ideas

- “Adding to what you said...” – connects your point directly to the previous speaker.
- “I agree, and I’d like to expand on that...” – shows support while contributing more detail.
- “Building on your suggestion...” – acknowledges the idea and develops it further.
- “That’s a good point; another aspect is...” – validates the idea and introduces a new angle.
- “Following your thought, we could also consider...” – continues the line of reasoning with an extension.

Turn-Taking Strategies

- “What’s your take on this?” – invites the other person to share their view.
- “Go ahead, I’d like to hear your thoughts.” – explicitly hands over the floor.
- “Do you want to add something here?” – opens space for contribution.
- “Let me stop here so you can respond.” – signals a pause and turn shift.
- “That’s my point; now I’d love to hear yours.” – balances speaking and listening.

Summarizing Views

- “In short, what you’re saying is...” – restates the main idea briefly.
- “To sum up your point...” – signals a concise wrap-up of someone’s view.
- “So, the key idea here is...” – highlights the central thought.
- “If I understand correctly, you mean...” – checks comprehension while summarizing.
- “Overall, your view suggests that...” – provides a rounded summary of the perspective.

Body Language and Tone of Voice

- Body Language: Non-verbal signals expressed through physical behavior, gestures, posture, and facial expressions.
- Key Elements: Eye Contact, and gestures
- Eye Contact shows confidence, attentiveness, and sincerity.
- Gestures are movements of the hands, arms, head, or face that communicate messages without words, either on their own or together with speech. These reinforce spoken words; open gestures suggest honesty, while closed ones may indicate defensiveness.

Body Language...cont'd

- Posture: Upright posture conveys confidence; slouching may suggest disinterest.
- Facial Expressions: Communicate emotions (smiles, frowns, raised eyebrows).
- Proximity: Physical distance affects comfort and perception of intimacy or authority.
- *Note that during oral communication we should maintain calm tone, open posture, appropriate eye contact this builds confidence.*

Tone of Voice

- Tone is the vocal quality that conveys emotion, attitude, and emphasis in speech.
- Key Elements:
- Pitch: High pitch can signal excitement or nervousness; low pitch often conveys seriousness.
- Volume: Loudness shows confidence or urgency; softness may suggest calmness or insecurity.
- Rate of Speech: Fast pace can indicate enthusiasm but may overwhelm; slow pace emphasizes clarity.
- Intonation: Rising and falling patterns add meaning beyond words (e.g., questions, emphasis).
- Warmth and Energy: A friendly, engaging tone builds rapport and trust.

Handling Strong Emotions: Handling Heated Moments

- Use calm tone, acknowledge feelings, refocus on facts and goals.
- De-escalation: acknowledge feelings, suggest a short pause, return to evidence.

Expressing Uncertainty

- "I'm not sure, but...", "There's limited evidence that...", "Further research is needed."
- Note that honest communication of uncertainty is appropriate in academic contexts.

Using Questions to Probe Reasoning

- “Why do you think that?”
- “How did you reach that conclusion?”
- “What evidence supports this?”
- “Can you explain your reasoning?”
- “What leads you to that idea?”
- *Probing means asking questions to explore, clarify, and challenge someone’s reasoning more deeply. It helps uncover the logic, evidence, and assumptions behind an opinion (Socratic questioning).*

Exercise: Probing Question

Online learning is better than classroom learning.

- Possible probing questions:
- What makes online learning more effective than classroom learning?
- How does online learning affect social interaction and teamwork skills?
- Are all students equally able to access online learning resources?

Vocabulary for Discussions

- Perspective: The way someone sees or interprets a situation.
- Viewpoint: A particular angle or opinion on an issue.
- Argument: A set of reasons given to support a claim.
- Evidence: Facts or information used to prove or support an argument.
- Claim: A statement or assertion that something is true.
- Counterargument: An opposing reason or view that challenges a claim.

Vocabulary for Discussions...cnt'd

- Stance: The attitude or position someone takes on a topic.
- Position: The specific side chosen in a debate or discussion.
- Justification: The explanation or reasoning that supports a claim or decision.

Note that the above words are key terms for argument and critical thinking vocabulary in academic English. They are the building blocks of clear, persuasive opinion speaking.

Conclusion

- Opinions are personal beliefs, not facts, but they can be supported with evidence.
- Clear, respectful expression of opinions builds confidence, stimulates discussion, and strengthens teamwork.
- Use polite language, hedging, and structured reasoning (OREx) to communicate effectively.
- Next Writing: Paragraph development
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