



Arguing a point of view



State what you think and feel but make sure you can back it up with reasons.

If you have a point of view at the start of a discussion, explain it clearly and briefly.

Use a strong opening phrase to introduce your point of view, for example 'I feel very strongly that...', 'It's very clear that...'

Make eye contact when sharing your point of view.

Use discussion to develop your point of view – you can change your mind on aspects of your views as you hear more information.

Expect people to disagree about points of view, and stay calm if they do.

Consider beforehand any arguments which might be raised against your point of view and prepare your counter-arguments.

Listen to questions which challenge your point of view and answer them clearly – don't dismiss them.

Accept that you will not always have an answer for questions you are asked. This need not weaken your point of view unless it happens too often.

Ask questions about points of view which are different from yours. Be prepared to see things from different angles.

Don't be afraid to change your point of view if you can justify your reasons for doing so.





Asking questions

Never be afraid to ask a question.

Ask questions respectfully.

Remember that successful talking and listening often depends on people asking questions.

In group work, ask a starting question, for example 'Does everybody know what we have to do?'

Ask open questions that encourage others to contribute, for example 'Does anybody have an idea to start us off?'

Encourage quieter people to join in by asking them a question and saying their name before the question, for example 'John, what do you think about...?'

Be positive about people asking you questions – it means they have confidence that you can answer.

Use the basic question words: who, what, when, where, why, which and how.

Ask rhetorical questions to encourage people to think more carefully about an issue.

Ask a few short questions instead of one long one.

If you don't understand a question that has been asked, say so.

Try to have a balance between the number of questions you ask and the number of times you give responses to others' questions.

Think about what you already know and what you need to know, then ask questions that will bridge the gap and make your understanding clearer.

Remember that the best questions can be those that are the most difficult to answer.



Body language

(Group work)

If you are sitting around a table, give everyone the same amount of space.

Position everyone so that they face the centre.

Don't turn your back towards anyone in the group.

Keep your elbows off the table, as leaning forward will block the line of sight between others in the group.

Make eye contact with others during the discussion.

Remember that the expression on your face can speak a thousand words. For example, widening your eyes shows surprise; furrowing your eyebrows shows that you don't understand.

Do not roll your eyes.

When someone new speaks, turn slightly in their direction.

Show interest in whoever is speaking by looking at them and nodding your head occasionally as you listen.

An animated gesture as you speak can be useful for getting your message across. For example, if you are making more than two points, you can stress the number of points by counting them on your fingers.

Make sure that your body language, gestures and facial expressions are always respectful.



Body language

(Presentation)

Make sure your posture is good. Stand up straight and keep your shoulders back.

Use confident body language. Even if you don't feel confident, if you pretend you are people will believe it.

Match your body language to the formality of the situation. For example, if the situation is very formal or you are standing at a lectern, you will be more likely to stay in one spot. If the situation is less formal, you may be more likely to walk around.

Smile at your audience occasionally.

Keep your arms unfolded.

If necessary, clasp your hands loosely where they fall in front of you, but don't stand like this all the time.

Always face your audience. If you are using a screen, do not read directly from it. Keep an eye on what's on the screen by using a laptop close by in front of you.

Keep an interested expression. If you are bored, your audience will probably be bored too.

Be aware of your own mannerisms and try to curb any that you do repeatedly, for example putting your hand through your hair or rolling on your heels.

As you speak, look slowly around your audience. Don't miss the people right in front of you or in the far corners of the room.

To show that you are listening carefully as your audience contributes or asks questions, look at the person speaking and nod or tilt your head to one side.

Effective group discussion



Follow instructions.

Make sure that you take part in the discussion.

Be aware of your body language. Keep it relaxed but appropriate for the setting.

Be aware of the different personalities in the group.

Assign roles before you begin, including a chairperson to direct the group and move the discussion on.

Start by stating the task and by making sure that everyone agrees on what you need to achieve.

Be aware of timing and stick to any time limits.

Remember that disagreement is necessary for discussion, but keep it respectful.

Use questions to move the group's thinking on and to encourage others to develop their points.

Don't allow any one person to dominate: encourage everyone to take part.

Include quieter members of the group by addressing them by name and asking them about their opinions.

If you have a personality clash with someone, focus on the topic, not them.

Think about what you are discussing from different perspectives.

Play devil's advocate: this means making points you do not necessarily agree with for the purpose of presenting an alternative point of view.

Round off the discussion a few minutes before the time is up so that you can summarise.



Using your voice



Be confident about your voice.

If you are nervous about speaking out, take a few deep breaths before you speak.

Warm up your voice. For example, stretch your face up and down and from side to side, mime chewing gum, or repeat 'A, E, I, O, U' aloud while exaggerating the shape of your mouth.

Speak at a pace at which you can be easily understood.

Move your mouth to speak so that your diction is clear.

Ask if people can hear you clearly.

Pause occasionally to allow people to take in what you are saying.

Try to vary the pitch of your voice so that it is not flat, which might bore your listeners.

Be aware of the impact that tone of voice can have on others. For example, using a sharp tone may provoke someone to become aggressive or discourage others from responding.

In a role-play situation, plan the volume, pace, pitch and tone of your voice.

Ask for and accept feedback on how well you use your voice so that you can improve.

