

Successful speakers... are clear about their opinions

At Trinity College London, we have studied the scripts from hundreds of our speaking exams. We wanted to find out what makes some test takers more successful than others. One thing that test takers who perform better do is make their opinions clear.

In any discussion, being clear about what you think helps the other speaker to understand what you are saying and continue the conversation.

You can be clear about a positive opinion: *Oh yes – I agree!*

You can be clear about a negative opinion: *No, I can't agree with you.*

You can be clear about being uncertain: *I'm really not sure.*

Being clear does **not** mean that you have to know exactly what you think. It **does** mean that you can say that you are certain or uncertain about your opinion.

Activity 1

Read these two exam extracts of a discussion between a test taker <TT> and an examiner <E> about people using mobile phones on trains.

Corpus extract

A

<E> Do you think that mobile phones should be banned on trains? Should they be forbidden?

<TT> Well, I think mobile phones are very useful.

<E> Yes, they can be. But what about people talking on them on trains? Do you think that is sometimes annoying?

<TT> It can be annoying, yes.

<E> Some people think they should be forbidden. Do you think they are right?

<TT> I think that people shouldn't talk too loudly.

<E> I see.

B

<E> Do you think that mobile phones should be banned on trains? Should they be forbidden?

<TT> Because people speak too loudly?

<E> Yes. Some people find that very annoying.

<TT> I can see their point. It is sometimes annoying. But I don't agree that they should be banned.

Trinity tip

The examiner is **not** testing your opinion. He or she is testing how well you can **express** your opinion, whatever it might be.

Which test taker is clearer about his or her opinion?

Which test taker actually answers the question?

Activity 2

Read these phrases aloud. Then write A (agreement), D (disagreement) or U (uncertainty)

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------------|-------|
| a) I disagree | ..... | g) I can't agree | ..... |
| b) I agree | ..... | h) I'm sorry but I can't agree with that | ..... |
| c) I think that's right | ..... | i) I'm not sure | ..... |
| d) I don't agree | ..... | j) I completely disagree with this | ..... |
| e) I really don't know what to think | ..... | k) Absolutely! | ..... |
| f) I just can't decide | ..... | l) That seems wrong to me | ..... |

Trinity tip

It is, of course, important to be polite when you are disagreeing with someone. We should show that we respect the other person's opinion. However, you **can** disagree without being rude. Being **too** polite might mean that your own opinions are not clearly expressed.

Activity 3

Look at these examples of disagreement. Tick the ones which you think are polite.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| a) I see what you mean but I can't agree with you | e) Personally, I would disagree with that |
| b) You're talking rubbish! | f) You don't know what you're talking about |
| c) That is nonsense | g) Are you mad? |
| d) You've got a point. However... .. | h) I can see your point but I don't agree with you |

Trinity tip

If you are not sure what to say at first, you can ask the other person to say more about his or her opinion. For example:

<A> I think cats make better pets than dogs.

 Why do you think that?/Do you mean all cats are better than all dogs?/Have you got a cat as a pet?/
Have you ever had a dog as a pet?

Activity 4

Put this conversation in order.

- Why do you think that?
- They're friendlier.
- That's true. But the exercise is good for you!
- I can't agree with that. I think dogs are very friendly too.
- I think cats make better pets than dogs.
- But dogs need more care. They need walks every day.

Trinity tip

For a conversation to be successful, you have to say why you agree or disagree with something or if you aren't sure. Remember that, in an exam, the examiner wants to hear you talking so you must be prepared to continue your conversation.

Activity 5

Think about these statements. Make some notes about your opinions. Then discuss with a partner.

- a) Some people think that cats make much better pets than dogs.
- b) Some people think the moon would be a perfect place for a holiday.
- c) Some people think books are old-fashioned.
- d) Some people think that smoking should be allowed everywhere