

## Basics

When you listen, you may be listening to just one person speaking or to two or more people having a conversation. When you are listening to several voices, it can be much harder to understand what is being said. One way to make this easier is to listen for opinions (what people say) and reactions (how other people reply).

## The academic context

Opinions and reactions are very important in seminars and workshops as well as in general academic conversations. Being able to identify them is part of what is called active listening. Active listening is a key part of being able to engage with other students as well as lecturers.

## Key features

There are several techniques that we use in giving opinions and reacting. These include:

- asking open-ended questions
- asking for clarification
- expressing your opinion at the right time
- paraphrasing to show or get understanding
- using non-verbal language
- rephrasing to clarify
- sharing experiences
- using short phrases to show you understand
- saying clearly what you mean
- reacting

## Challenges / difficulties

- It can be difficult to understand discussion between several voices; listening for an opinion, then the responses, can help you find the key points.
- There are many different phrases that we use in opinion–response conversations. What matters is not the whole phrase, but understanding what the opinions are and what responses people make.

## How can I develop this skill?

Try to listen to people giving opinions and reactions wherever you can. Good sources of material might be films, TV/radio debates and news interviews. You can often find very interesting old interviews on YouTube – try searching for an interview with a twentieth-century figure you are interested in. If you are watching a video, as well as listening for the language used, you can watch for non-verbal language.

## Learning outcome

Students will be able to demonstrate they can recognize opinions and responses in listening texts.

## Theory to practice

Here are some examples of phrases used in opinion-response conversations. You might hear similar examples. See if you can connect them with the headings (a-i) below. Put the letter of the heading next to the example. We have done one for you.

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1 I believe ... I think ... I'm not sure that ...                     | <u>h</u> |
| 2 You're right! I disagree! That's excellent!                         | _____    |
| 3 So, you are saying ... And so you think ...                         | _____    |
| 4 Aha. I see. Mmm, that's interesting.                                | _____    |
| 5 I understand, but why did that happen? I see, when was that?        | _____    |
| 6 Can I give you my ideas, please? I'd like to say something here ... | _____    |
| 7 That happened to me, so I understand. Yes, I've noticed that, too.  | _____    |
| 8 Can you clarify, please? What do you mean exactly?                  | _____    |
| 9 So what I mean is ... Just to clarify ...                           | _____    |
| a asking open-ended questions   |          |
| b asking for clarification  |          |
| c expressing your opinion at the right time                           |          |
| d paraphrasing to show or get understanding                           |          |
| e rephrasing to clarify   |          |
| f sharing experiences   |          |
| g using short phrases to show you understand                          |          |
| h saying clearly what you mean  |          |
| i reacting  |          |

## Ways to get more practice

- Discuss your answers with another student and see if you agree. Try to clarify any differences you have.
- Each time you listen, see if you can find examples of opinions and reactions.