

Student name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

QUESTIONING OPINIONS

It is important to understand the ways authors select and present evidence. It helps you to assess if the author's reasoning is clear and if the text is biased or not. It's a useful skill when evaluating both spoken and written texts.

In *C21 English for the 21st Century*, Level 3, you learn why it is important to question opinions in order to evaluate an argument. In an academic setting, assessing whether evidence is relevant and reliable is an important critical thinking skill. During an academic discussion, in a seminar or tutorial, you evaluate ideas by agreeing or disagreeing with the points put forward and by providing support for your position. This might include agreeing/disagreeing with ideas you have read or with those expressed by other participants in a discussion.

Practice

- 1 Read the statement below, then match the beginnings and endings of the comments expressing agreement or disagreement in the discussion that follows.

'Opinion polls tell us very little about what the people in a country actually think about any given political issue.'

- Zoe I agree that _____
 Alex I completely agree with _____
 Tom I'm not sure that's _____
 Emily Yes, exactly! _____

- a I think it's important to recognize that although opinion polls may not be perfect, they're still one of the most practical ways we have of measuring what people think.
- b opinion polls aren't always an accurate measure of public opinion because they're usually based on such a small sample size.
- c a reason to dismiss them completely though; they only claim to provide a snapshot of public opinion after all.
- d Zoe; the people questioned in opinion polls don't necessarily represent the population as a whole.


- 2 In pairs, discuss what you know about opinion polls. Do you agree or disagree with the opinions in Exercise 1?

TIP


In a discussion, we often acknowledge a view we disagree with before we go on to say why we think it is flawed; a strategy that can be summarized as *yes, but ...*
 Which student above uses this strategy?

3 A group of students are planning to research how people use social media. They are discussing which method they should use to collect data. Read the three different proposed methods.

- a** We could put together an online survey and share it via social media. That way we could potentially get lots of responses and collect plenty of data.
- b** It would be good to interview people face-to-face. Then we're not restricted to simple, quantitative options, but we can ask follow-up questions about people's behaviour and motivations.
- c** In order to get a representative sample, we could send out questionnaires by email to a carefully selected group of people. So, we can try to get a balance of age and gender at least.

4  In pairs, discuss possible *yes, but ...* responses to the three proposals above. Try to use a variety of language and structures.

Yes, (I agree / it's true that) an online survey would be a good way to collect a lot of data, but ...
Although / While an online survey would be a good way to collect a lot of data, ...

5  In groups, discuss the best method for collecting data about how people use social media.

- You can discuss the proposals above or add your own ideas.
- Say which ideas you agree with and explain why.
- Say which ideas you disagree with by pointing out their weaknesses.
- Use *yes, but ...* responses where appropriate.
- Try to agree on one method by the end of your discussion.

6  In your group, create a poster setting out your chosen research method.

Include:

- the research question
- a brief description of your chosen method
- your main reasons for choosing this method
- a summary of its limitations

Reflect

7 Complete the quiz. You can choose more than one answer to each question.

- 1** Which skills can you demonstrate by expressing agreement/disagreement in an academic discussion?
 - a** critical thinking skills
 - b** strong personal opinions
 - c** the ability to link ideas together
- 2** Why do we often acknowledge a view we disagree with before we say why it is flawed?
 - a** to be polite
 - b** because arguments aren't typically 'black and white'
 - c** to show we are considering different perspectives
- 3** How well did you participate in the group discussion task?
 - a** I managed to make some interesting points.
 - b** I think I expressed my ideas quite clearly.
 - c** I was most comfortable helping prepare the poster.