

Warm up

Introduce the following three scenarios and ask students what is common to all three situations (i.e. expressing opinions). Discuss briefly how the way you express opinions might differ.

- 1 Your friend asks you what you think about a new film you saw.
- 2 You're preparing a group presentation. Another member of the group asks what you think about the design of the slides they've prepared.
- 3 You are in an academic seminar. The tutor asks what you think about the topic being discussed.

Using the Factsheet

The Factsheet sets out some of the key features of expressing opinions in an academic discussion. It also gives practical strategies to help students develop their opinions based on academic sources in preparation for a discussion, such as by making notes on a reading text. Get students to work through the Factsheet first before they go on to practise expressing opinions using the Worksheet.

There are two possible ways to use the Factsheet:

- 1 Give students the Factsheet before the lesson, so they can read it at home and come to the lesson prepared to do the Worksheet. If you use this approach, start the lesson by checking that all students have read and understood the Factsheet and answer any questions.
- 2 Give students the Factsheet at the beginning of the lesson and start by working through it with students.

Theory to practice

- Ask students how they take notes in lectures. Ask those who handwrite, those who type, etc. why they do so, eliciting advantages and disadvantages of each method.
- Students read the text, ignoring the notes for the moment. Did the discussion in the previous step raise any of the issues in the text?
- Ask students to match the notes to the numbers 1–4. Elicit correct answers.
- Discuss the questions with the whole class.

Suggested answers

- 1 **a** *we remember information better if we write notes by hand*
b *we have to think more carefully about what we choose to write down*
c *taking notes in a lecture (Students in my uni use laptops)*
d *we can't copy down every word (But do we miss some info?)*
- 2 The student agrees with the argument in the text in general, but has a reservation regarding the possibility of missing important information due to not writing everything.

Using the Worksheet

Practice

1 Read the opinions below (a–c). These students are discussing the benefits of reading academic texts on paper or on screen. Underline the words and phrases they use to introduce their opinions.

- On first reading, ask students just to focus on which each person prefers, paper or screen. Get brief feedback.
- Now tell them to read again and underline the words and phrases used to express opinions.
- Check the answers with the whole class.

Suggested answers

- a I think ...
- b For me ...
- c I think ...

2 Which of the speakers mention:

- Get students to work through the responses again marking examples of the four points.
- Go through the answers as a whole class.
- Ask students which of the four types of supporting evidence they find most convincing.

Answers

- 1 b 'I don't like looking at a screen all the time', c 'Sometimes it's easier to look for information online, but if I need to read something in detail ... then I usually print it out'
- 2 a 'most students probably read things on screen'
- 3 a 'You can find most books and academic papers online. It's easier than going to the library to get books and it's cheaper, too', b 'doctors say too much time looking at a screen is bad for your eyes and it makes you tired'
- 4 c 'for example for an assignment'

TIP

Get students to look at the tip. Elicit why the three examples given are progressively more effective and why the final one makes a stronger argument.

3 In pairs, tell your partner which of the opinions, a–c, you agree with most. How do you prefer to read when you are studying? Say why. Make a note of your partner's opinion or record them if possible.

- Put students in pairs. Read the task rubric together as a class to check understanding. If possible, get students to record their answers, for example using their mobile phones, so they can play back their answers later in the lesson. Alternatively, get the partner to make brief notes to refer to later.
- Do not get feedback on the task at this stage. You could just ask students to put their hands up to show who agreed most with each opinion, a, b or c.

4 Now read the information below. How do the points link to your own ideas and knowledge? Underline any points that support your opinion. Add notes next to the texts as you read and think about the ideas.

- Before reading, remind students about the strategies in the Factsheet for helping develop opinions. Explain that they should not just focus on understanding the ideas, but also think about their own reactions to them. Do they agree with the ideas? Have they heard some of these ideas before? How do they link to their own experience? Can they use them to support their own opinion? Encourage students to make notes and annotate the texts as they read.
- Monitor and answer any language questions.

5 In groups, discuss the benefits of reading academic texts in print or on screen.

- Put students in groups of 4–6 by combining pairs from Exercise 3. Briefly go through the points to remember before giving students time to discuss their ideas.
- Monitor and note down any points for feedback about good use of language/strategies you hear.
- Allow enough time for all the students in each group to express their opinions and react to others.

6 Make a list of suggestions for expressing opinions in academic discussions. Include examples. Present your lists to the class.

- As a whole class, get feedback about what worked well and any problems students encountered during their discussion. Use the opportunity to mention anything you've noticed whilst monitoring.
- Working in the same groups, get students to make a list of suggestions for expressing opinions in academic discussions. Elicit a few examples using *do* and *don't*. Depending on the time available, these could be fairly informal lists in note form or they could be written up as posters or slides. Monitor and offer suggestions if necessary.

- Invite each group to present their list. Again, this can be fairly brief and informal or it could be a more formal presentation with students standing at the front of the class. In a large class, to avoid repetition, you could ask each group to present one or two points each.

Reflect

7  **In pairs, look back at the notes you made in Exercise 3.**

- Put students back in their original pairs from Exercise 3. If they recorded their answers, get them to listen back to the recording. Alternatively, they can look back at the notes they made. Allow time for them to work through the questions.