

Basics

When people talk on a subject, they usually list their main arguments. These are then backed up with examples, reasons or explanations to support each one. In *C21 English for the 21st Century*, you get lots of practice at listening for key information. Here, you will focus on how to listen for the main arguments a speaker makes, as well as the information used to back them up.

The academic context

In talks and lectures, as well as online videos, you need to be able to pick out the main arguments, together with how the speaker supports them. Often, the speaker uses linking words or phrases to introduce them. If you listen for these, you can usually identify the information you need.

Key features

Phrases for introducing arguments

There are many ways a speaker can introduce arguments. They include (but are not limited to) the following:

- *First ... / Firstly ... / Initially ... / In the first place ... / Primarily ... / Originally ...*
- *The main argument/point in favour is ... / Another problem/issue is ...*
- *I believe ... / In my opinion ... / From my viewpoint ...*
- *It is well known that ... / It is understood that ... / It is an established fact that ...*
- *In addition ... / Furthermore ... / Moreover ...*
- *Obviously ... / Significantly ... / Clearly ...*
- *Lastly ... / Finally ... / Eventually ... / Ultimately ...*
- *On the one hand ... / On the other hand ... / In contrast ...*

Phrases for introducing supporting information

To support an argument, speakers can use the phrases above. They also often introduce explanations, reasons or examples, using phrases such as:

- *In other words ... / To explain (in more detail) ... / That is ... / By this I mean ...*
- *This is because ... / One reason ... / The (main) reason for this is ... / What this means is ...*
- *This happens (largely/generally) as a result of ... / This is (partly/wholly) due to ... / This is (mainly/never) caused by ...*
- *For example ... / For instance ... / ... such as ... / ... like ...*

Remember that speakers can also support arguments with statistics, definitions, charts and other visual aids, or by referring to the opinions of other people.

Challenges / difficulties

It can be hard to hear all the main arguments and supporting information, especially if the speaker is talking quickly. In addition, some speakers don't express their opinion very clearly or explicitly. You also need to be able to tell the difference between a good, solid argument (backed up with reasons, examples, etc.) and a weak argument which cannot be supported convincingly.

How can I develop this skill?

When you are listening to talks or lectures, pay attention to the main arguments and how the speakers support them. Learn to listen for the phrases in the Key features section. Then, each time you listen, notice how key arguments and supporting information are introduced or 'signposted'.

Learning outcome

If you can understand the main arguments and the supporting points, you will have understood the most important things a speaker says. As well as understanding more, however, you will also learn how to quickly spot a weak argument (where the speaker perhaps does not have very good supporting information). This will help you in your studies, as you will be able to select the important information to learn.

Theory to practice

01 Listen to a short talk on education. The first time you listen, complete the main arguments (1–4) with a short phrase. Then listen again and match the supporting points (a–h) to the main arguments.

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|---|-------|-------|
| 1 Teach _____ at school. | _____ | _____ |
| 2 Teach a _____ of subjects. | _____ | _____ |
| 3 Change university _____. | _____ | _____ |
| 4 Provide university students with more _____ in the world of work. | _____ | _____ |
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- a focus more on the student's personality than on exam results
 - b law, sociology
 - c greater experience = greater choice
 - d students' marks at school go up
 - e programmes such as placements or internships
 - f university students could save time
 - g students can see if a career suits them
 - h help students with learning differences

Which of the supporting points (a–h) are examples?

Ways to get more practice

Online talks are a good way to get more practice because you have the opportunity to listen again. Also, the main points are often written down somewhere, so you can cross-reference them with what you hear and make sure you didn't miss anything important. A good exercise is to listen to a talk and make notes of the main arguments and how the speaker supports each one. Look at the supporting information and identify whether the speaker is using an example, an explanation, a reason, a cause, a result, etc. You will quickly learn to identify these types of supporting information, and to see whether or not the information is reliable or useful to you.