



Improve your participation at university

Speaking with peers and tutors during tutorials, seminars and workshops, both online and face to face, provides opportunities to communicate and increase your understanding of key topics and ideas. To improve your participation, be active and involved during discussions by:

- maintaining good body language – for example in face to face sessions, face your group members when they are speaking, nod to acknowledge that you are listening, give them eye contact, and avoid slouching or crossing your arms;
- using appropriate language to show that you are involved in the conversation, and
- speaking clearly – consider your pace, volume and intonation.

Note: In an Australian academic context students are expected to express themselves honestly and openly, but at the same time to be reasonably polite. Even though you may disagree with someone’s opinion, it is important that you phrase your disagreement appropriately.

Useful phrases for discussions

Expressing ideas

e.g. to give your opinion or add to what someone else is saying.

I think/believe... My understanding is... The ideas in this reading suggest that... In my opinion... It says in the textbook that...	To soften your opinion: It seems to me... I wonder if... I was thinking that... Maybe...	To clarify your ideas for others: What I mean... In other words... That is...
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Clarifying or asking questions

e.g. to check your understanding of a concept, instruction or idea

So you mean... / Do you mean...? So what you’re saying is... What do you mean by...? I don’t quite get the concept about.... What was that point you made?	To soften your request for clarification: Can you clarify what you mean by....? I’m not sure what you mean by... Sorry, what was that point you made? Would you mind repeating that?
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Interrupting

To interrupt someone: Excuse me... Hang on a second... Before you go on... Can I add something here? Can I interrupt here?	To let someone interrupt: Sure, go ahead. No problems. No worries. Sure. Go for it.	To indicate that you want to finish what you were saying first: Just a minute. Hang on a second. Sorry but can I finish this first.
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Agreeing	
Definitely / Absolutely/ Totally That's a good point That's right / true Yeah, I know what you mean Yeah, I know	To soften your agreement: Yeah, I guess so You could be right Yeah, kind of / sort of

Disagreeing	
I don't agree with that I totally disagree No way I completely disagree That's not right	To soften your disagreement: Yeah, I guess so but... You could be right, however... Yeah, kind of but... Maybe but what about... On the other hand, That's true, but... I'm not sure about that... A different way of looking at this is...

Note: Be careful when strongly disagreeing with others. You need to use appropriate tone and body language to avoid offending someone. It's a good idea to have a reason why you disagree and invite the other person to respond. Alternatively, use phrases to soften your disagreement.

Keeping the conversation going		
e.g. to get others involved, return to a topic and show your interest		
To get others involved: What do you think / reckon? Do you agree? Any other ideas? How about you (<i>John</i>)?	To return to a topic: Can we just go back to... Going back to your point earlier... What were you saying before? What was (<i>John</i>) saying earlier? Where was I?	To show your interest: It's tricky isn't it? Oh yeah, right. Hmmmm. Ok.

Avoiding answering a question or giving your opinion	
e.g. when you are unsure, need more time to think or are uncomfortable about the topic	
To indicate you are unsure or need more time: I'm still getting my head around it. I'm not sure. I just need a bit more time to think about this. To be honest, I don't know. This one is a tricky one, can I think about it?	To indicate you are uncomfortable about a topic: I'll pass on that, if that's ok. I prefer not to talk about it. This topic makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. Is it okay if I sit out on this one?