



## Go The Distance

### Writing on discussion forums

#### I. Questions and appropriateness

When you're posting on an online academic discussion forum, you need to consider how appropriate your language is. Have a look at this forum post.

Hey Joe,

Nice to hear from you! 😊 How's it going? How're you getting on with your part of the project? Did you read Sarah's post? What do you think about the PowerPoint presentation? Should we include more slides?

Abid

It's clear that Joe and Abid are in regular contact. There's some friendly, informal language, an emoji and lots of direct questions. This post is part of a longer conversation, and is only relevant to Joe and Abid. In this context, direct questions work really well:

- How's it going?
- How're you getting on with your part of the project?
- Did you read Mai's post?
- What do you think about the PowerPoint presentation?
- Should we include more slides?

Let's take a look at another forum post:

Good afternoon everyone 😊,

I recently read some of the online academic journals for this module, and I feel that sharing our ideas will make some of the arguments easier to understand. I was wondering what your thoughts regarding the advances in Artificial Intelligence in transportation are? What do you consider to be the positives and negatives? Do you know if this has already affected any of the industries in your city?

Thanks, Amy

Did you notice how Amy begins her forum post? In this example, Amy is posting to a larger group: possibly everyone on her course! Amy has used several indirect questions, because she wants to be polite whilst inviting people to share opinions and contribute to an academic discussion.

### Activity 1

Can you change these questions into more polite questions?

1. Is the due date on Friday?

Do you know \_\_\_\_\_  
Friday?

Hint: Is this a yes/no question? What word do we need to use if it is?

2. Where is this information from?

Can you tell me \_\_\_\_\_ from?

Hint: Do you need to change the position of the auxiliary verb and the subject?

3. Can you help me?

Do you mind \_\_\_\_\_ me?

Hint: Do we use the infinitive or the gerund after 'do you mind'?

4. Is this a good idea?

Do you think \_\_\_\_\_ idea?

Hint: Remember the inversion rule!

5. Can I have an extension?

Would it be possible \_\_\_\_\_ extension?

Hint: Do we use the infinitive or the gerund after 'would it be possible'?

### 2. Disagreeing

Agreeing and disagreeing with others is part of the academic journey and it is essential that you do this in a way that encourages discussion, rather than offending and alienating people. You may already know how to construct balanced arguments in essays. The process is not so different on forums, except that you're talking much more directly to people, so you can be less formal with your choice of words – but you still need to be polite!

Here's an example of what NOT to do.

Maryam,

That's absolute rubbish! How can you agree with the author? He is not a credible source to use. You should do some more research.

Would you like to read that reply in response to one of your carefully written posts? This poster has a lot to learn about how to agree and disagree in an academic context!

Let's look at how to disagree in an appropriate style. When having a discussion, you won't always agree with what people say. However, this must be done in a polite way that can open up a discussion, rather than close it.

Here are some phrases you can use to disagree politely.

- I'm afraid I don't totally agree with you.
- I'm not sure that's correct.
- I'm not really sure about that.
- To be honest, I don't necessarily agree.
- I'm not sure that point is relevant to this argument.
- I'm afraid I don't think that's the case.

These phrases are much more polite, and are much more likely to get a more positive response! You need to build a good group dynamic online: we use **I'm afraid** as a way of apologising to the person for disagreeing with them.

It's also important to acknowledge what the other person has said before explaining why you disagree with them. This shows the other person that you've considered their point carefully and they're much less likely to have a bad reaction to your counter argument. Here are some useful expressions to help you do this.

- I see what you're saying, but ...
- I can understand your point of view, however, ...
- I agree with you up to a point, but ...
- I agree with you to a certain extent, however, I don't fully agree.
- I see your point, but ...

The linking words **but** and **however** are essential here, because they allow you to introduce the reasons why you disagree with someone. If you don't do this, you're arguing

for no reason! When you've given your reasons for disagreeing, you can use indirect questions to develop the discussion, and invite people to comment.

Remember that terrible post from earlier? Here it is again with these phrases.

Hello Maryam,

**I can understand your point of view, but I'm afraid I don't totally agree with your point.** I'm not certain that the author is considered as a credible source in this subject. From my perspective, I believe that the issues stem from having a centralised farming system. **Do you know if there are** any other sources available to support this point of view?

This post would be much better received by everyone, and is much more likely to encourage a well thought out and constructive debate.

### 3. Agreeing

Of course, sometimes you will agree with your course mates. It's important to show encouragement in order to create a 'team atmosphere'. This will help everyone in their studies.

Here are some expressions to use to show that you agree with someone.

- I completely agree with you.
- I totally agree.
- That's correct.
- That's a good point.
- That's an excellent point.
- Exactly.
- Absolutely.
- You're right!
- I couldn't agree with you more. (This one sounds strange, but it means 'I agree with you 100%')

## Activity 2

Can you put the words into the correct order to make agreeing / disagreeing expressions?

1. a I point to up agree

\_\_\_\_\_

Hint: We use this to partly agree with someone.

2. I with don't totally afraid agree I'm you

\_\_\_\_\_

Hint: We use 'I'm afraid' at the beginning to be super polite!

3. sure not correct that's I'm

\_\_\_\_\_

Hint: Start with the subject 'I'

4. see but you're I saying what

\_\_\_\_\_

Hint: Remember, we use 'but' to introduce our counterargument. Where does it go?

5. more I agree couldn't

\_\_\_\_\_

Hint: This expression means 'you agree 100%', even though we're using a negative!

## More

Remember to check our Academic Writing webpages for information and activities to practise:

- Academic vocabulary
- Understanding assignment questions
- Writing effective paragraphs
- Citing sources correctly
- And more!

You can find these materials at

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/gothedistance/academicwriting>

## **Answers**

### **Activity 1**

1. Do you know if the due date is on Friday?
2. Can you tell me where this information is from?
3. Do you mind helping me?
4. Do you think this is a good idea?
5. Would it be possible to have an extension?

### **Activity 2**

1. I agree up to a point
2. I'm afraid I don't totally agree with you
3. I'm not sure that's correct
4. I see what you're saying, but
5. I couldn't agree more