

## Successful speakers... are clear about their opinions

At Trinity College London, we have studied the scripts from hundreds of our speaking exams. We wanted to find out what makes some test takers more successful than others. One thing that test takers who perform better do is make their opinions clear.

In any discussion, being clear about what you think helps the other speaker to understand what you are saying and continue the conversation.

You can be clear about a positive opinion: *Oh yes – absolutely!*

You can be clear about a negative opinion: *No. That seems completely wrong to me.*

You can be clear about being uncertain: *I really don't know what I think.*

Being clear does **not** mean that you have to know exactly what you think. It **does** mean that you can say that you are certain or uncertain about your opinion.

### Activity 1

Read these two exam extracts between an test taker (TT) and an examiner (E) of a discussion about the laws on smoking in public places.

#### Corpus extract

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| <p><b>A</b></p> <p>&lt;E&gt; Do you think that the no-smoking laws are too strict? Are smokers being made to feel guilty for smoking?</p> <p>&lt;TT&gt; Well, I suppose there is a reason for the laws.</p> <p>&lt;E&gt; Are smokers being made to feel like victims now?</p> <p>&lt;TT&gt; I can understand that. Of course I'm not a smoker but they are people like everybody else.</p> <p>&lt;E&gt; So do you think that the laws are too strict, too extreme?</p> <p>&lt;TT&gt; Well, for example, the old law before this wasn't bad. There were places for smokers and for non-smokers.</p> <p>&lt;E&gt; So do you think that was a better idea?</p> <p>&lt;TT&gt; Well, I can understand that people feel the new law is too extreme.</p> | <p><b>B</b></p> <p>&lt;E&gt; Do you think that the no-smoking laws are too strict? Are smokers being made to feel guilty for smoking?</p> <p>&lt;TT&gt; Well, I'm not a smoker but yes, I think some smokers are made to feel bad about it.</p> <p>&lt;E&gt; Are the laws too extreme now?</p> <p>&lt;TT&gt; I think so, yes. I don't agree with smoking, myself of course. In the past there were areas for smokers and non-smokers and I think that was a better idea.</p> <p>&lt;E&gt; So a compromise was better.</p> <p>&lt;TT&gt; Yes, I believe it was.</p> |
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#### Trinity tip

The examiner is **not** testing your opinion. He or she is testing how well you can **express** your opinion, whatever it might be.

Which test taker is clearer in saying what he or she thinks? .....

In which discussion does the examiner have to check more often what the test taker thinks? .....

#### Trinity tip

It is, of course, important to be polite when you are disagreeing with someone. We should show that we respect the other person's opinion. However, you **can** disagree without being rude. Being **too** polite might mean that your own opinions are not clearly expressed. This means that the other speaker is not sure how to continue the conversation.

## Activity 2

Look at these examples of disagreement and agreement. Choose the response which expresses the speaker's opinion of the statement more clearly.

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| <p><b>A</b></p> <p>&lt;A&gt; Some people say that children should be allowed to work in factories.</p> <p>&lt;B&gt; Well maybe some children work in factories when they are very young./I don't think that is a good idea.</p> <p><b>B</b></p> <p>&lt;A&gt; Scientists say that soon we will all be able to live over the age of 100. I'm not sure this is a good thing.</p> <p>&lt;B&gt; Erm, I can understand what you're saying but I don't agree with you./Erm, some people live to be over the age of 100 now.</p> | <p><b>C</b></p> <p>&lt;A&gt; I think acting in films must be a very boring job.</p> <p>&lt;B&gt; I think actors need a lot of training and they need to learn a lot of things./Really? I think it must be quite interesting.</p> <p><b>D</b></p> <p>&lt;A&gt; Holidays in the mountains are much better than holidays by the coast.</p> <p>&lt;B&gt; Yes, I might like holidays in the mountains./Yes, I know exactly what you mean.</p> <p>&lt;A&gt; I love Manhattan.</p> <p>&lt;B&gt; It's my favourite area of New York, definitely./Yes, I think so.</p> |
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### Trinity tip

If you are not sure what to say at first, you can ask the other person to say more about his or her opinion. For example:

- <A> I think people should spend less time on social networks.
- <B> Why do you think that?/Do you mean less of their free time or when they should be working?

## Activity 3

Discuss these statements with a partner.

- Do you think money is important in life?
- Should people spend less time on the internet?
- Is change a good thing?
- Do you think the legal age for driving should be brought up to 21?