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# Communicating in academic situations

*Being a successful student*

## In this unit you will:

- 1 reflect on your experience of speaking in an academic context
- 2 analyse your strengths and weaknesses in speaking
- 3 identify and practise language for agreeing and disagreeing
- 4 consider aspects of a successful presentation
- 5 give a short informal mini-presentation

There are a number of different situations on your academic courses in which you will need to communicate orally in English. The main situations are presentations, seminars and discussions. In academic culture, students need to express their views clearly on different issues relating to their subject area. These views are often based on a critical reading and evaluation of written texts.

The more you study and engage with your subject area, the more your ideas will develop and change. This will help you to develop your critical thinking skills, which are a key aspect of academic study. It is also important that you develop the language skills that will enable you to express your ideas most effectively.



## Task 1 Your experience of speaking English

**1.1** Look at the following list of academic situations which require you to speak. Which situations have you experienced either in your own language or in English? Put a tick (✓) in the appropriate box.

Situations	English	Own language
1. Giving a formal presentation		
2. Participating in a seminar (group discussion)		
3. Leading a seminar (group discussion)		
4. Discussing and giving your opinion in a seminar on pre-assigned articles you have read		
5. Speaking with a department tutor in a one-to-one tutorial (e.g., about an essay plan)		
6. Discussing feedback on your written work with a tutor in a tutorial		
7. Discussing your studies with other students		
8. Other (please state)		

- 1.2** Compare your experiences with those of another student, using your answers to Ex 1.1. Give details of:
- where you had each experience
  - how it was organised (e.g., how many students were involved and how long the speaking turns were)
  - what kinds of topics you covered
- 1.3** Discuss your attitude to the situations in Ex 1.1. Which academic tasks do you find, or think you will find, the most difficult to do in English? Why?

## Task 2 Your attitude to speaking English

- 2.1** Look at the following statements. Do you agree or disagree with them? Which points are important to you?
- I want to speak English with a perfect native-speaker accent.
  - I want to speak English without a single grammatical mistake.
  - I feel as though I am a different person when I speak English.
  - My pronunciation is not as important as my grammatical accuracy.
  - If I can communicate my meaning effectively, it does not matter if I make mistakes.
  - I don't like working in groups during English lessons because I may learn incorrect English from my classmates.
  - I want to speak English for social reasons as well as for academic reasons.



- 2.2** In groups, discuss each statement from Ex 2.1. Appoint one student to note which statements are the most controversial for your group, i.e., which statements caused the most disagreement.

2.3



Listen to some students reporting back on their discussion of the points in Ex 2.1.

Which statements do they refer to?

2.4

Choose one student to report back to the class on the most interesting/controversial points from your discussion in Ex 2.2.

### Study tip

When reporting back to the class, try to keep comments clear and to the point. Get used to using standard expressions for agreement and disagreement.

#### Useful language: Reporting back

*Our group thought the most controversial point was ...*

*Point X provoked the most discussion.*

*Point X was the most controversial point.*

*There was some disagreement about Point X.*

*Some people felt ...*

*Most of the group agreed ...*

*Others disagreed ...*

## Task 3 Agreeing and disagreeing

3.1

Read the statements below. Do you agree (A), disagree (D) or partly agree (P) with each one?

To succeed at university, you need to:

1. \_\_\_ be good at taking exams
2. \_\_\_ be a quick reader
3. \_\_\_ have a good tutor
4. \_\_\_ manage your time well
5. \_\_\_ understand your own learning style
6. \_\_\_ have a good memory

### 3.2



Listen to two students discussing some statements about academic life. Does the second speaker agree, disagree or partly agree with each statement? Underline the correct alternative in the *Opinion* column in the table.

Opinion	Useful language
1. agrees/disagrees/partly agrees	
2. agrees/disagrees/partly agrees	
3. agrees/disagrees/partly agrees	
4. agrees/disagrees/partly agrees	
5. agrees/disagrees/partly agrees	
6. agrees/disagrees/partly agrees	

### 3.3



Listen to the discussion again.

- In the *Useful language* column in Ex 3.2, write down the exact words the second speaker uses to agree, disagree or partly agree.
- Try to say the words as they are pronounced in the recording.

### 3.4

Look at the statements in Ex 3.1 again. Work with another student as follows:

**Student A:** Read a statement.

**Student B:** Respond, using one of the *Useful language* phrases from the table in Ex 3.2. Give your own opinion and a supporting reason.

## Task 4 Study skills for success

You are going to hear a conversation between two students discussing the challenges of studying at university. The female student is a native speaker of English. The male student is an international student who studies on a pre-session course.

### 4.1



Listen and number the points below according to the order in which the students discuss them.

- \_\_\_ Plan ahead and begin working early.
- \_\_\_ Choose areas to study that you are interested in.



3. \_\_\_ Find out what is important on your reading list.
4. \_\_\_ Ask a peer to read your work before submitting it.
5. \_\_\_ Use reading strategies to help you read quickly.
6. \_\_\_ Deal with stress by finding time for relaxation.

**4.2** Think of your own study suggestions to add to those mentioned in the recording and write them below.

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## Task 5 **Prioritising study skills**

**5.1** In groups, discuss the study skills you will need at university.

- a. Come to an agreement on the study skills your group thinks the most important for success at university.
- b. List what your group thinks are the five most important skills.

Build on the ideas from Ex 4.1. Make sure you are able to justify your choice. Remember to use the language for agreeing and disagreeing from Task 3.



## Task 6 **A mini-presentation: Tips for successful study**

Now that you have looked at various aspects of being successful as a student, consider what advice would be useful for new students. Give a group mini-presentation to the class, explaining why the tips you chose in Task 5 are important.

**6.1** You are now going to start preparing your presentation. First, think about what signpost expressions you could use.

Look at the visual aid below.

**Top five study tips**

- Be well-organised
- Work with classmates
- Keep good notes
- Develop good IT skills
- Be motivated



Listen to a student presenting his top five study tips based on this.

- Write your five points from Ex 5.1 onto a visual aid, such as a PowerPoint slide or poster. Use key words, not whole sentences. You need to identify the key words for each of your tips.
- Look at the *Useful language* expressions from the recording. These expressions signal when you are moving from one point to another. Use them in your presentation.

**Useful language:** Signpost expressions

*There are five main points which we consider important for successful study.*

*Our first point is ...*

*Fourthly, we think ...*

*Next, we have put ...*

*And finally, our last point is ...*

*Moving on to our third point, ...*

**Presentation skills: Using signpost expressions**

When giving a presentation, you need to help your audience follow your presentation by using signpost expressions. These are important for:

- opening a presentation
- guiding an audience through the main points
- helping an audience understand the presentation's organisation
- closing a presentation

See Appendix 1 (page 166) for a more extensive list of signpost expressions.

**6.2** Now think about how you would deliver your presentation. Look at the following list of important aspects of delivering a presentation clearly.

- pronunciation of sounds and words
- intonation
- volume
- speed
- eye contact

**Study tip**

There are many skills involved in a successful presentation. These include: language, pronunciation, organisation and style of delivery.

**Presentation skills: Clear delivery**

The delivery of your presentation is as important as the content. If your audience cannot understand what you are saying, e.g., because your pronunciation is poor or because you speak too fast, then the content will be wasted.

**6.3** In your group, discuss the delivery of the presentation.

- a. Decide who will give the presentation – either one group member or two or more group members.
- b. Practise the presentation, focusing on the points in Ex 6.2. Other group members should give the presenter(s) feedback on these points, e.g., *You need to make more eye contact with the audience.*

**Study tip**

It can be useful to record yourself in your own time. When you listen to yourself, you often notice possibilities for improvement.

**Presentation skills: Listening to feedback**

Presentation skills develop with practice, so you will not do everything perfectly from the beginning. Listen carefully to group feedback – whether you are presenting or not – as it will help you improve.

**6.4** Now give the presentation to the class.

For each presenter, complete a presentation assessment form (Appendix 9a, page 180). At the end of each group's presentation, compare your assessment forms in your groups.

**6.5** At the end of all the presentations, give each presenter the assessment form you completed for his/her presentation.

- a. Read and think about any feedback you as a presenter receive from other students.

- b. Decide as a class which presentation was the best according to the criteria on the assessment form.

## Task 7 Assessing a successful presentation

- 7.1** Think about the following points related to the delivery of a presentation. Which would you consider appropriate or inappropriate, and which depend on the presentation? Tick (✓) the relevant box.

Presentation point	Appropriate	It depends	Inappropriate
1. The presenter puts as much information as possible on each poster or slide.			
2. The presenter uses colour and sound to liven up his/her PowerPoint slides.			
3. The presenter reads from a script.			
4. The presenter memorises a script and recites it.			
5. The presenter uses notes.			
6. The presenter pauses after each main point.			
7. The presenter reads all the information on the poster or slide.			
8. The presenter stands in one place all the time.			
9. The presenter speaks at the same speed all the time.			

**7.2** In groups, discuss your completed table and state your reasons for the choices.

## Task 8 Review: Preparing to use a learner diary

Research into language learning has shown that reflecting on the process of learning has a strong impact on its effectiveness. One way of doing this is through keeping a diary. Before you fill in your first diary entry, complete a self-assessment questionnaire on your speaking skills.

**8.1** Look at the following range of speaking skills. Indicate which of these you feel to be easy or difficult (5 = I can do this well; 1 = I do not feel competent at all). Put a tick (✓) in the appropriate box.

Speaking skill	1	2	3	4	5
I can speak accurately, without making too many grammatical mistakes.					
I can speak without hesitating too much.					
I can find ways to express my meaning, even if I cannot find exactly the right words.					
I can usually find the words I need to say what I want.					
I can make most people understand my pronunciation.					
I can speak confidently in front of an audience.					
I can contribute effectively in group discussions.					
I can talk confidently in my own subject area.					

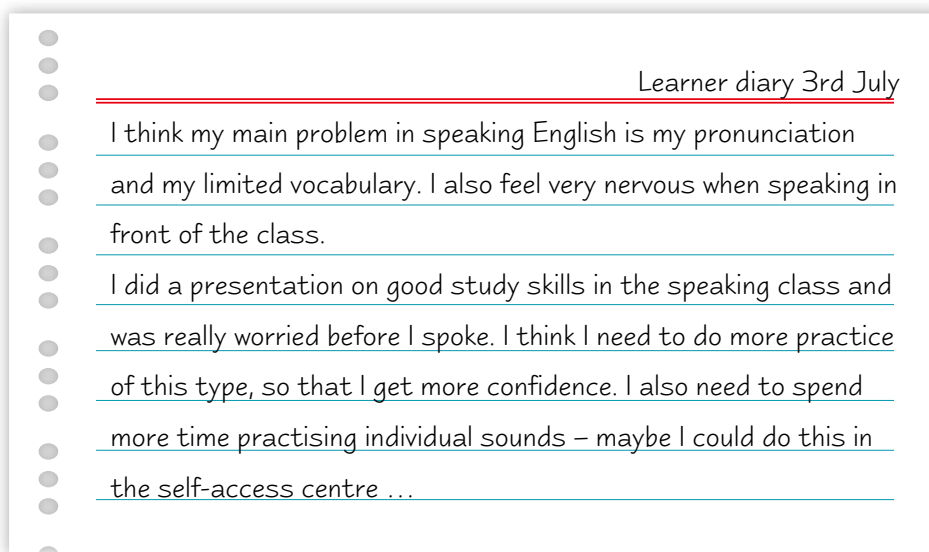
## 8.2 Consider the questions below.

- a. What makes speaking in another language difficult?
- b. Can you think of some practical suggestions to improve your spoken English, inside and outside the classroom – e.g., talking to yourself in English? Make a list. For each suggestion, ask yourself these questions:
  - How would it help me?
  - How easy would it be to organise?

## Learner diary

Read the learner diary questions and example diary entry.

- What areas of speaking English do you feel you need to work on?
- What can you do to improve in these areas, either inside or outside the classroom?
- How do you feel about the speaking you have done so far in the lessons on this course?



The image shows a sample learner diary entry on lined paper. The title is 'Learner diary 3rd July'. The text describes the student's main problems with speaking English (pronunciation and vocabulary) and their feelings of nervousness. It also mentions a presentation in class and the student's plan to practice more to gain confidence.

Learner diary 3rd July

I think my main problem in speaking English is my pronunciation and my limited vocabulary. I also feel very nervous when speaking in front of the class.

I did a presentation on good study skills in the speaking class and was really worried before I spoke. I think I need to do more practice of this type, so that I get more confidence. I also need to spend more time practising individual sounds – maybe I could do this in the self-access centre ...

Make an entry in your own learner diary, answering the questions. Think about your strengths and weaknesses in speaking English as identified in the questionnaire in Ex 8.1.

## Unit summary

In this unit you have looked at the speaking skills you need in academic situations and thought about your own strengths and weaknesses.

**1** Complete the sentences below in any way you want so that they are true for you.

a. I find speaking in English difficult when

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b. I find using English in academic situations can be different from other situations. I think it is important to be able to speak \_\_\_\_\_ but some people feel \_\_\_\_\_

c. I agree with others in the class that \_\_\_\_\_

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**2** Think about the discussions you have had while working on this unit. Discuss the following questions and agree on a suitable answer for each one.

a. To what extent did other students agree in the discussion in Task 2 about attitudes to speaking English?

b. Which discussion statement in Ex 2.1 about study skills did students find most controversial?

c. What do you think are the key points to remember when giving a presentation?

**3** Think of good presentations you have seen. What made them good in terms of:

- content?
- delivery?
- visual aids?

For web resources relevant to this book, see:  
[www.englishforacademicstudy.com](http://www.englishforacademicstudy.com)

This weblink will provide you with further practice for becoming a successful speaker of English, as well as useful study tips.



# Seminars and discussions

## *Learning online*

### In this unit you will:

- 1 identify characteristics of successful participation in seminars and discussions
- 2 consider problematic issues from different perspectives
- 3 practise summarising the outcome of a discussion
- 4 examine the role of a chairperson in a discussion



In your academic studies you will need to participate in seminars and discussions with groups of other students. Usually you are expected to have done some preparation, e.g., read an article. Seminars take various formats. Some are led by tutors and others by students. In seminars you need to be able to state your viewpoint clearly and to develop the confidence to do this. This unit will give you practice in participating in seminars, as well as the opportunity to lead one.

It is important to think about how you can contribute effectively to a seminar. The purpose of Task 1 is to start you thinking about how you can do this.

## Task 1 The role of seminars

### 1.1 Discuss questions 1–3.

1. What is the role of seminars in academic studies?
2. What do tutors expect from students?
3. How can you prepare for seminars?

## Task 2 Participating successfully in group discussions

### 2.1 Decide the degree to which the statements 1–11 in the table describe characteristics of good or poor seminar participants.

- a. Put a tick (✓) in the appropriate box.
- b. Prepare a list of reasons for your answers; if your answer is *It depends*, be prepared to explain further.

The participant ...	Good	It depends	Poor
1. listens to what others say and builds on this, adding his/her opinion			
2. tries to get other people to change their minds and agree with his/her opinion			
3. always agrees with other people's opinions			
4. does not say anything at all			
5. explains his/her points in great detail, and at great length			
6. explains his/her points briefly			
7. is nervous about speaking, but makes himself/herself do it			
8. encourages others to speak, inviting them into the discussion			
9. only speaks when asked			
10. asks other students to clarify what they mean, or to explain further			
11. changes his/her opinion during the discussion			

**2.2** Compare and discuss your answers in Ex 2.1 with those of another student, explaining the reasons for your choices.

**2.3** Reflect on factors affecting group discussions in different cultures.

1. What is considered good behaviour in group discussions in your own country?
2. Do you think there are any differences from an English-speaking country?
3. If you have experience of different English-speaking countries, do you feel there are differences between any of them?

## Task 3 Considering different perspectives on an issue

- 3.1** Look at questions 1–4. Think about who would be affected, either directly or indirectly, by each issue.
1. At what age should formal education begin?
  2. What is the most effective way to maintain discipline within large classes of children?
  3. Who should decide what is taught in schools?
  4. How might different groups of people (e.g., parents) or organisations respond to the points above?

- 3.2** Look at this statement concerning education and consider it from the perspectives of the different people involved (1–7).

A seriously disruptive child should be excluded permanently from school.

1. the teacher of the child
2. the parents of the child
3. the headteacher of the child's school
4. the child
5. the child's classmates
6. a child psychologist
7. the education authorities

- 3.3** Read the text “Learning support units” on page 103 (note: Ofsted is the UK Office for Standards in Education). Do you think these units are a solution to the problem of disruptive children?

- 3.4** Compare and discuss your ideas with those of another student, giving reasons for the view of each person. Use some of the *Useful language* expressions for comparing perspectives.

### Study tip

In academic study, you need to look at issues from different perspectives and to think beyond your own experience or position. This is part of the process of reaching a balanced conclusion.

**Useful language:** Comparing perspectives

<i>From (a teacher's) perspective, ...</i>	<i>(The child psychologist) would argue that ...</i>
<i>If I were (the headteacher of the child's school), I'd probably feel that ...</i>	<i>From the point of view of (the parents), ...</i>

**3.5**



Now listen to a student comparing different perspectives on the statement in Ex 3.2. What does the speaker say about the views of those involved?

**Task 4 Reaching a balanced conclusion**

**4.1** Look at the following statements about school education.

- Corporal punishment is necessary to maintain discipline.
- Children should be given formal tests and exams from the age of six.
- Children should be allowed to leave school at 16 if they wish.
- Parents should be allowed to educate children at home if they wish.
- Children should be able to choose which subjects they want to study at the age of 15.

Consider each statement from the perspective of three or four different people who might be affected. Consider:

1. how they would view the issue
2. the long- and short-term implications of the statements

In addition to the people mentioned in Ex 3.2, think about the viewpoints of other sectors of society – such as young people or employers – and society as a whole.

**4.2** Now record your points using the table in Appendix 2 (page 167). Remember you are recording what you think the views of those directly involved might be, not your own views.

**4.3** In groups, discuss each of the statements from Ex 4.1, comparing your ideas about the different views of the people involved.

**Step 1:** Compare what you wrote for the first statement in the *Different perspectives* columns of the table in Appendix 2. Use some of the *Useful language* expressions from Ex 3.4.

**Step 2:** When you have completed Step 1, give your own opinion on the first statement. What do you think should happen?

**Step 3:** In groups, compare your answers to Step 2. Do you agree?

**Step 4:** Now repeat Steps 1–3 for the other statements.

## Task 5 Summarising the outcome of a discussion

In seminars, you may have to summarise the final outcome of a long discussion. Did people agree or disagree on the main issues, and why? What were the main points for and against?

**5.1** Listen to a student summarising a group discussion of the statement from Ex 3.2 relating to the exclusion of disruptive children. Did the group agree or disagree with the statement?



**5.2** Look at the following extract from the student's talk, paying attention to how the speaker organises the points.

The missing phrases are where the speaker:

- states whether or not the group agreed
- acknowledges a strong argument against the final position
- qualifies the final position

This is a difficult question, but \_\_\_\_\_ such a child should be excluded from school, as this would be in the best interests of most people concerned. \_\_\_\_\_ this action might cause some damage to the child's long-term ability to socialise effectively with other children, so we also agreed that \_\_\_\_\_ there is no other solution – I mean, if all else fails.



Listen again and complete the gaps.

**5.3** Underline the words that you think are stressed in the three phrases in Ex 5.2. If necessary, listen again.

**5.4** Next to each phrase in the following *Useful language* box there is a number. This number tells you how many words are stressed when this phrase is spoken aloud and with the correct emphasis.



- a. Predict which of the words are stressed.
- b. Listen to a student using some of the phrases.
- c. Practise saying the phrases in a natural way. Make sure you are using the correct stress.

**Useful language:** Summarising a discussion

**Summing up your position**

- We finally all agreed that ...* 3
- After much consideration, we decided that ...* 3
- All things considered, we felt that ...* 4
- On balance, we felt that ...* 2
- We couldn't reach agreement on this issue ...* 3
- Some of us felt that ..., whilst others ...* 4

**Recognising strong arguments against your position**

- It's true that ...* 1
- We recognised that ...* 1
- We're fully aware that ...* 2
- One has to acknowledge that ...* 2

**Qualifying your position**

- This action should only be taken if ...* 4
- So, although we agreed with the statement, we stressed that ...* 5

**5.5** Take turns to present a summary of your discussion of one of the statements from Ex 4.1 to the class. Use the *Useful language* expressions in your summary.

After you have listened to the summaries given by the other groups, be prepared to make comments or ask questions about what they have said.

## Task 6 Considering issues in higher education

- 6.1** Look at questions 1–3. Who is affected by these issues? What might the different responses be?
1. How should higher education be funded?
  2. How much of its time and resources should a university spend on research and how much on teaching?
  3. How can a developing country best improve its higher education system?

## Task 7 The role of a chairperson in a discussion

When we have a group discussion it is often a good idea to appoint a chairperson. This will help the management of the discussion. Task 7 looks at the role of the chairperson.

- 7.1** Online learning is rapidly becoming more popular as an increasing number of students choose to study in this way. Use the table below to make notes on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning.
- a. Use ideas from your own experience.
  - b. Read the texts on pages 105–111. Think about whether the texts have changed your opinions and amend your notes as appropriate.

Advantages	Disadvantages
	– not all people have access to the technology

## 7.2 Take part in a group discussion on the topic given. Follow the steps.

Online learning will eventually replace many forms of face-to-face teaching.

**Step 1:** Think about the points you want to make and what your overall position on the issue is.

**Step 2:** Appoint a chairperson to manage the discussion. Some of the chairperson's responsibilities are listed below. The appointed chairperson should refer to the *Useful language* expressions below.

### The role of a chairperson includes:

- getting the discussion started
- giving a brief overview of the topic (introducing it)
- possibly giving definitions
- keeping the discussion going by encouraging everyone to participate
- clarifying what people say, if necessary
- ensuring that one person does not dominate
- checking that all contributions were understood
- managing the time
- summing up the discussion at the end

**Note:** The chairperson should not dominate or control the discussion too much.

**Step 3:** You have 10–15 minutes for your discussion. Each person should try to make at least one contribution to the discussion; you do not need to wait for the chairperson to invite you to speak.

### Useful language: Chairing a discussion

#### Getting started

*Shall we begin?*

*Today, we're looking at the following question/topic ...*

*Who would like to begin?*

#### Clarification

*So what you mean is ...*

*If I've understood you correctly, ...*

#### Managing contributions

*Thanks, Pete, for your contribution ...*

*OK, Pete. Would anyone else like to comment?*

#### Concluding

*So, to sum up, ...*

*We're running out of time, so ...*

*Does anyone want to make a final point?*

*Have I forgotten anything?*



**7.3** Review your group's discussion in Ex 7.2 by completing the discussion review form in Appendix 9b (page 181).

**7.4** With a student from another group, compare and discuss your discussion review forms. If you are a chairperson in the discussion, join with another chairperson.

### Study tip

To make progress with your speaking, you need to reflect on your performance in speaking activities. This will help you identify areas for improvement.

## Learner diary

**Make another entry in your learner diary.**

Reflect on the characteristics of a good/poor discussion participant you considered at the start of this unit.

- Do you feel that you were a “good participant” in the discussion activities in this unit? Can you say why or why not?
- What areas do you think you need to improve on to become a better participant?

**Make an entry in your learner diary, answering the questions. If you prefer, you can make an audio recording of your thoughts and give it to your teacher to listen to.**

# Unit summary

In this unit you have looked at the speaking skills you need to participate in and summarise seminars and discussions. You have also looked at the role of the chairperson.

**1 Read the opinion below and discuss the questions with another student.**

I believe we should be allowed to leave school at the age of 15.





- a. Do you agree with this teenager's perspective? Why? Why not?
- b. How could you complete the sentence below? *From the point of view of an employer, ...*
- c. What other perspectives could this issue be considered from?
- d. Why is it important for a seminar participant to be able to think about different perspectives in advance when preparing for a discussion?

**2 Complete the text with the words and phrases in the box from Unit 2. There is one word which you will not need to use.**

clarify      participate      dominate      overview      sum up  
contribution      conclusion      time      dominate

### The role of the chairperson

In a seminar, the chairperson is responsible for keeping the discussion going but should not control or \_\_\_\_\_ it. He or she normally gets the discussion started by giving a brief \_\_\_\_\_ of the topic and clarifying key concepts. He or she then helps the discussion run smoothly by encouraging everyone to \_\_\_\_\_. This means ensuring that one person does not \_\_\_\_\_ and inviting quieter people to speak where necessary so that everyone makes at least one \_\_\_\_\_. He or she may also ask people to \_\_\_\_\_ any points that are unclear. The chairperson also manages the \_\_\_\_\_ and should \_\_\_\_\_ the main points at the end.

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For web resources relevant to this book, see:  
[www.englishforacademicstudy.com](http://www.englishforacademicstudy.com)

This weblink will encourage you to think about how seminars differ from lectures, provide you with practice in looking at issues from different perspectives and give you some useful language for discussing ideas.

