

Talking Points: Improve your discussion skills – In Bezug auf relevante Themen die sprachliche Diskussionsfähigkeit optimieren (Klasse 9–12)

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M 1 Introduction

To the learner

You have studied English for several years and you have a fair grasp of its essential grammar and vocabulary. However, when it comes to using the language outside the classroom, you feel you need more oral practice to make you feel confident and at ease.

As a foreign language learner, you are bound to have difficulties. Firstly, there are words you don't know, and this prevents you from saying what you want to say. Secondly, there are structures which you haven't mastered well enough yet to express yourself with the accuracy you have in your mother tongue. And finally, there are situations in discussions in which you don't know what to say, or rather what the right thing to say is.



Carefully graded tasks will help you overcome some of these difficulties. At the end of the unit, you will be competent to function in certain well-defined situations. This will build up your *confidence*.

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A. Opening the new awareness: How can I be more competent in discussions?

1. Working on your own rank the following aspects in the order of their importance. Use numbers from 1 to 4.

critical (1) very important (2) less important (3) irrelevant (4)

- understanding other people's intentions
- knowing who will be talking and for how long
- being confident
- expressing complex ideas
- giving and justifying opinions
- talking about the things I really care about
- discussing topics that interest me
- practising makes permanent

2. Talk to a partner and explain your reasons for your ranking.
3. Report back to the class.

M 2 Talking Point 'Environment'

"When civilized man destroys in blind vandalism the natural habitat surrounding and sustaining him he threatens himself with ecological ruin." (Konrad Lorenz, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*)

A. Individual work

1. Study the **picture**, then read the **question and answer**. There are two contrasting attitudes. Where does your sympathy lie and why?



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Question (Brazilian Government)

"These ecologists are worrying about us going in and chopping down the Brazilian forest. But why? There is nothing there."

Answer (Pete Wilkinson, Friends of the Earth)

"A typical dogmatic view – that if an area contains a human life then it's there to do whatever you like with it. It's a terrible tragedy!"

2. Now read the **poem**. What strikes you most?

"Said Somebody"

Said Somebody:

The trees, of course,
will have to be chopped down
and we'll build the road
5 across some farm land

Said Somebody else:

It would be easier to use the cricket field
We could build fifty houses there –
back to back, of course.
10 It's only used in summer anyway.

Said Somebody:

There might be objections
and we'll have our seats to consider

Well, said Somebody else:

15 How about that bit of scruffy Green Belt
or National Trust Park
– or with a wink in the right direction
something could be arranged.

20 after all, we do need houses
and laundrettes and pubs and streetlights...

Trouble is, said Somebody,
They've got their priorities all wrong
– think trees and fields and birds
are more important than roofs
25 over people's heads

If we're not careful, said Somebody,
we'll have the cranks out
with their placards again.

30 By the way,
Does anybody know what 'Ecology' means?

Tina Morris: "Said Somebody", in: Robin Richardson: Learning for change in world society. One World Trust: London 1976.

B. Connect – Extend – Challenge

1. Consider what you have just seen and read, then ask yourself:

How are the thoughts and pieces of information presented above *connected* to what you already knew?

What new ideas did you get that *extended* or broadened your thinking in new directions?

- What *challenges* or puzzles have come up in your mind from the thoughts and information presented?

2. Talk about your findings with someone in the class.

M 3 Presentation: Expressing opinions and inquiring

When you are taking part in a discussion, it is very useful to have techniques up your sleeve to express your opinion and agreeing or disagreeing with someone's opinion.

You probably find it fairly easy to give your opinion using expressions like these:

stating an opinion

Informal: *As I see it ...*
The point is ...
You know what I think / I think that ...
Formal: *As far as I am concerned ...*
All things considered, I must say ...
I'd just like to say that I think that ...

agreeing completely

People may agree wholeheartedly like this:

I absolutely agree.
I agree entirely.
I'm with you all the way.
Yes, I think you're absolutely right.

agreeing partly

Or agree with reservations, like this:

I agree up to a point, but ...
I see what you mean, but ...
That's true in a way, but ...
Most of what you say is true, but ...

disagreeing

Or you may disagree like this:

I don't really see.
I'm afraid I can't accept that.
Well, maybe. But ... (Note that the word "Well ..." often precedes expressions of disagreement.)
Well, that might be true, but ...

showing rather strong disagreement

I can't agree with that. I think that ...
Oh, I don't think so. I think that ...
I don't agree with that. I think ...
I completely disagree. I think that ...

disagreeing with someone you know very well

You must be joking!
Don't make me laugh!
Come off it!

finding out other people's view

How do you feel about that point?
What are your views on this point?
Do you agree with what's been said so far?
Does that make sense to you?

C. Discussion: Changes

1. You have decided to prepare a long-term plan to reverse negative developments in the environment of the modern world.
 - a) Make a list of those developments you would like to see reversed.
 - b) Pair work. Compare your list with that of a partner and add any developments that are a matter of concern to you.
 - c) Still in pairs. Draw up a plan covering:
 - Immediate action
 - The first three years
 - The following ten years



Your plan might address the following questions:

- What are your concerns?
- Are these concerns the same for people around the world?
- How do your concerns affect people in your local area?
- How do your concerns affect people in your country?
- How do your concerns affect people around the world?
- How do your concerns affect the natural environment?
- What are the solutions?
- Are the solutions the same for people around the world?

2. In groups. "Discussion tickets – Discuss your plan"

- a) Each student tears a page of exercise paper into four pieces and writes on each piece "Valid for one contribution".
- b) While you discuss the plan every time someone speaks he or she must 'pay' one ticket. Tickets are 'paid' by laying them on the floor in front of the speaker so they are visible to all. Every utterance must be paid for. The discussion will continue until all the tickets have been used up. Once you have spent your tickets, you must sit back and listen – you cannot intervene again. You are not allowed to give your tickets away. (NOTE: The teacher has four tickets too and must abide by the rules like everybody else.) Use gestures if you do not want to spend all your tickets at once!

Reflection: What difficulties if any did you have in expressing yourself? What do you think you have learnt from the discussion?

M 5 Talking Point 'Media'

In this age of global media, information and images about controversial world events are available widely. They have a strong influence on all of us.

A. One day in Athens



Foto: AFP/Getty Images

Work with a partner and answer the questions below. Take notes. Then report back to the class.

- Who might have taken the picture?
- What might be the purpose of the picture?
- Who is it appealing to?
- What techniques are used to attract your attention?
- What values and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this picture?
- How might other people understand the message of the picture differently from you?

B. Switch activities

Work with a partner on your own. Then share your ideas with a partner.

- Look at the statement below and say what it means to you.
- Then switch the subject and object round and explain the meaning of the new statement.
- In the next step, look at the specific examples listed after the head statement. Classify these as belonging to the first statement, the "switched" statement, or to both.

"The media influence public opinion."

- Life in an informed society
- Bias
- Think critically
- Popular press
- Media and politics
- Lens of media
- Who has the power?
- Impose meaning

M 8 Talking Point 'Violence'

In our time, many movements, groups and parties have been involved in rebellion. Violence and terrorism – short, sharp, and very violent – is a common means to this end.

Task: Study the picture and read the text excerpt.

Step Inside

1. Individual work. Select a person or an object that is a part of the event or situation you are examining. Imagine yourself as the person or thing you have selected. Place yourself within the event or situation to see things from this point of view. Take notes.

Some questions to consider:

- What can this person/thing see, observe or notice?
- What might the person/thing know or believe?
- What might the person/thing care deeply about?
- What might the person/thing wonder about or question?

2. In class. Share your notes and your impressions.



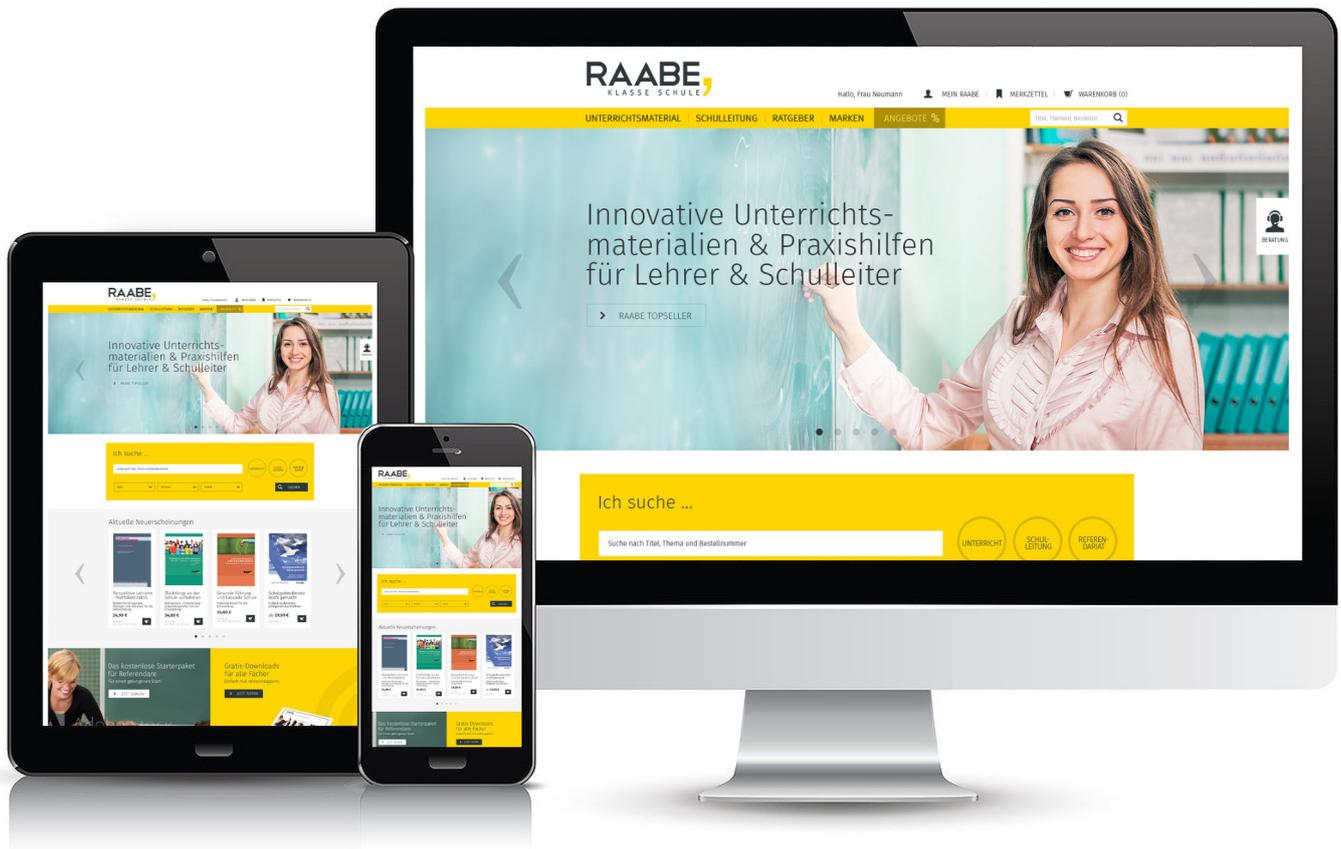
Foto: dpa picture alliance

“Policemen!” said Luca.

Harriet looked on. There was a curious group of uniformed men standing in the doorway of the lounge. Harriet stared. The tense still attitudes of the men announced something unusual. Danger. Harriet’s heart suddenly began to beat very fast. She turned and saw next to her a stout German whom she had noticed on the plane. His face struck her with terror. It had gone completely white, his mouth open, his eyes staring towards the centre of the room. Harriet looked there in the midst of a deadly quietness and frozen immobility of everybody else, two young men were standing together, one of them holding a long glittering tube in his hands. More police appeared in another doorway. Someone called out peremptorily in German. A woman screamed. One of the policemen raised a revolver. There was a sudden crackling of deafening sound and the room became full of desperate agonized screaming. The stout man beside Harriet fell to the floor bleeding profusely. Screaming herself, Harriet covered Luca with her body.

Iris Murdoch: *The Sacred and Profane Love Maschine*, Vintage Classics 2003. Reprinted by permission of The Random House Group Limited © 2003

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