

**Discussion and Debate in
Practice: Engaging with
Fundamental and
Professional English
Language Skills**

An Eclectic Primer for Enthusiastic Learners

Unit Four: Adding More to Academic Discussion

Michael Chesnut

Hello Class and welcome to the unit four workbook.

This week we are reviewing a few aspects of English from earlier in the semester and adding more to our understanding of English discussion and debate. Further, we have a very interesting reading this week as well.

Part A: Showing Agreement, Disagreement, and Limited Agreement

We already looked at these expressions a little in week three but this week I want to further examine these expressions.

Which expressions do you know and regularly use?

Which expressions do you know, but rarely use in class?

Which expressions are you unfamiliar with or do not understand?

Which four expressions do you want to try and use in today's class?

What further expressions of agreement, disagreement, and limited agreement can you add to this list?

Showing Agreement	Showing Disagreement
I definitely/absolutely/completely/totally agree (totally may be casual)	I can't help but disagree
I agree one-hundred percent	That's nonsense!
I can't disagree	I think differently
I couldn't agree more	That doesn't make sense
Absolutely	I doubt it
Exactly	X is not necessarily the best idea
Totally (Casual)	That's off topic
I'm with you on that	I don't see it that way
My sentiments exactly	Interesting, but I have a different point of view
That makes sense	Nonsense
We're on the same page	No way
I'm with you on that	I see it differently (or) I see things differently
	I think you missed the point
	You really think so?
	That's a terrible idea
	I can't understand your point about _____
	Well, I have a different opinion

Showing Limited Agreement

I hear what you're saying but. . .

I agree to some degree

While I agree that . . . I think . . .

I disagree with some parts of . . .

I agree to a certain extent

I hear you but

I agree with you to some extent

That could be possible but . . .

I agree with some of your points

I agree with you up to a point

Part B: The Importance of Follow-up Questions

Follow-up questions are simply questions that 'follow' after the other person has finished speaking. Any time a friend tells you something and you ask them to explain more or ask them to give more details you are asking follow-up questions. However, in our class students are so focused on their own speech they often forget to ask good follow-up questions to other students. This section is designed to get us thinking more about follow-up questions.

There are many general follow-up questions you can ask when your partner finishes speaking. Some are listed below but there are many others.

Can you explain further?

Can you please go on?

Can you elaborate on your main point?

Can you say any more about (the topic)?

What do you think the consequences will be of (the topic)?

I'd like to hear more about your ideas. (This is not a question but encourages the other person to continue speaking so we will put it here)

Why do you believe that?

What evidence do you have that supports your position?

These questions are fine but the best follow-up questions are much more specific.

Attempt to create specific questions that both ask for more details and use language directly related to your topic in our discussions this week. Questions such as "why?" and "why do you believe that?" are very general and are often less effective than more specific questions. Questions can also be a form of pressuring someone into reconsidering their opinion or persuading a group to believe your argument.

Consider the following exchange.

A: I believe HUFS should install biometric scanners in all the dormitories. That would be safer.

B: **Have you considered** issues of privacy? Some of those scanners might be hacked and could disclose important information.

"Have you considered ____X____?" is another way of asking about a topic. It should be answered with a "Yes, I have" or a "No, I haven't" and a further explanation of how X related to Speaker A's original topic.

Consider the following exchange.

A: HUFS should redevelop the school gym because the current facility is really old and run down.

B: Do you believe HUFS should acquire new exercise machines or should HUFS redevelop the gym building?

This is a very specific question that pushes Speaker A to give more information.

Consider the following exchange.

A: HUFS should install an outdoor swimming pool in the space used by the basketball court.

B: How would you resolve the problem of having a huge amount of wasted space in winter?

This is again a very specific question that pushes A to give more information.

Consider the following exchange.

A: HUFS should install an outdoor swimming pool in the space used by the basketball court.

B: Why do you believe having an outdoor swimming pool would be superior to having a basketball court?

This is a very general question but Speaker B uses the language of Speaker A to show she or he is listening carefully and understands the issues being discussed.

Try to ask some specific follow-up questions in our week four discussions!

Part C: Speaking about Beliefs and Opinions

The following are some expressions you can start to use to discuss your beliefs and opinions in a more business-like and academic way.

I firmly believe we should not resume classes until the present crisis has ended.

I share your opinion on the issue of resuming classes.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not true that university classes in Canada are small and discussion based.

It's a matter of opinion whether American universities are superior to Australian universities.

I have an unshakeable belief that we are doing the right thing in our class.

This research leads me to conclude that we must do more homework in this class.

I have doubts about the accuracy of this research.

I feel strongly about this issue.

I hold the view that we must continue our current course of action.

We will review these expressions in class but you should think further about how you can express your beliefs and opinions in business-like scholarly English.

Think more about the above expressions.

Which expressions do you know and regularly use?

Which expressions do you know but rarely use in class?

Which expressions are you unfamiliar with or do not understand?

Which four expressions do you want to try and use in today's class?

What further language regarding expressing your beliefs can you add to this list?

'In my opinion'

Many students use the phrase 'in my opinion' very often in this class and it is a nice business-like expression that you should use. However, when students overuse this expression and use it repeatedly in the same way, it may make listeners evaluate the speaker's English as more intermediate level rather than advanced. Consider how you use the phrase 'in my opinion'. Do you use it more often at the beginning of a sentence or the end? Some research finds that East Asia speakers of English use 'in my opinion' most often at the beginning of a sentence while American speakers of English use it most often at the end of a sentence. Both ways of using this expression are completely fine and natural ways of using this expression, but if you only use 'in my opinion' at the beginning of a sentence, consider trying to use it also at the end of a sentence. Further, think about how using 'in my opinion' at the end of your sentences, allows you to deliberately weaken and 'step back' from a very strong position if you believe you have overstated the strength of your opinion.

Part B – Our Reading for this Week

Comics studies has been undervalued for too long: we're fighting to change this

Comics have a long and rich history, but it's only now that courses and research are laying proud claim to the discipline

By Christopher Murray



The academic discipline of comics studies has burgeoned in recent years. New journals and conferences supporting the subject area have emerged, a comics laureate has been appointed and the UK's first ever master's programme for the discipline has been established.

This is the culmination of many decades of work in comics scholarship. Many will know that the study and appreciation of comics has a long history – early appreciators of the medium include Goethe, Picasso, and Bunuel. But it is only now that this is being translated into courses and research that do not disguise themselves as something else, but rather lay proud claim to comics studies as a discipline.

There are several reasons for this rise in popularity. Comics have achieved a hard-fought-for degree of critical respectability since the "graphic novel" boom of the mid-1980s. Award-winning and innovative works such as Maus, Fun Home and Palestine have been recognised as accomplished

works of art and literature. Over recent years they have crept into university reading lists worldwide, and across a range of disciplines, from literature courses to history and media studies.

At the other end of the scale, comics have provided the inspiration for many top-grossing films and acclaimed television series. After several shaky decades the comics industry is finally bouncing back with new business models that take advantage of online distribution, mitigating against the vulnerability that it, along with most traditional print media, had been exposed to with the onset of the digital age.

A new confidence is to be found in the industry, and in the wider world of comics, which includes hugely popular cross-over events like San Diego Comics Con, New York Comic Con, Thought Bubble in Leeds and many others like them worldwide.

It was these developments that led me to launch Dundee University's master's programme in comics studies. The course combines the academic study of comics with practical assessments, allowing students to create comics as well as research them. Of course, there were some predictable claims that universities are "dumbing down" in order to recruit more widely. Fortunately, such prejudices about comics being "just for kids" now seem hopelessly out of date.

Busting myths

Although attitudes are changing, there are still some myths about the discipline which scholars are working hard to dispel.

There's a misconception that comics studies is just for the boys. Actually, just as comics conventions and comics shops are no longer no-go zones for girls and women, female students make up around 60% of our intake at Dundee.

Similarly, there are a great many prominent female comics scholars leading the development of the field. The issue of gender inequality remains a concern in the mainstream comics industry, where most creators are male, but the situation is very different in independent comics and web comics.

Another myth concerns funding. Some students fear that funding bodies will not take the subject seriously. However, several PhD students who have recently started at Dundee have received full AHRC funding support to undertake research into comics.

This is partly a recognition of the huge amount of work that has to be done in this under-developed area. It's also down to the fact that students working in comics studies often employ innovative and genuinely interdisciplinary methodologies. There are few orthodoxies to fall back on in comics studies, so the field can be approached from a diverse range of perspectives. As the field expands it must grow, scholars must not seek to impose a canon and orthodoxy – instead they need to

retain its interdisciplinary strengths.

For comics studies to thrive, what is really needed is a lot more fundamental than money: the appreciation of comics needs to start at school – and not in the playground, but in the classroom.

Comics have a lot to offer teachers and school pupils, as I have seen in the workshops I have organised for local schools. They can break down disciplinary divides and enable discussions that cross between literature, art, history, politics, media, religious studies, and so on. The value that universities now place on creative thinking across subjects could be embedded much earlier, and using a medium that reflects forms and influences from many cultures.

Comics are also a powerful educational tool for assisting readers with dyslexia or autism who may have difficulty processing text.

We do not yet take advantage of the power of comics to educate, inspire and challenge students. The ever-increasing number of comics scholars worldwide aim to change that.

New to comics and graphic novels? Here are five must reads

Batman: Year One (1987)

Frank Miller, author of the equally monumental *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986), joins forces with master stylist David Mazzucchelli to present an innovative revision of Batman's origin. This was the inspiration for Christopher Nolan's *Batman* films.

Watchmen (1986)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbon's brilliant deconstruction of the superhero genre. The intricate narrative structure is matched by the clockwork precision of the artwork, redefining the potential of the medium.

Fun Home (2006)

Alison Bechdel's memoir of her relationship with her father, intertwined with her coming out story, and her discovery of his own secret life, draws on a range of literary allusions and showcases Bechdel's exquisite control of the comics form.

WE3 (2004)

Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's powerful manga inspired science fiction animal rights tale is an unforgettable mash up of *Watership Down*, *The Fox and the Hound*, *The Matrix*, and *Mobile Suit Gundam*. If you think your cat has a mean streak, wait till you read this.

The Arrival (2006)

Shaun Tan's stunning parable of an immigrant finding his way in an exotic and threatening new world is an impressive blend of children's illustrated book and graphic novel. Told without words with beautiful sepia coloured images, it evokes an old, long forgotten family album, but with elements of surrealism. A wonder for all ages.

Christopher Murray is a lecturer in English and film studies at the University of Dundee. He is also the editor of Studies in Comics

Discussion Questions

Question Set One: What is 'Comics Studies'? What was your initial reaction to this article's title? What did you first think a Comics Studies class would be like?

Question Set Two: How does the author justify studying comic books? Why is studying comic books more popular than before? What examples does the author use of serious comic books or graphic novels? Did you look them up? Can you now? What do you think of them?

Question Set Three: Who is the author of this article? Why do you think he wrote this article? What academic program did he develop? What have critics claimed about this program? What do you think about this program?

Question Set Four: What are some myths about comic books and comic book readers, according to the article? What are some concerns regarding comic books and comic books studies? What academic strengths do students who study comic books have? How can comic studies further develop, according to the author? What do you think about these myths, concerns, strengths, and plans?

Debate Question

The EICC Department should create a class titled introduction to Comics Studies.

First, in your groups generate a list of arguments for this resolution and a list of arguments against this resolution. Second, consider some expressions, collocations, verbs, grammar and more you could use in this debate. What can you say to win the debate? Third, how can you use ethos, logos, and pathos in this debate?

Part C: Arguments Based on our Week Two Reading

Consider the following statements that are related to the article we discussed in week two.

The EICC Department needs a literary translation class for students in the first year of their studies.

Translating poetry is always doomed to failure.

Literary translation should focus on conveying the culture of the source text.

Literary translation is too difficult to be taught to first year students in a foreign language major.

The best way to master a foreign language is through intensive reading of literature.

It is sad that K-pop music is more important than Korean literature.

The future of Korean literature in translation is bright.

You are very welcome to disagree or agree with these statements or even choose another position regarding these statements but in this activity, you should simply present your opinion regarding any one of these statements and your partners should agree or disagree with your opinion using the language we studied this week. Being able to agree, disagree, and partially agree in an academic fashion is an important aspect of this class.

The End!