Expressing Opinions

This month we're focusing on the expression of opinions. We feel that many of our topics lend themselves to the expression of opinions, so this is one area in which our members could use some practice.

Listed below are a variety of language patterns that you can use to ask for opinions, express opinions, and agree and disagree with other people's opinions. Have a look at the list and try to identify patterns that you don't normally use. Then make a commitment to using those new patterns in your conversations over the next month or two. This will help you expand your range of language patterns at your disposal when it comes to talking about your opinions.

Also accompanying this PDF are 10 mp3 audio recordings. Each is designed to give you some practice listening to a native speaker using the patterns and to either repeat them, answer questions, or respond with agreement or disagreement. See each respective section below for more details on how to best use each recording.

As with all of our learning strategies each month, it is not enough to just listen and understand, but rather you need to put it immediately into practice. This is how you will improve your speaking ability. So for this month, memorize new language patterns, practice your delivery with the recordings, and then start using them in real conversations you have with your friends

We hope you enjoy this set.

Asking for Opinions

There are a number of different patterns you can use for asking others for their opinions. Look at the list below. Choose one or two that you don't normally use and make a commitment to start using them regularly in your conversations this month and next.

What do you think of _____?
What's your opinion of _____?
What are your ideas on _____?
Do you have any thoughts on _____?
How do you feel about _____?
What's your take on _____?

Expressing Opinions

As with asking for opinions, there a numerous ways to express your opinions. Below are some common patterns. Note that there are varying levels of certainty. Not only can certainty be expressed through different language patterns, but it can also be expressed through verbal delivery, especially in terms of intonation and emphasis (see Audio Recording #3 for more details).

Note: the term 'that' is optional in most of these phrases. Sometimes speakers will drop it.

Very Certain
I know for a fact (that)…
I'm absolutely sure (that)…
I'm 100% certain (that)…
I'm completely convinced (that)…
Beyond a shadow of a doubt…

Certain
I know (that)…
I'm sure (that)…
I'm certain (that)…
I'm convinced (that)…
Without a doubt…

Normal (also certain)
I think (that)…
I don't think (that)…

I believe (that)…
I don't believe (that)…

I feel (that)…
I don't feel (that)…

In my opinion…
It seems to me (that)…
As far as I know…
As I see it…
Don't you think…?

Uncertain (or not so certain)
I'm pretty sure (that)…
I'm not so sure (that)…
It seems like…
It doesn't seem like…
X might be…
X might not be…

Agreeing and Disagreeing

Use the patterns below to agree and disagree with others' opinions. As before, try to hone in on patterns you don't normally use, and try to start using them regularly over the coming months.

Notice that there are both direct and indirect ways of disagreeing. In polite or delicate situation, use the indirect forms.

Agreeing

Strongly Agreeing
You're completely right.
That's absolutely right.
That's totally true.
I completely agree.
I agree with you 100%
I couldn't agree more.
That's just what I was going to say.

Agreeing
You're right.
That's right.
That's true.
I agree.
I agree with you.
I think so, too.
Exactly.

Disagreeing

Direct (strong)
I completely disagree.
I totally disagree.
I absolutely disagree.
You're wrong.
That's completely wrong.
No way!
What are you, crazy?

Direct (normal)
I disagree.
I disagree with that.
I'm afraid I disagree.
I don't think so.
You have a good point, but…
Yeah, but on the other hand…
That's not exactly the way I see it…

Indirect

    I don't know.
    I don't know about that.
    I'm not so sure.
    I'm not so sure about that.
    I'm not so sure I agree.
    I wonder about that.
    I wonder if that is true or not.

Correcting Yourself (Backtracking)

Sometimes in a conversation, we can be misunderstood or be guilty of overstatement. When people start to question your opinion, especially if it appears to be an extreme one, then you need a strategy to backtrack (or backpedal) and re-state your opinion in a more accurate way. The following patterns can be used to correct yourself, or to re-state your opinion in a more accurate way.

    What I mean is…
    Actually, what I mean is…
    What I actually mean is...
    What I meant to say was…
    Actually, what I meant to say was...
    What I actually meant to say was...
    That's not exactly what I meant…

Killing the Conversation

Whenever someone asks you for your opinion on a topic you care not to discuss, you can use some of the phrases below. When doing so, you communicate that you either do not wish to discuss the topic, or that you have nothing to say about it.

    Beats me.
    I don't really know.
    That's a good question.
    I'm not sure.
    I have no idea.
    I have no clue.
    I'd have to think about that.
    Ummm, I'd rather not say.
    Hmmm, I don't know.
    Who knows?

Passing the Buck

Passing the buck means to pass on the responsibility of expression to someone else. You can do this either as a way of avoiding a response, or as a way of buying yourself some time to think of a response. Likewise, you might also use pass the buck in order to assess other people's opinions before expressing your own.

To do this, simply combine a *Conversation Killer* pattern with a pattern from the *Asking for Opinions* section. Some examples could be:

> Beats me. How about you?
> I don't really know. What do you think?
> That's a good question. What's your take on that?
> I'm not sure. How do you feel?
> I have no idea. Do you?
> I have no clue. Do you have any thoughts on that?
> I'd have to think about that. What you do think?
> Ummm, I'd rather not say. What's your opinion?
> Hmmm, I don't know. What do you think?
> Who knows? Do you?

Interrupting and Asking for Clarification

Sometimes we need to stop people in mid-sentence and ask them for clarification. This can happen frequently when people discuss their opinions, especially if the topic is complex. This is a strategy you can also use to assert some influence or control over the flow of the conversation, should you feel it necessary.

To interrupt, use one of the patterns below. Then ask a question.

> Hang on.
> Hang on a sec.
> Hang on a second.
> Hang on a minute.
> Hold on.
> Hold on a sec.
> Hold on a second.
> Hold on a minute.
> Wait.
> Wait a sec.
> Wait a second.
> Wait a minute.
> Excuse me.
> Sorry, but…
> I'm sorry.

For example:

> Hang on a sec. He went where?
> Excuse me. She did what?
> Sorry, but who did she go with?

Hesitating

Sometimes we simply need time, or little bit of space to think about what we want to say. This is particularly useful for speakers of English as a second or foreign language. However, it is important not to be completely silent. You should make some sounds (at least) and utter some phrases if you want to sound a bit more natural.

The list below contains some of the possible phrases and questions you can use to hesitate, thus buying yourself some time.

Normal
   Umm…
   Uhh…
   Hmm…
   Yeah…
   Let's see.
   I don't know…
   I wonder…
   I wonder about that…
   That's a good question…
   Let me think about that…
   How should I say this?
   How can I say this?

Ask the speaker to repeat
   What did you say?
   Could you say that again?
   Sorry, I didn't catch that.
   Sorry, I didn't get that.
   Sorry, I didn't quite get that.
   Sorry, I didn't understand that.
   Can you elaborate on that?
   I'm not sure what you mean.
   I'm not exactly sure what you mean.

It depends
   It depends.
   It just depends.
   It really depends.
   It really depends on the situation.
   Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't.
   Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't.
   Who's to say?

Audio Lessons

This month we have prepared 10 short audio (mp3) files to help you with the patterns. Listed below is both an explanation of how to use each track, along with the transcript of patterns used.

Most of the lessons involve listen and repeat, as the purpose for you is to hear clearly how a native speaker might deliver the patterns (listen) and try to mimic the delivery out loud (speak) through repeating or shadowing them. Other lessons involve answering questions out loud or responding to a statement.

1. Asking for Opinions – In this recording, just listen and repeat or listen and shadow. Do your best to match the intonation, pronunciation, emphasis, and rhythm of each question.

For a challenge, you can also pause the recording after each question and try to answer in your own words, using opinion patterns from recording #2 below. Of course, try to use a pattern that you don't normally use, so that you can learn something new.

    What do you think of ___?
    What's your opinion of ___?
    What are your ideas on ___?
    Do you have any thoughts on ___?
    How do you feel about ___?
    What's your take on ___?

    What do you think of Near Death Experiences?
    What's your opinion of NDEs?
    What are your ideas on life after death?
    Do you have any thoughts what happens after you die?
    How do you feel about death?
    What's your take on death?

    What do you think of ESP?
    What's your opinion of parapsychology?
    What are your ideas on clairvoyance?
    Do you have any thoughts on telepathy?
    How do you feel about precognition?
    What's your take on early psychokinesis?

2. Expressing Opinions – As above: Listen and Repeat or Listen and Shadow.

Very Certain
I know for a fact that death is not the end.
I'm absolutely sure consciousness exists outside the body.
I'm 100% certain that death is not final.
I'm completely convinced that death is just a new beginning.
Beyond a shadow of a doubt, we will all die.

Certain
I know we're going to die.
I'm sure death will be a door to a new reality.
I'm certain that I'll meet my loved ones after death.

I'm convinced that ESP is real.
Without a doubt, life is a precious thing.

Normal (also certain)
I think it's good to celebrate life.
I don't think death is so scary.
I believe love conquers all.
I don't believe that we can fully understand love.
I feel that we should live each day as if it were the last.
I don't feel that we need to prove the existence of NDEs.
In my opinion, NDEs can teach us something important.
It seems to me, that accepting death makes us happier.
As far as I know, science cannot yet explain paranormal phenomena.
As I see it, compassion is the most important quality to develop.
Don't you think this topic is interesting?

Uncertain
I'm pretty sure there's no such thing as life after death.
I'm not so sure that near death experiences are real.
It seems like just a hallucination.
It doesn't seem like an NDE could be possible.
Death might be something to look forward to.
Death might not be so painful and scary after all.

3. Certain vs. Uncertain Tones – Listen and Repeat or Listen and Shadow. Each of the patterns below are spoken twice by the speaker. The first instance is spoken with a *certain* tone, while the second instance is spoken in an *uncertain* tone. Use these tones to add a small measure of certainty or uncertainty when delivering any sort of utterance, especially an opinion or feeling.

I think it's good to celebrate life.
I don't think death is so scary.
I believe love conquers all.
It seems to me, that accepting death makes us happier.
As far as I know, science cannot yet explain paranormal phenomena.
I'm pretty sure there's no such thing as life after death.
I'm not so sure that near death experiences are real.
It doesn't seem like an NDE could be possible.

4. Agreeing and Disagreeing – Practice the patterns below by listening to the native speaker, and either repeating or shadowing. Choose a few that you don't normally say, and commit to using them frequently over the next month or two.

Strongly Agreeing
You're completely right.
That's absolutely right.
That's totally true.
I completely agree.
I agree with you 100%
I couldn't agree more.
That's just what I was going to say.

Agreeing
You're right.
That's right.
That's true.
I agree.
I agree with you.
I think so, too.
Exactly.

Disagreeing

Direct (strong)
I completely disagree.
I totally disagree.
I absolutely disagree.
You're wrong.
That's completely wrong.
No way!
What are you, crazy?

Direct (normal)
I disagree.
I disagree with that.
I'm afraid I disagree.
I don't think so.
You have a good point, but…
Yeah, but on the other hand…
That's not exactly the way I see it…

Indirect
I don't know.
I don't know about that.
I'm not so sure.
I'm not so sure about that.
I'm not so sure I agree.
I wonder about that.
I wonder if that is true or not.

5. Correcting Yourself (backtracking) – This recording has two parts. In the first part, just Listen and Repeat the patterns. In the second part, you are presented with some questions. Pause the recording and practice correcting yourself by using one of the patterns followed by an explanation of what you **really** meant.

Patterns
What I mean is…
Actually, what I mean is…
What I actually mean is...
What I meant to say was…
Actually, what I meant to say was...
What I actually meant to say was...
That's not exactly what I meant…

Questions
Really? You really believe near death experiences are completely fake?
We should all die now! Do you really mean that?
What a minute, are you calling people with NDEs liars?
Hold on a sec, do you really mean that you die every night when you go to sleep?
Really? You really believe that life is a dream?
We should celebrate death? Do you really mean that?

6. Killing the Conversation and Passing the Buck – As with some of the previous audio files, you are asked to practice the delivery of the patterns by Listen and Repeat or Listen and Shadow. There are two parts. The first are patterns for killing the conversation. The second are those same patterns plus a question for passing the buck.

Killing the Conversation
Beats me.
I don't really know.
That's a good question.
I'm not sure.
I have no idea.
I have no clue.
I'd have to think about that.
Ummm, I'd rather not say.
Hmmm, I don't know.
Who knows?

Passing the Buck
Beats me. How about you?
I don't really know. What do you think?
That's a good question. What's your take on that?
I'm not sure. How do you feel?
I have no idea. Do you?
I have no clue. Do you have any thoughts on that?
I'd have to think about that. What you do think?
Ummm, I'd rather not say. What's your opinion?
Hmmm, I don't know. What do you think?
Who knows? Do you?

7. Interrupt and Ask for Clarification – Listen and Repeat or Listen and Shadow.

Hang on.
Hang on a sec.
Hang on a second.
Hang on a minute.
Hold on.
Hold on a sec.
Hold on a second.
Hold on a minute.
Wait.
Wait a sec.

Wait a second.
Wait a minute.
Excuse me.
Sorry, but…
I'm sorry.

Hang on. Can I ask a question?
Hang on a sec. She went where?
Hang on a second. He said what?
Hang on a minute. What did you say?
Hold on. I don't get it. Who called you?
Hold on a sec. Are you sure about that?
Hold on a second. They did what?
Hold on a minute. How much did it cost?
Wait. What was it called?
Wait a sec. How many people were there?
Wait a second. How is that possible?
Wait a minute. That doesn't make any sense. How did that come about?
Excuse me. Can I say something?
Sorry, but…I just don't understand what you're saying. Can you rephrase that?
I'm sorry. Could you clarify that?

8. Hesitating – In this recording, just listen and shadow. Pay close attention to the intonation, as it is important in hesitation patterns. Hesitating with an off-intonation will sound robotic and fake.

Hmmm…I don't know.
I don't really know.
Let me think about that.
I just don't really know.
Let's see….
Umm...I wonder.
I wonder about that.
I really wonder about that.
Let's see….Umm.
How can I say this?
Let's see….how can I say this?
How should I say this.
Um, how could I say this.
Yeah…..
That's a good question.
Yeah, that's a good question.
Wow! That's a good question.
That's a really good question.
Wow! That's a really good question.

What did you say?
Could you say that again?
Sorry, I didn't get that. Can you say it again?
Sorry, I didn't quite get that.
Sorry, I didn't catch that.

I didn't quite catch that.
Can you elaborate on that?
I'm not 100% sure what you're saying.
I'm not exactly sure what you're saying.
I'm not fully sure I understand.

It depends.
Sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't.
It really depends.
It really depends, you know?
It just depends.
It just depends on the situation.
Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't.
Who's to say?
It just really depends.
Uh, yeah, I wonder about that.
Ummm, I'm not so sure.
I don't know. Let me think about that.
Hmm, yeah, let me think about that for a second.
Yeah, hmm, I don't know.
I wonder. I wonder.

9. Give Your Own Opinion – In this recording, listen to each question, pause the recording, and speak out loud. Use patterns for expressing opinions that you don't normally use. Add levels of certainty or uncertainty using either appropriate patterns and/or voice intonation, both of which were practiced in previous audio recordings.

- What do you think of life after death?
- What's your opinion of the city where you live?
- Do you have any thoughts on email addiction?
- What are your ideas on getting rid of under-performing employees? Should companies pay them?
- How do you feel about your future?
- What's your take on Near Death Experiences?

10. Agree or Disagree – Listen to statements made by the native speaker. Then, agree or disagree (directly or indirectly, as you see fit) accordingly. Also, indicate certainty or uncertainty with your tone of voice. Pause the recording wherever necessary.

- In my opinion, summer is the best season of the year.
- I don't feel that money is so important.
- I'm 100% certain that world peace is just around the corner.
- I think Near Death Experiences are real.
- I believe in life after death.
- I don't think people can actually read other people's minds.
- If you ask me, global warming is not a problem at all.
- In my opinion, there is definitely life on other planets.
- It seems to me that there are too many cars in the world.
- I feel there should be a limit on mobile phone usage time.