Presenting convincing arguments
by Gabrielle Jones

Age: Adults
Level: Upper-intermediate +
Time: 60 minutes
Objectives: To formulate and present convincing arguments in business English; to discuss and practise giving structured opinions when debating a topic
Key skills: Speaking and reading
Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; one copy of Teacher's resource A per pair or small group, cut up into strips (optional); one copy of Teacher's resource B per student; one copy of the Preparing your argument sheet per student; one copy of Teacher's resource C per group of two or three students

Procedure

1. Lead in – Learners discuss questions in pairs or small groups, then feed back to the whole class.

   Make students aware that an argument can be either a disagreement with someone else's opinion, or a reason for supporting a particular idea or opinion. The latter will be focused on in this lesson.

2. The structure of an argument – Students read through ten pieces of advice for formulating an argument. They should discuss, in pairs or small groups, which ones they think are appropriate and which ones are inappropriate and why.

   Key: Points 2, 5, 7 and 8 are inappropriate.

3. Pre-reading – Elicit the term 'flexi-time'. Ask students to discuss, in pairs or small groups, the pre-reading questions on flexi-time in the workplace.

4. Reading – Students look at the comment presented at a discussion on introducing flexi-time. They should underline the language used to structure the speaker's argument.

5. Language use – Students complete the table with the phrases they identified in the Reading.

   Key:

expressing your opinion	I believe strongly …
sequencing	Firstly, … ; Finally, …

providing supporting arguments	What is more, …
acknowledging other views	I am aware that you are in two minds about …
showing contrast	however, …
reformulating	I am convinced that flexi-time will create a happier workplace and result in higher staff retention levels.
summarizing	All things considered, …

6. Cut up Teacher's resource A into strips and distribute. Ask students, in pairs or small groups, to decide which category (from the Language use activity) the phrases belong to. If you don't have enough time, Teacher's resource B can be distributed instead.

   Key: See Teacher's resource B for the answers.

7. Preparing your argument – Students should now construct an argument against flexi-time, using the structure given in the diagram. When they have finished, they should compare their arguments in pairs or small groups.

8. Practice argument topics – Distribute the practice argument topics found on Teacher's resource C, one copy per group of two or three students. One member of each group must be 'for' the first topic and one must be 'against'. The third member of the group, if there is one, will assess how well the other two presented their arguments.

9. Ask students to formulate their argument for or against the topic, using the structure and language presented in the class.

10. Before they begin their discussion, tell students that, if working in pairs, they should take notes on their partner's arguments and use of target language, and, if in threes, the third member of the group should listen and take notes on both speakers' arguments and their use of target language.

11. When they have finished presenting their arguments, students debrief each other, giving feedback on their arguments and language use.

12. Students can then prepare and discuss the next topic, alternating their 'for' / 'against' roles as they wish.

Lead in

Discuss these questions for a few minutes in pairs or small groups.

What is the difference between discussing something and arguing about something?

What is the difference between a discussion and an argument?

What did you last discuss at work? What did you last argue about?

When was the last time you had to put forward an argument about something?

How can someone make a convincing argument? What should they do and what should they say?

The structure of an argument

Look at the advice for formulating an argument. Which pieces of advice do you think are appropriate? Which are inappropriate?

1. Have a clear standpoint – make sure that your audience knows what your opinion is.
2. Don't make your argument clear until just before you conclude.
3. Present a logical sequence of reasons for your argument so that it is easy to follow.
4. Provide supporting arguments and evidence to strengthen your view.
5. Give many different examples of why your opinion is valid.
6. If you refer to other people's opinions, you can contrast them with your own.
7. Always agree with other people's opinions.
8. Use insults to make your partner's argument weaker.
9. Make sure to reformulate your argument so the audience hears it one more time.
10. Summarize your main point at the end of your argument.

Pre-reading

Do you have a flexi-time system in your organization? In general, is it a good or bad policy?

If you don't have flexi-time, would you like it to be introduced in your workplace? Why? Why not?

What are the benefits of flexi-time for employees?

What are the benefits for the company of offering a flexi-time system to staff?

What are the drawbacks of flexi-time?

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Reading

Look at the following comment presented at a discussion on introducing flexi-time. What language is used to structure the speaker's argument?

'I believe strongly that introducing a flexi-time system would be beneficial. Firstly, it would facilitate a better work–life balance. What is more, it would allow employees to attend language classes. Finally, not only would it would increase job satisfaction but it would also boost productivity. I am aware that you are in two minds about introducing this system; however, I am convinced that flexi-time will create a happier workplace and result in higher staff retention levels. All things considered, it seems a productive step for us to take.'

Language use

Write one example from the Reading text above next to each category.

expressing your opinion	
sequencing	
providing supporting arguments	
acknowledging other views	
showing contrast	
reformulating	
summarizing	

Lesson Share WORKSHEET

Firstly, …	It seems clear that …
Then, …	In conclusion, …
Finally, …	All things considered, …
However, …	That is, ...
Alternatively, …	What I want to say is …
Although ...	What is more, …
I believe (strongly) that …	As well as ..., the ...
I feel / think that ...	Not only will ... but ... will ...
Personally, …	I am aware that you feel …
In other words, …	It is clear that you …
	Your standpoint is clear.

Lesson Share TEACHER'S RESOURCE B

Expressing your opinion

I believe (strongly) that …

I feel / think that ...

Personally, …

Sequencing

Firstly, …

Then, …

Finally, …

Providing supporting arguments

What is more, …

As well as ..., the ...

Not only will ... but ... will ...

Acknowledging other views

I am aware that you feel …

It is clear that you …

Your standpoint is clear.

Showing contrast

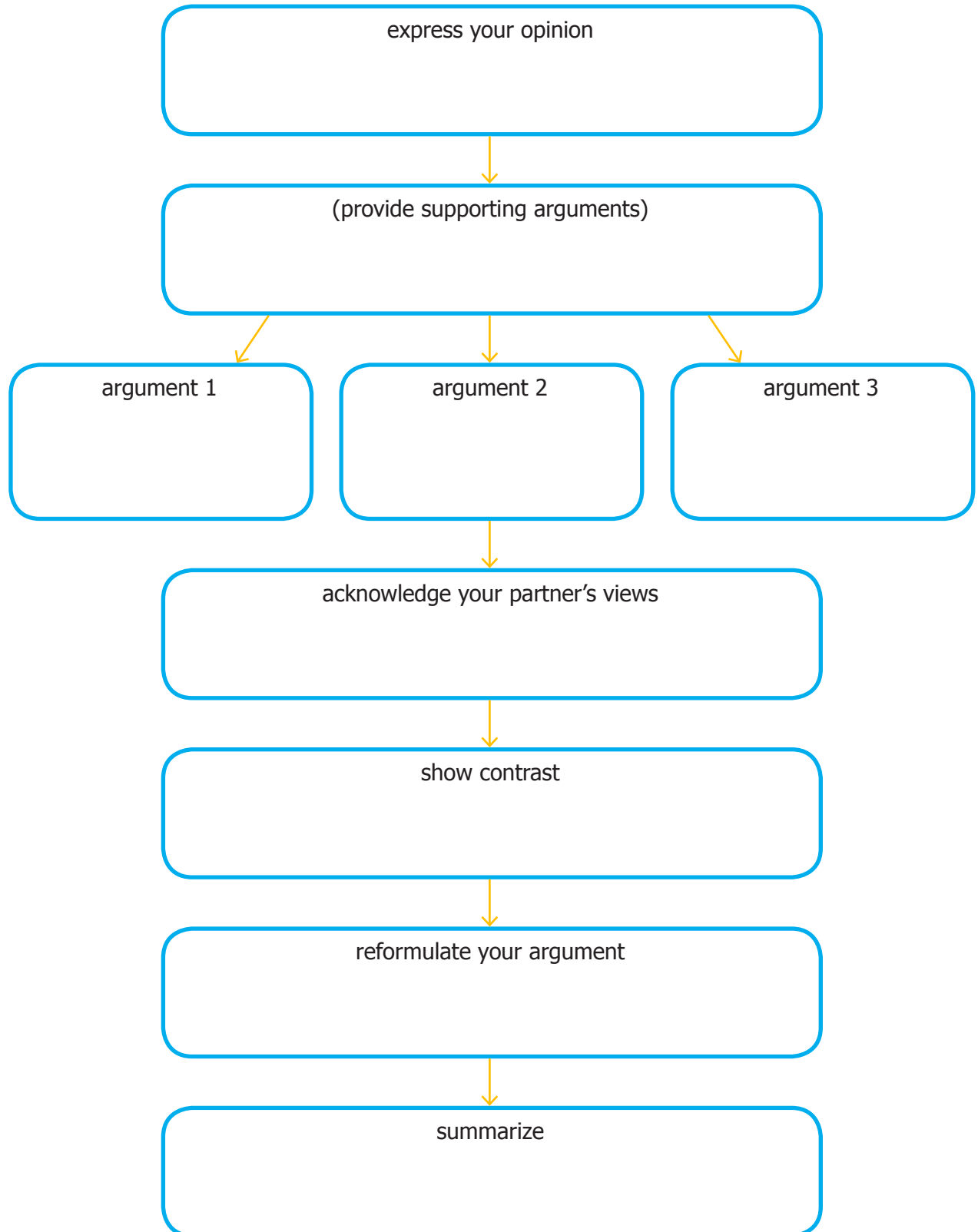However, …

Alternatively, …

Although ...

Reformulating

In other words, …

That is, ...

What I want to say is …

Summarizing

It seems clear that …

In conclusion, …

All things considered, …

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Preparing your argument

You are going to formulate an argument against flexi-time. Prepare your arguments using the diagram below, and remember to use the vocabulary from the previous activity.

express your opinion

↓

(provide supporting arguments)

↓

| argument 1 | argument 2 | argument 3 |

↓

acknowledge your partner's views

↓

show contrast

↓

reformulate your argument

↓

summarize

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Lesson Share TEACHER'S RESOURCE C

Practice 'argument' topics

Employees should be allowed to use company mobile phones for private use, too.

Employees with children should be prioritized when organizing holidays.

Companies should pay employees for the time they attend language classes.

Companies shouldn't be forced to publish results of research where the results are not positive.

The international lingua franca of business should continue to be English.

Companies should limit use of computers to five hours a day in order to protect employees' eyesight.

Organizations should compose a company song, to be sung at the start of each day as a motivational tool.