



Discussions

Lesson code: 11ID-K6C9-GZK4

INTERMEDIATE

 American English

1 Warm-up

What topics do you typically discuss with your coworkers at business meetings?

2 Listening

Read the questions and answers below. Then, listen to an extract from a discussion about a company's financial situation. Choose the best answer for each question.



1. What problem is the company facing?
 - a. clients are paying late
 - b. clients are buying from a competitor for a cheaper price
 - c. employees want higher salaries
2. Which of the measures below does the speaker NOT propose?
 - a. imposing penalties
 - b. hiring a credit controller
 - c. offering cheaper prices
3. According to the speaker, it's possible the company's clients will find the proposed measures ...
 - a. rather strict
 - b. acceptable
 - c. flexible
4. Why does the speaker think that clients will probably accept the proposed measures in the end?
 - a. they have no choice
 - b. they have good relationships with the company
 - c. competitors are more expensive



Now listen to a discussion about the prison system and do the same.

1. What problem is the speaker discussing?
 - a. too many people are sent to prison
 - b. not enough criminals are sent to prison
2. After they're released, most ex-prisoners ...
 - a. stop committing crimes
 - b. continue to commit crimes
3. According to the speaker, teenagers should be given ...
 - a. lighter punishments
 - b. longer sentences
 - c. more entertainment
4. People who commit very serious crimes should ...
 - a. stay in prison for the maximum period of time
 - b. receive education and training



3 Structuring an argument

Read the two discussions and study how the underlined words and expressions are used to structure the arguments:

A company's financial problems

Regarding our cash flow situation, we are having problems with slow payers. Therefore, I think we need to deal with this situation urgently. First, we should consider imposing penalties for late payments. For example, if a client pays 10 days late, they would have to pay a fixed amount of interest on the overdue payment. What's more, we should call our clients more often to insist on prompt payment. In fact, I think we should hire a credit controller who will be responsible for collecting late payments rather than leaving this task up to the accountant. I realize that our clients may find these measures rather strict, but if we carefully and tactfully explain to them that these steps are very necessary, they should understand. After all, we do have very good relationships with them and we have given most of them generous discounts this year.

The prison system

I believe that too many people who break the law are sent to prison these days. For the most part, the system doesn't work. Although studies show that most ex-prisoners continue to commit crimes after they are released, more and more people are also being imprisoned. The system can be improved in many ways. Teenagers, for instance, should be given lighter punishments - at least for less serious offences. In addition, education and training should be improved. In other words, we should prepare prisoners for life after they are released. However, regarding very serious crimes, I think that we have no choice but to keep such criminals in prison for the maximum amount of time.

The underlined words and expressions serve different functions. Study the table on the next page.



Introducing a new topic:	Regarding (our cash flow situation), regarding (very serious crimes),
Giving or adding a new point:	In the first place, What's more In addition,
Describing a general situation:	For the most part,
Giving an example:	For example, For instance,
Introducing a contrasting idea:	However, Although
Modifying a previous statement:	In fact,
Simplifying a previous point:	In other words,
Supporting a previous point:	After all,
Introducing the logical result of a situation:	Therefore,

Add the following expressions to the table:

As far as is/are concerned, In short, Overall, Firstly, Actually,
despite this, Additionally, As a result, In general,

Now complete the following discussion with suitable words and expressions:

International outsourcing

For the most part ¹, I think that outsourcing is a good thing for companies. For many firms, outsourcing work to cheaper regions of the world is one way of reducing costs. The cost of labor in India, _____ ², is much lower than in the West, so many western companies have set up call centres there and are able to provide a cheaper service to their customers. _____ ³, there are plenty of advantages.

_____ ⁴, there are also several drawbacks for companies that outsource. _____ ⁵, they lack full control over the work since they have to trust other companies to train and manage the staff. _____ ⁶, cultural differences mean that customers don't always receive a high standard of service.

_____ ⁷ the countries where outsourcing projects are based, much needed jobs are provided and the local economy usually benefits. _____ ⁸, there is always the risk of exploitation - many workers are paid too little and have to work long hours. _____ ⁹, the conditions under which they work are far from ideal and many suffer from stress.



4 Agreeing and disagreeing

Complete the table with the following expressions:

Absolutely!
I absolutely disagree.
I totally agree with you.
That works for me.
You must be joking!

Actually, I don't really agree.
I'm not sure about that.
That might be true, but ...
Yes, you're right.
You're right to a certain extent, but ...

STRONG AGREEMENT	
AGREEMENT	I agree.
PARTIAL AGREEMENT	I agree with you up to a point, but ...
DISAGREEMENT	
STRONG DISAGREEMENT	

In pairs, agree or disagree about the following opinions using expressions from this exercise:

1. Outsourcing is a good thing for companies and economies.
2. Smoking should be banned everywhere.
3. The best way to learn a language is to live in the country where it's spoken.
4. If you want to get a good job, experience and qualifications are very important.
5. You can never trust salesmen.
6. It is easier to speak English on the phone than face-to-face.
7. People who drink and drive should receive lighter punishments.
8. Spam is irritating.
9. If you want to be a successful businessman, you need to be born with certain character traits.
10. You should never mix business with pleasure.



Other structures may also be used to express agreement or disagreement:

A: It's hot in here, isn't it?

B: Yes, it's boiling.

A: I think we need to move to a new office.

B: Don't you think that will be a little difficult right now?

A: He's very bad at tennis.

B: I know, he's awful.

A: Our project manager needs a break.

B: Do you really think so?

A: If we don't sign this deal, we will lose millions in profit.

B: Isn't that a slight exaggeration?

Which of the underlined responses contains ...

a. a negative question?

b. a rhetorical question?

c. a synonym?

In pairs, use these structures to agree or disagree with four of the opinions on Page 4.

5 Role play

Work in small groups. Choose a topic from the list below. Have a discussion and respond to opinions using expressions from this lesson.

1. The efficiency of the public transport system in your town.
2. The most effective way to attract new customers.
3. The best ways for people and governments to deal with the financial crisis.
4. The advantages/disadvantages of using mobile phones on planes.
5. The advantages/disadvantages of budget airlines.
6. The importance of doing business in English.



2 Listening

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2 Listening

I believe that too many people who break the law are sent to prison these days. For the most part, the system doesn't work. Although studies show that most ex-prisoners continue to commit crimes after they are released, more and more people are also being imprisoned. The system can be improved in many ways. Teenagers, for instance, should be given lighter punishments - at least for less serious offences. In addition, education and training should be improved. In other words, we should prepare prisoners for life after they are released. However, regarding very serious crimes, I think that we have no choice but to keep such criminals in prison for the maximum amount of time.



2 Listening

Pre-teach difficult vocabulary from the questions, answers and recording scripts, e.g. cash flow, impose penalties, the due payment, prompt payment, credit controller, measures, tactfully, break the law, commit crimes, imprisoned, offences, jail. Go through the questions with the class. Students work individually and check in pairs. A company's financial situation:

1. a 2. c 3. a 4. a

The prison system:

1. a 2. b 3. a 4. a

3 Structuring an argument

Go through the table with the students making sure they understand the functions in the left column. Where necessary, translate or have the students translate any confusing words or expressions with a dictionary.

INTRODUCING A NEW TOPIC: As far as is/are concerned

GIVING OR ADDING A NEW POINT: additionally; firstly

DESCRIBING A GENERAL SITUATION: overall; in general

INTRODUCING A CONTRASTING IDEA: despite this

MODIFYING A PREVIOUS STATEMENT: actually

SIMPLIFYING A PREVIOUS POINT: in short

INTRODUCING THE LOGICAL RESULT OF A SITUATION: as a result

International outsourcing - suggested answers (other words and expressions which fulfill the same functions are also possible):

2. for instance	3. In short	4. However	5. Firstly
6. Additionally	7. Regarding	8. However	9. What's more

4 Agreeing and disagreeing

STRONG AGREEMENT: Absolutely! I totally agree with you.

AGREEMENT: That works for me; Yes, you're right.

PARTIAL AGREEMENT: That might be true, but ...; You're right to a certain extent, but ...

DISAGREEMENT: I'm not sure about that; I'm afraid, I don't really agree.

STRONG DISAGREEMENT: I absolutely disagree; You must be joking!

negative question: Don't you think that would be a bit difficult right now? Isn't that a slight exaggeration?

rhetorical question: Do you really think so?

synonym: Yes, it's boiling; I know, he's awful

Prepare students for the final task of Exercise 4 by providing or brainstorming synonyms where needed, e.g. good - excellent, banned - forbidden, very important - essential, more difficult - harder, irritating - annoying, etc.

