

The art of better arguments

1. Warm-up: How do you feel about conflict?

Discuss these questions with a partner:

- Do you generally enjoy a good debate, or do you try to avoid arguments? Why?
- Think about the last time you had a disagreement with someone. What was it about?
- In your opinion, what is the difference between a bad argument and a good, productive discussion?

2. Vocabulary: The language of disagreement

Match the words from the video with their definitions:

1. Aggravating	d. Annoying or irritating
2. Nonnegotiable	f. Not open to discussion or modification
3. Tribal trap	e. The tendency to blindly support your own group and reject outsiders
4. Credibility	g. The quality of being trusted and believed in
5. To stifle	b. To suppress or stop something from happening

6. Adversary	a. An opponent or enemy
7. Butting heads	h. To engage in a pointless conflict or disagreement
8. Common ground	c. An area of agreement between two opposing groups

3. Video: How to have better arguments

Watch the video from 0:25 to 3:57 and answer the questions below.

1. What does the speaker mean when he says the problem with arguments is not the "what" but the "how"?

He means the problem isn't the topic of the argument (the "what"), but the destructive way people argue (the "how"), where the goal is to prove the other person wrong rather than to understand or solve a problem.

2. What are the three big barriers to effective conversations he identifies?

The three barriers are **identity**, lack of **appreciation**, and lack of **affiliation**.

3. Why do conflicts become so emotional when our **identity** is involved?

They become emotional because our core values, beliefs, and sense of self feel threatened. Our pride is on the line, and it becomes a deeply personal issue.

4. What is the first step the speaker recommends for showing **appreciation**?

He recommends not talking for the first 10 minutes and consciously listening to the other person to understand the value, logic, and rationale behind their perspective.

5. How does changing the dynamic from "me versus you" to "us versus the problem" help build **affiliation**?

It transforms the other person from an adversary into a partner. By framing it as a shared problem, it encourages collaboration and finding common ground instead of conflict.

[Watch the video on YouTube](#)

4. Comprehension check: Fill in the gaps

Complete these key ideas from the video using one word per gap.

1. The more you understand who you are, the more you can stay **balanced**, even when the other person threatens your core values.
2. Each side wants to feel appreciated, and yet the last thing they wanna do is to **appreciate** the other side.
3. When you're in the midst of a conflict, don't talk. Consciously **listen** to the other side.
4. Turn that other person from an adversary into a **partner**.
5. It's no longer me versus you, but the two of us facing the same shared **problem**.

5. Grammar focus: Giving constructive advice

When giving advice on how to handle a conflict, it's important to be constructive, not confrontational. The video uses several forms to give advice:

- **Imperatives:** Used for direct, clear instructions. (e.g., "**Listen** and **understand**.", "**Find** common ground.")
- **Modal Verbs (should, can, could):** Used to make suggestions and offer possibilities. (e.g., "How **should** we argue?", "You **could** try to see their perspective.")
- **Question Forms:** Used to invite collaboration. (e.g., "**What if we** looked at the problem together?")

Rewrite these confrontational statements into more constructive pieces of advice or suggestions using the grammar forms above.

1. You're wrong.
→ Could we look at this a different way?
2. Stop talking and listen to me.
→ What if we take turns to speak and listen?
3. That's a terrible idea.
→ I have some concerns about that approach. Could we explore other options?
4. You always do this.
→ I feel frustrated when this happens. Let's try to find a different solution together.
5. This is your fault.
→ Let's focus on how we can solve this problem, rather than blaming each other.

6. Useful phrases for better arguments

These phrases can help you navigate a disagreement constructively. They reflect the video's principles of appreciation and affiliation.

Acknowledging their perspective (Appreciation):

- "I hear where you're coming from."
- "That's a valid point."
- "I understand why you feel that way."
- "Help me understand your perspective on this."

Stating your perspective (without attacking):

- "From my point of view..."
- "The way I see it is..."
- "I feel that..." / "I'm concerned that..."
- "Can I share how this looks from my side?"

Finding common ground (Affiliation):

- "What can we both agree on?"
- "It sounds like we both want [to solve the problem/what's best for the team]."
- "Let's focus on our shared goal, which is..."

- "What's your advice on how we can get our interests met?"

7. Role-play: Putting it into practice

Work in pairs. Choose one of the scenarios below. Have a conversation where you disagree, but try to use the vocabulary, grammar, and phrases from this lesson to have a **constructive** argument. The goal is not to "win," but to find a solution together.

Remember the three principles:

1. **Identity:** Know what's important to you and why, but stay balanced.
2. **Appreciation:** Listen to understand the other person's view and acknowledge it.
3. **Affiliation:** Frame the issue as a shared problem to solve together.

Scenarios:

- **Scenario A: The Holiday Plan**

Person A wants to go on an adventurous, active holiday (hiking, camping). Person B wants a relaxing beach holiday to rest and do nothing. You have a shared budget and need to decide on a destination for your one-week vacation.

- **Scenario B: The Project Deadline**

You are colleagues working on an important project. Person A wants to work extra hours this week, including the weekend, to finish ahead of schedule. Person B believes in a strict work-life balance and wants to stick to the original plan, which is already tight.

- **Scenario C: The Shared Apartment**

You are roommates. Person A is very tidy and wants to implement a strict weekly cleaning schedule. Person B is more relaxed about mess and feels the schedule is too rigid and stressful.