Listening: discussions, arguments and media

English B2

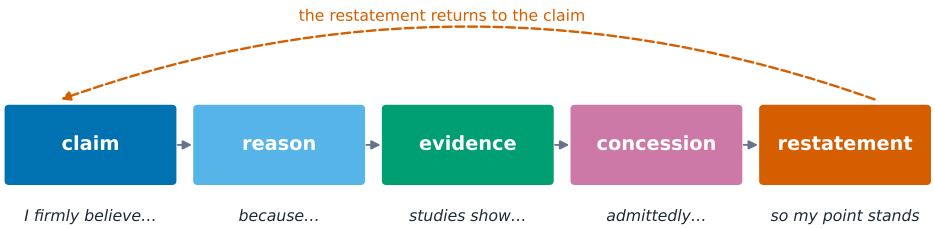
What this topic teaches

B2 listening follows arguments, not just sentences: claims, reasons, concessions and turns. It also handles media voices - interviews, podcasts, news - where two speakers battle for the floor politely.

- An argument is a spine: claim, reason, evidence, concession, restated claim.
- **discourse markers** are the road signs: however, having said that, let us be clear.
- Media voices interrupt, hedge and quote; the host's questions are the map.
- Memory hook: listen for the **turns**, the words where the argument changes direction.

The argument spine

Part	Signals	Example
claim	I firmly believe, the point is	The school day should start later.
reason	because, since, the reason is	...because teenagers sleep on a different clock.
evidence	studies show, according to	One study found later starts raised results by 4 percent.
concession	admittedly, it is true that	Admittedly, buses would cost more.
restatement	so my point stands	Even so, the gain outweighs the cost.



The spine of an argument, and the signal that announces each part

- The concession is not surrender: it is armour. Hear it as the speaker strengthening the claim.

Discourse markers: the road signs

B2 speakers mark their turns openly. Catch the marker, and you know what is coming before it arrives.

Marker family	Signals	It promises
contrast	however, on the other hand, whereas	a turn is coming
concession	admittedly, granted, to be fair	a point conceded before a counter
emphasis	in fact, crucially, the truth is	the load-bearing point
structure	first, finally, to sum up	where you are in the argument

- Contrasts are the loudest signs: however is nearly always followed by the speaker's real position.

■ A first try

Mark the moves: *Many people say the library should open on Sundays. Admittedly, staffing is not cheap. However, a town without a Sunday library shuts out students who have nowhere else to study. So the question is not cost; it is priority.*

Media voices: hosts, guests and interruptions

Interviews and podcasts have their own choreography.

- The host's question sets the topic; the guest's first sentence usually answers or dodges it - catch which.
- Interruptions are polite combat: *Sorry, can I just add...* marks a point the speaker could not wait to make.
- Quoted voices shift responsibility: *Critics say...* is the host's claim wearing someone else's coat.
- Hedge clusters (*sort of, I mean, you know*) mark thinking aloud; the unfinished sentence before them often carries the real point.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- Do not treat a concession as agreement: *Admittedly, X* is almost always followed by *however, Y*.
- Numbers arrive with spin: *only 4 percent* and *fully 4 percent* are the same data in opposite uniforms.
- Stress decides: the word the speaker stresses in a sentence is the word to write down.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. Name the five parts of the argument spine in order. – **Claim, reason, evidence, concession, restatement.**
2. What does *admittedly* promise? And *however*? – ***Admittedly***: a point conceded, with a counter coming. ***However***: a turn, usually to the speaker's real position.
3. Whose claim is *Critics say the plan will fail*? – **The critics'** on the surface; but the speaker chose to report it, so it may be the speaker's own view in borrowed clothes. Listen for what comes next.
4. Spin check: *only 4 percent* vs *fully 4 percent*. – **The same data**, with opposite attitudes: *only* makes it small, *fully* makes it large.

■ Practice: follow the argument

Teacher-read: your teacher reads the extract twice.
Host: "Should cities ban cars from their centres? With me is the urban planner Dr Ines Moreau. Dr Moreau, would a ban hurt local shops?" Guest: "Well, that's the first thing people worry about, and it's a fair worry. Admittedly, some shops did lose customers in the first few months when the town of Riverton closed its centre. However, within two years footfall was higher than before, because people walked and stayed longer. Crucially, the shops that complained most were the ones that relied on drive-in customers." Host: "Critics say that only works in small cities." Guest: "Sorry, can I just add – it's been tried in larger ones too, with mixed results, I'll admit. But the direction is clear."

1. Does the guest answer the host's question or dodge it? 6. What does she concede? 7. What is her load-bearing point, and which marker introduces it? 8. What does *Critics say* do in the host's turn? 9. What does *I'll admit* signal in the guest's last turn?

Answers. 5 **She answers it**: first the concession, then *However*, then the main point (footfall rose). 6 **Some shops lost customers at first.** 7 ***Within two years footfall was higher***, after *However*; *Crucially* adds the key detail about which shops complained. 8 It **raises an objection without the host owning it**. 9 **A second, smaller concession** (*mixed results*) before *But* restates her claim. *(The extract, the speaker and the town are invented for practice.)*