

16 Discussions

Managing a discussion

Read this dialogue in a real estate agency and then study the points below.

- 5 A: Can you help me? **I'd be interested to know something about** property prices in this area.
- B: Yes, of course. But first, **could you tell me a little more about** your present situation?
- 10 A: I've been living in rented accommodation for several years. Now I'm wondering whether it's a good time to buy somewhere for myself.
- B: Okay. **What sort of price were you thinking of?**
- A: Oh, you know, nothing too expensive.
- 15 B: **Could you be a little more specific?** We have some small one-bedroom apartments that start at around €120,000. **Was that the kind of thing you had in mind?**
- A: Possibly. But I'm not ready to think about individual properties just yet. I wanted to know more about the market in general. There are a lot of stories in the newspapers about house prices, and they worry me.
- 20 B: Okay. **If I understand you correctly,** your worries are probably these: you don't want to buy at the top of the market and see your house fall in value, but equally you don't want to miss the chance if prices are going to continue to rise.
- A: **Yes, exactly.**
- 25 B: This is of course a concern for all our clients, but you know it's very difficult to time the housing market. Newspaper stories can make forecasts, but no-one really knows.
- A: **I see what you're saying, but** you must have some idea. I read one article that said that house prices are going to crash.
- 30 B: **I don't think that's true.** Prices have stabilized recently, but they're not going to crash.
- A: **Really? Do you think so?** My friend bought an apartment near here last year for €165,000, and now other apartments in the same block are going for less than €150,000.
- 35 B: **Well, of course, it all depends.** There are many factors that can cause these short-term changes. But **there is another way of looking at this.** If prices have dropped temporarily, then now is a good time to buy.
- A: But **going back to what you said earlier,** have prices stabilized, or are they actually falling? I **disagree with you about** now being a good time to buy if they are still falling.
- 40 B: In certain areas they are still falling. But **I think we're losing sight of the main point.** You're living in rented accommodation, and the rent you pay could be going to repay a mortgage. And you would have your own home.
- A: **That makes sense.** But **it's a difficult issue.**
- B: **You're absolutely right.** But while you're here, **why don't I give you an idea of** what's available in your price range?
- 45 A: Okay.
- B: Right. **I'd like to start by** writing down one or two personal details, and **then we can move on to** looking at some of the properties we have on the market.

- Look at the words in bold above. Underline:
 - five phrases asking for more information.
 - one phrase showing the speaker is going to check using their own words.
 - three phrases for full agreement.
 - one phrase using *Yes, but ...* for half agreement.
 - one phrase using two open questions to show polite disagreement.
 - two phrases for simple disagreement.

How many of these can you find in the mind map opposite?

- At lines 7 and 10 you will see the phrases: *What sort of price were you thinking of?* and *Was that the kind of thing you had in mind?*

These questions are interesting for two reasons:

- first, they use 'vague' language: *sort of, kind of*.
- second, they use past tenses (*were / was / had*), even though the time reference is present.

The past forms create an indirect, distant feeling. They combine with the vague language so that the client feels that he / she is under no pressure.

- Look back at lines 30–42. There is a battle for control of the topic:
 - at line 31 B tries to change the focus: ... *there is another way of looking at this*.
 - but at line 34 A resists: ... *going back to what you said earlier, ...*
 - at line 37 B deals briefly with this resistance: *In certain areas ...* but then tries to block further discussion with: *I think we're losing sight of the main point*.
 - at line 42 B manages the conversation so that they move on from the opening to begin a sales conversation about specific properties. For B, this is the main topic.

Now look at the 'Topic management' branch of the mind map.

Other language for discussions

In discussions you are likely to use a lot of linking words and phrases. (See units 20–22.)

Full agreement

That makes sense.
You're absolutely right.
Yes, I would agree with that.

Half agreement

I see what you're saying, but ...
I agree with you up to a point, but ...

Polite disagreement

Well, of course, it all depends.
I'm not sure I agree with that.
I've got mixed feelings about that.
Really? Do you think so?
Don't you think that ...?

Simple disagreement

I don't think that's true.
I disagree with you about ...
That's not how I see it.

Beginning the main topic

Right, let's get down to business.
Why don't I give you an idea of ...?
I'd like to start by ... (-ing)

Moving from point to point

So that's decided, then. Shall we move on?
Okay, let's go on to the next point.

Changing the focus

There is another way of looking at this.
Perhaps we should also consider ...

Returning

Going back to what I / you said earlier ...
Let me back up. (AmE).

Interrupting

Could I just interrupt for a moment?

Blocking

I think we're losing sight of the main point.
Sorry, if I can just finish, I was saying that ...

Buying time

It's a difficult issue.
I'll have to think about it.
Could I get back to you on that?
Why don't we come back to that later

Topic management

Agreeing and disagreeing

Clarification



DISCUSSIONS

Asking for more information

I'd be interested to know something about ...
Could you tell me a little more about ...?
Could you be a little more specific?
What (exactly) do you mean by ...?
What sort of price were you thinking of?
Was that the kind of thing you had in mind?

Asking for repetition

Could you go over that again, please?

Checking by using your own words

So, if I understand you correctly, ...
So basically what you're saying is ...

Checking the other person's understanding

Does that answer your question?
Does that make sense?

Responding

Yes, exactly.
Yes, that's right.
Not exactly.
Well, let me put it another way.
No, that's not what I meant.
No, what I'm trying to say is ...