

## Everyday Speaking Skills in English — Lesson 2

Hedging and Expressing Uncertainty | B1 | Student Worksheet

### Vocabulary

All phrases in this lesson are neutral — suitable for most professional and academic contexts.

#### Hedging your opinion

|                                                       |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>To some extent...</b> [neutral]                    | Used to show that something is partly true, but not completely or universally so.                     | <i>"To some extent, social media does affect how young people see themselves."</i>                          |
| <b>Up to a point...</b> [neutral]                     | Similar to to some extent — agrees partially but signals that there are limits to the agreement.      | <i>"Up to a point, the research supports that argument, but the picture is more complicated."</i>           |
| <b>In some cases...</b> [neutral]                     | Used to acknowledge that something is true in certain situations, without claiming it is always true. | <i>"In some cases, online communities provide genuine support for people who feel isolated."</i>            |
| <b>It is not quite as simple as that.</b> [neutral]   | Used to push back gently on an oversimplified claim, suggesting the reality is more nuanced.          | <i>"I understand the concern, but it is not quite as simple as that — the evidence is genuinely mixed."</i> |
| <b>I would not say that exactly, but...</b> [neutral] | Gently corrects or qualifies what someone has said without directly contradicting them.               | <i>"I would not say that exactly, but I do think the relationship between the two is worth examining."</i>  |
| <b>There is something in that, but...</b> [neutral]   | Acknowledges a degree of validity in someone's point before introducing a qualification.              | <i>"There is something in that, but I think we need to be careful about overstating the link."</i>          |

#### Expressing genuine uncertainty

|                                                          |                                                                                                  |                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>It is hard to say.</b> [neutral]                      | Used when the answer is genuinely unclear or the evidence does not point in one clear direction. | <i>"It is hard to say whether the effects are long-term — the research is still quite new."</i>     |
| <b>The evidence is mixed.</b> [neutral]                  | Used to indicate that different studies or sources point in different directions.                | <i>"The evidence is mixed on this — some studies show a link, others do not."</i>                   |
| <b>It is open to debate.</b> [neutral]                   | Used to signal that a topic is genuinely contested and that reasonable people disagree.          | <i>"Whether social media causes anxiety or merely reflects it is open to debate."</i>               |
| <b>That is a difficult question to answer.</b> [neutral] | Acknowledges the complexity of a question before attempting a carefully hedged response.         | <i>"That is a difficult question to answer because the variables involved are hard to isolate."</i> |

|                                                     |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>I am not sure I would go that far.</b> [neutral] | Used to signal that you partially agree but think a claim goes further than the evidence supports. | <i>"I am not sure I would go that far — calling it a crisis might be overstating the situation."</i>             |
| <b>You could argue that...</b> [neutral]            | Introduces a possible position or interpretation without fully committing to it yourself.          | <i>"You could argue that the platforms themselves bear some responsibility, though the evidence is complex."</i> |

#### Acknowledging complexity

|                                                                         |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>It depends on...</b> [neutral]                                       | Used to show that the answer varies depending on specific factors.                                          | <i>"It depends on the individual — some people are more affected by social comparison than others."</i>                        |
| <b>That is not the whole picture.</b> [neutral]                         | Signals that a claim or argument is incomplete and that important factors have been left out.               | <i>"That is not the whole picture — we also need to consider the positive effects on connectivity."</i>                        |
| <b>It is more nuanced than that.</b> [neutral]                          | Used to resist a simplistic framing and push towards a more careful analysis.                               | <i>"The relationship between screen time and wellbeing is more nuanced than that."</i>                                         |
| <b>I think we need to distinguish between...</b> [neutral]              | Introduces an important distinction that has been overlooked in the conversation.                           | <i>"I think we need to distinguish between passive scrolling and active engagement — they seem to have different effects."</i> |
| <b>The picture is more complicated than it first appears.</b> [neutral] | Used to signal that initial impressions are misleading and that closer examination reveals more complexity. | <i>"The picture is more complicated than it first appears once you look at the methodology of those studies."</i>              |
| <b>It is worth noting that...</b> [neutral]                             | Introduces an important qualification, caveat, or piece of evidence that adds nuance to the discussion.     | <i>"It is worth noting that most of the studies rely on self-reported data, which has limitations."</i>                        |

## Exercise 1: Listening

Listen to the interview with Dr Chen. Notice how she uses hedging phrases. Then answer the questions.

### Interview

**Interviewer:** There has been a lot of debate recently about the link between social media use and mental health. What is your view on the strength of that link?

**Dr Chen:** That is a difficult question to answer, honestly. The evidence is mixed — some studies do show a correlation, but several large-scale studies have found the effect size to be quite small.

**Interviewer:** So you would not say there is a crisis?

**Dr Chen:** I am not sure I would go that far, no. There is something in the concern — I do not think it is entirely unfounded. But calling it a crisis implies a level of certainty that the research does not really support yet.

**Interviewer:** What about the argument that platforms are deliberately designed to be addictive?

**Dr Chen:** You could argue that, and I think there is something in it. But it is not quite as simple as that. I think we need to distinguish between passive scrolling and active engagement — they seem to have very different effects.

**Interviewer:** So the type of use matters?

**Dr Chen:** It depends on the individual and on what they are doing on the platform. The picture is more complicated than it first appears.

**Interviewer:** Some researchers argue that social media simply reflects existing mental health trends rather than causing them. Do you find that convincing?

**Dr Chen:** Up to a point. I would not say that exactly — I do think the platforms have their own effects. But that is not the whole picture either. It is more nuanced than that.

**Interviewer:** Is it worth noting any particular gaps in the research?

**Dr Chen:** Absolutely. It is worth noting that most of the studies rely on self-reported data, which has real limitations. It is open to debate how much weight we should put on this body of research until we have more robust longitudinal studies.

Circle the correct answer.

1. What does Dr Chen say about the evidence linking social media and mental health?

a) It is clear and conclusive. b) It is mixed — some studies show a link but others find only a small effect. c) It proves that social media causes anxiety. d) It is mostly unreliable and should be ignored.

2. Why does Dr Chen avoid calling the situation a 'crisis'?

a) She thinks the concern is entirely unfounded. b) She believes young people are not really affected. c) She thinks the word implies more certainty than the research supports. d) She thinks social media has only positive effects.

3. What distinction does Dr Chen say is important?

a) Between older and younger users b) Between passive scrolling and active engagement c) Between different platforms d) Between short-term and long-term use

4. How does Dr Chen respond to the argument that social media is simply a mirror of existing trends?

a) She agrees completely. b) She dismisses it as oversimplified. c) She partially agrees but says it is not the whole picture. d) She says the evidence does not support it at all.

5. What limitation of the existing research does Dr Chen highlight?

a) Most studies were conducted outside the UK. b) The sample sizes are too small. c) Most studies rely on self-reported data, which has limitations. d) The studies only look at adults.

6. What does Dr Chen's overall approach suggest about her view of the topic?

a) She thinks social media is entirely harmless. b) She is cautious and sees the issue as genuinely complex. c) She believes researchers have reached a clear consensus. d) She thinks the debate is over.

## Exercise 2: Multiple Choice

Choose the correct hedging phrase to complete each sentence.

1. \_\_\_\_ on the link between diet and mood — different studies point in very different directions and no clear consensus has emerged.  
a) It is hard to say b) It is open to debate c) That is not the whole picture d) The evidence is mixed
2. \_\_\_\_ it depends on whether we are talking about occasional use or something more compulsive.  
a) In some cases, b) You could argue that c) It is worth noting that d) I think we need to distinguish —
3. \_\_\_\_ the platforms profit from keeping users engaged as long as possible, which raises ethical questions.  
a) Up to a point, b) It is hard to say, c) You could argue that d) There is something in that,
4. The answer really \_\_\_\_ your age, your usage patterns, and the type of content you consume.  
a) is not the whole picture about b) depends on c) is open to debate because of d) is worth noting about
5. I think the proposal has merit \_\_\_\_ — it addresses some real problems, but it does not deal with the underlying causes.  
a) that is not the whole picture b) it is hard to say c) you could argue d) up to a point
6. \_\_\_\_ that the methodology used in that study has been widely criticised by other researchers.  
a) It is more nuanced than b) The picture is more complicated c) It is worth noting d) I would not say
7. I \_\_\_\_ that it causes the problem — I think it more likely amplifies tendencies that are already there.  
a) would not say that exactly b) am not sure I would go that far as to say c) think we need to distinguish between d) could argue
8. Whether screen time limits genuinely help is \_\_\_\_ — there is no clear consensus among researchers yet.  
a) not the whole picture b) open to debate c) more nuanced than that d) worth noting

### Exercise 3: Matching

Match each hedging phrase (A) to its function or meaning (B).

| A - Phrase                                        | B - Function / Meaning                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. To some extent... ____                         | 7. Introduces an important qualification or piece of evidence that adds nuance                                   |
| 2. The evidence is mixed. ____                    | 8. Gently pushes back on an oversimplified claim, suggesting the reality is more nuanced                         |
| 3. It depends on... ____                          | 6. Introduces an important distinction that has been overlooked in the conversation                              |
| 4. I am not sure I would go that far. ____        | 4. Signals partial agreement but suggests a claim goes further than the evidence supports                        |
| 5. You could argue that... ____                   | 5. Introduces a possible interpretation without fully committing to it yourself                                  |
| 6. I think we need to distinguish between... ____ | 1. Acknowledges that something is partly true without claiming it is completely or universally so                |
| 7. It is worth noting that... ____                | 2. Indicates that different studies or sources point in different directions, making a firm conclusion difficult |

8. It is not quite as simple as that. \_\_\_\_

3. Shows that the answer varies depending on specific factors rather than being universally true

## Exercise 4: Gap Fill

Choose the correct hedging phrase from the box to begin each sentence.

**Phrase Bank:** To some extent | I think we need to distinguish between | It is more nuanced than that | It is worth noting that | That is not the whole picture | I am not sure I would go that far | The picture is more complicated than it first appears | It is open to debate

1. \_\_\_\_, the criticism is fair — the study did have methodological weaknesses.
2. \_\_\_\_ correlation and causation before we draw any firm conclusions.
3. \_\_\_\_ — the same technology can have very different effects depending on how it is used.
4. \_\_\_\_ several of the most widely cited studies in this area have since been challenged.
5. \_\_\_\_ — we also need to consider the role of family environment and peer relationships.
6. \_\_\_\_ — saying it is entirely harmless seems to ignore some genuine concerns.
7. \_\_\_\_ once you factor in the role of pre-existing mental health conditions.
8. \_\_\_\_ whether the benefits outweigh the risks, and reasonable people genuinely disagree.

## Exercise 5: Choose the Right Phrase

Each question gives a sentence that is too absolute, too evasive, or otherwise unsuitable. Choose the rewrite that hedges most appropriately.

1. Original: "Social media is definitely bad for mental health."

*Context: You are in an academic discussion. This is too absolute — the evidence is genuinely uncertain.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) The evidence is mixed — some studies show a link, but others find the effect is very small. b) Social media is bad for mental health, full stop. c) I completely agree that social media is definitely harmful. d) It is hard to say, but I think it is probably definitely bad.

2. Original: "It's impossible to say anything about this."

*Context: A colleague says this after a difficult question. This sounds like a complete refusal to engage — too evasive.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) That is a difficult question to answer, but I think there are a few things we can say with some confidence. b) You could argue that it is impossible, I suppose. c) It is hard to say. It is definitely impossible. I do not know. d) The picture is more complicated — it is completely impossible to say.

3. Original: "You're totally right — it causes depression."

*Context: In a research seminar. This sounds too certain and sycophantic for an academic context.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) Absolutely, yes, you are completely right about that. b) I am not sure I would go that far — the causal link has not been firmly established. c) To some extent, you are totally right and it definitely causes depression. d) Up to a point, but you are also definitely correct.

4. Original: "It's just addictive, that's all there is to it."

*Context: You are discussing social media design professionally. This is too dismissive and oversimplified.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) Yeah, it is just addictive, basically. b) I completely agree — it is just addictive and nothing else. c) It is not quite as simple as that — the design encourages engagement, but the effects vary considerably by user. d) You could argue it is just addictive, and that is probably all there is to it.

5. Original: "That study proves it."

*Context: In a meeting, someone cites one study as definitive proof. This overstates what a single study can show.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) Yes, that study definitely proves it, I agree. b) It is worth noting that a single study rarely constitutes proof — we would want to see the findings replicated. c) It is hard to say, but that study probably proves it. d) You could argue that the study proves it, sort of.

6. Original: "Some people find it helpful. That's it."

*Context: You are summarising research findings in a presentation. This is too abrupt.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) In some cases it is helpful, and that is basically the whole story. b) Some people find it helpful, so it is definitely good overall. c) In some cases it can be genuinely helpful — though it is worth noting that the picture is more complicated when we look at heavy users. d) It depends — some people find it helpful, that is all.

7. Original: "Nobody knows anything about this topic."

*Context: This is too nihilistic. In a seminar, it shuts down discussion.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) Nobody knows anything, so there is no point discussing it. b) It is open to debate, and the research is still developing — but there are some tentative conclusions we can draw. c) It is hard to say — nobody really knows, basically. d) The evidence is mixed, which means nobody knows anything at all.

8. Original: "The platforms are evil."

*Context: In a professional policy discussion, this is far too emotive and imprecise.*

Which rewrite hedges most appropriately?

a) The platforms are evil, honestly. b) You could argue that the platforms prioritise engagement over user wellbeing, which raises serious ethical questions. c) I completely agree — the platforms are definitely evil. d) To some extent, the platforms are evil, I think.

## Exercise 6: Error Identification

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Each sentence contains one error, or no error at all. Underline the error and write a correction, or write "No error".

1. To some extent, the research support the hypothesis that passive use is more harmful.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

2. It is hard to say whether the effects are long-term — the data is still quite limited.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

3. You could argue what the platforms bear some responsibility for the current situation.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

4. The evidence is mixed, and it is open to debate how much weight we should give it.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

5. I am not sure I would go that far — calling it a crisis are overstating the case.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

6. It is worth to note that most of the studies rely on self-reported data.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

7. The picture is more complicated than it first appears once you examine the methodology closely.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

8. I think we need to distinguish between correlation and causation before drawing any conclusions.

Correction / No error: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise 7: Complete the Dialogue

Choose the correct hedging phrase from the box to complete each turn in the conversation.

**Phrase Bank:** That is a difficult question to answer | To some extent | It is not quite as simple as that | I think we need to distinguish between | The evidence is mixed | It is worth noting that | I am not sure I would go that far | That is not the whole picture

Sam: So, do you think social media is actually making young people more anxious?

1. Rosa: \_\_\_\_ — the research is genuinely complex and I do not think anyone has a definitive answer yet.

Sam: But surely the studies showing a link are convincing?

2. Rosa: \_\_\_\_, yes — some of the findings are worth taking seriously. But I think we need to look more carefully at the methodology.

Sam: Platforms are designed to be addictive, though. Surely that is harmful by definition?

3. Rosa: \_\_\_\_\_. The design does encourage prolonged use, but the effects depend greatly on the individual.

Sam: So the type of use matters?

4. Rosa: Exactly. \_\_\_\_ passive consumption and active social connection — they seem to have quite different effects.

Sam: What about the argument that it just reflects existing mental health trends?

5. Rosa: \_\_\_\_ — different studies point in different directions.

Sam: Is there anything we can say with confidence?

6. Rosa: \_\_\_\_ the research we have is based largely on self-reported data, which limits how much weight we can put on it.

Sam: So you do not think it is a crisis?

7. Rosa: \_\_\_\_ — I think the concern is legitimate, but calling it a crisis implies a level of certainty the evidence does not yet support.

Sam: It sounds like a complicated picture.

8. Rosa: \_\_\_\_\_. That is exactly it — and that complexity is something we need to communicate better.

## TEACHER ANSWER KEY

Do Not Distribute to Students

### Everyday Speaking Skills — Lesson 2: Hedging and Expressing Uncertainty | B1

#### Exercise 1: Listening

1. What does Dr Chen say about the evidence linking social media and mental health?

**Answer: It is mixed — some studies show a link but others find only a small effect.**

2. Why does Dr Chen avoid calling the situation a 'crisis'?

**Answer: She thinks the word implies more certainty than the research supports.**

3. What distinction does Dr Chen say is important?

**Answer: Between passive scrolling and active engagement**

4. How does Dr Chen respond to the argument that social media is simply a mirror of existing trends?

**Answer: She partially agrees but says it is not the whole picture.**

5. What limitation of the existing research does Dr Chen highlight?

**Answer: Most studies rely on self-reported data, which has limitations.**

6. What does Dr Chen's overall approach suggest about her view of the topic?

**Answer: She is cautious and sees the issue as genuinely complex.**

#### Exercise 2: Multiple Choice

1. \_\_\_ on the link between diet and mood — different studies point in very different directions and no clear consensus has emerged.

**Answer: The evidence is mixed**

2. \_\_\_ it depends on whether we are talking about occasional use or something more compulsive.

**Answer: In some cases,**

3. \_\_\_ the platforms profit from keeping users engaged as long as possible, which raises ethical questions.

**Answer: You could argue that**

4. The answer really \_\_\_ your age, your usage patterns, and the type of content you consume.

**Answer: depends on**

5. I think the proposal has merit \_\_\_ — it addresses some real problems, but it does not deal with the underlying causes.

**Answer: up to a point**

6. \_\_\_ that the methodology used in that study has been widely criticised by other researchers.

**Answer: It is worth noting**

7. I \_\_\_ that it causes the problem — I think it more likely amplifies tendencies that are already there.

**Answer: would not say that exactly**

8. Whether screen time limits genuinely help is \_\_\_ — there is no clear consensus among researchers yet.

**Answer: open to debate**

### Exercise 3: Matching

1. To some extent... -> 1

**Acknowledges that something is partly true without claiming it is completely or universally so**

2. The evidence is mixed. -> 2

**Indicates that different studies or sources point in different directions, making a firm conclusion difficult**

3. It depends on... -> 3

**Shows that the answer varies depending on specific factors rather than being universally true**

4. I am not sure I would go that far. -> 4

**Signals partial agreement but suggests a claim goes further than the evidence supports**

5. You could argue that... -> 5

**Introduces a possible interpretation without fully committing to it yourself**

6. I think we need to distinguish between... -> 6

**Introduces an important distinction that has been overlooked in the conversation**

7. It is worth noting that... -> 7

**Introduces an important qualification or piece of evidence that adds nuance**

8. It is not quite as simple as that. -> 8

**Gently pushes back on an oversimplified claim, suggesting the reality is more nuanced**

### Exercise 4: Gap Fill

1. \_\_\_\_, the criticism is fair — the study did have methodological weaknesses.

**Answer: To some extent**

2. \_\_\_\_ correlation and causation before we draw any firm conclusions.

**Answer: I think we need to distinguish between**

3. \_\_\_\_ — the same technology can have very different effects depending on how it is used.

**Answer: It is more nuanced than that**

4. \_\_\_\_ several of the most widely cited studies in this area have since been challenged.

**Answer: It is worth noting that**

5. \_\_\_\_ — we also need to consider the role of family environment and peer relationships.

**Answer: That is not the whole picture**

6. \_\_\_\_ — saying it is entirely harmless seems to ignore some genuine concerns.

**Answer: I am not sure I would go that far**

7. \_\_\_\_ once you factor in the role of pre-existing mental health conditions.

**Answer: The picture is more complicated than it first appears**

8. \_\_\_\_ whether the benefits outweigh the risks, and reasonable people genuinely disagree.

**Answer: It is open to debate**

### Exercise 5: Choose the Right Phrase

1. Original: "Social media is definitely bad for mental health."

**Answer: The evidence is mixed — some studies show a link, but others find the effect is very small.**

Why: This hedges appropriately by acknowledging both sides of the evidence without making an absolute claim.

2. Original: "It's impossible to say anything about this."

**Answer: That is a difficult question to answer, but I think there are a few things we can say with some confidence.**

Why: This acknowledges the difficulty while still showing willingness to engage.

3. Original: "You're totally right — it causes depression."

**Answer: I am not sure I would go that far — the causal link has not been firmly established.**

Why: This partially agrees while introducing an important qualification.

4. Original: "It's just addictive, that's all there is to it."

**Answer: It is not quite as simple as that — the design encourages engagement, but the effects vary considerably by user.**

Why: This resists the oversimplification while still engaging seriously with the underlying point.

5. Original: "That study proves it."

**Answer: It is worth noting that a single study rarely constitutes proof — we would want to see the findings replicated.**

Why: This introduces an important methodological caveat without dismissing the study entirely.

6. Original: "Some people find it helpful. That's it."

**Answer: In some cases it can be genuinely helpful — though it is worth noting that the picture is more complicated when we look at heavy users.**

Why: This uses two hedging phrases to give a balanced and appropriately qualified summary.

7. Original: "Nobody knows anything about this topic."

**Answer: It is open to debate, and the research is still developing — but there are some tentative conclusions we can draw.**

Why: This acknowledges genuine uncertainty while keeping the conversation productive.

8. Original: "The platforms are evil."

**Answer: You could argue that the platforms prioritise engagement over user wellbeing, which raises serious ethical questions.**

Why: This reframes the emotive claim as a reasoned argument using appropriate hedging.

## Exercise 6: Error Identification

1. To some extent, the research support the hypothesis that passive use is more harmful.

**Error: "support" -> "supports" | Subject-verb agreement error — the subject is the research (singular), so the verb should be supports, not support.**

2. It is hard to say whether the effects are long-term — the data is still quite limited.

**Answer: No error.**

3. You could argue what the platforms bear some responsibility for the current situation.

**Error: "what" -> "that" | Wrong conjunction — the correct phrase is you could argue that, not you could argue what.**

4. The evidence is mixed, and it is open to debate how much weight we should give it.

**Answer: No error.**

5. I am not sure I would go that far — calling it a crisis are overstating the case.

**Error: "are" -> "is" | Subject-verb agreement error — calling it a crisis is a singular gerund phrase, so the verb should be is, not are.**

6. It is worth to note that most of the studies rely on self-reported data.

**Error: "to" -> "noting" | Wrong verb form — the correct phrase is it is worth noting (gerund), not it is worth to note (infinitive).**

7. The picture is more complicated than it first appears once you examine the methodology closely.

**Answer: No error.**

8. I think we need to distinguish between correlation and causation before drawing any conclusions.

**Answer: No error.**

### **Exercise 7: Complete the Dialogue**

**Gap 1: That is a difficult question to answer**

**Gap 2: To some extent**

**Gap 3: It is not quite as simple as that**

**Gap 4: I think we need to distinguish between**

**Gap 5: The evidence is mixed**

**Gap 6: It is worth noting that**

**Gap 7: I am not sure I would go that far**

**Gap 8: That is not the whole picture**