

Learning and using English- ranking language practice

Choose one of the statements below and read it out with the right level phrase to match your own opinion, making sure that it isn't too strong or too weak. The optional words are in order of how often, how likely, how many, etc. Discuss with your partner(s) until you agree or clearly won't agree, and circle the word or words that represent your final opinion(s). Then do the same with their own choice of sentence and phrase.

Useful phrases for discussing the sentences and phrases

"That's exactly what I would say (because...)"

"I wouldn't go that far. I'd say that... (due to...)"

"I would go even further and say that... (because of...)"

"(Despite...) I still think that..."

"Okay, you've persuaded me. Let's say that..."

Share your opinion(s) on two phrases with the class and see what other groups think.

Ask about any sentences or phrases that you aren't sure about, discussing as a class each time.

Sentences on the English language to discuss

- Absolutely all/ Virtually all/ Almost all/ The vast majority of/ Most/ Many/ Some/ A minority of/ A small minority of/ A tiny minority of/ None of students in this country's schools will need English in their future jobs.
- All/ Very nearly all/ Nearly all/ The majority of/ A large number of/ A number of/ A small percentage of/ A very small fraction of/ Almost no/ No companies in this country should switch their official office language to English.
- Being able to get more foreign students will be utterly crucial/ extremely important/ really important/ quite important/ not very important/ totally unimportant for this country's universities over the next 20 years.
- Being able to speak English fluently will be absolutely essential/ incredibly important/ very important/ fairly important/ not so important/ completely unimportant for the majority of working people in the year 2025.
- Employers in this country without fail/ practically always/ generally/ frequently/ at times/ seldom/ practically never/ don't ever prioritise English language skills when they are looking for new staff.
- English language levels in this country are much much worse than/ far worse than/ considerably worse than/ somewhat worse than/ a bit worse than/ a tiny bit worse than/ more or less the same as/ slightly better than/ substantially better than/ much better than in other countries with similar economies.
- Learning something like history through English is always/ nearly always/ usually/ often/ sometimes/ rarely/ almost never/ never better than actually studying the grammar etc of the language.
- Most students find language learning absolutely fascinating/ incredibly interesting/ very interesting/ fairly interesting/ not very interesting/ totally uninteresting.
- Other non-native English speakers use the difficult idioms etc of native speakers all the time/ most of the time/ occasionally/ once in a blue moon.
- Speaking English will definitely/ will almost certainly/ will probably/ may well/ might/ could possibly/ could conceivably/ almost certainly won't/ definitely won't become less important as technology improves.
- Students' English language test scores are usually completely identical to/ virtually identical to/ almost the same as/ incredibly similar to/ really similar to/ somewhat similar to/ very different from/ almost totally different from/ totally different from their ability to use English in their studies, jobs and lives.
- The number of people from overseas studying in this country's universities is likely to accelerate/ increase dramatically/ rise sharply/ climb substantially/ creep up/ flatten out/ remain stable/ drop slightly/ fall quite a lot/ fall rapidly/ collapse from now until 2050.
- There is no doubt that/ It is almost certain that/ It is likely that/ It is perhaps the case that/ It is highly unlikely that/ There is next to no chance that/ There is no chance that students will want to focus more and more on English in the future (rather than on a wider range of languages).
- Writing a publishable English-language academic paper is absolutely impossible/ almost impossible/ extremely difficult/ really hard/ somewhat challenging/ a little tricky/ very easy/ incredibly easy/ a total cinch.

First of all without looking above, write as many phrases as you can in the right places below, with ones with the same meaning next to each other. Start with just this page.

How often

without fail

not ever

How many/ How much/ How many percent/ What fraction/ What proportion

all

none of

How likely/ How probable

no doubt

no chance

How + adjective (e.g. How important)

utterly crucial

completely unimportant

How much more.../ How much ...er

much much more...

a tiny bit ...er

How similar/ How different

completely identical to

totally different from



Mixed answers

a large number of
a minority of
a number of
a small minority of
a small percentage of
a tiny minority of
a very small fraction of
absolutely all
almost all
almost certain(ly)
almost certainly not
almost never
almost no
always
at times
could conceivably
could possibly
definitely
frequently
generally
highly unlikely
likely
many
may well
might
most
most of the time
(very) nearly all
nearly always
never
next to no chance
no
occasionally
often
once in a blue moon
perhaps
practically...
probably
rarely
seldom
some(times)
the majority of
the vast majority of
usually
virtually all

a bit
absolutely essential
almost the same as
almost totally different from
considerably
extremely...
fairly...
far
incredibly similar to
incredibly...
much
not so...
not very...
quite...
really similar to
really...
slightly
somewhat
somewhat similar to
substantially
totally un...
very different from
very...
virtually identical to

Do the same with trends language.

Suggested answers

Many other answers are possible, and some could go in slightly different positions, so please check if you wrote anything different.

How often

always/ without fail/ all the time
practically always
nearly always
usually/ generally/ most of the time
often/ frequently
sometimes
at times/ occasionally
rarely/ seldom
almost never
practically never/ once in a blue moon
not ever/ never

How many/ How much/ How many percent/ What fraction/ What proportion

absolutely all/ all
virtually all/ very nearly all
almost all/ nearly all
the vast majority of
most/ the majority of
many/ a large number of
some/ a number of
a minority of
a small minority of/ a small percentage of
a tiny minority of/ a very small fraction of
almost no
no/ none of

How likely/ How probable

definitely/ no doubt
almost certainly/ almost certain
probably/ likely
may well
might/ perhaps
could possibly
could conceivably/ highly unlikely
almost certainly not/ next to no chance
no chance

How important

utterly crucial/ absolutely essential
extremely important/ incredibly important
really important/ very important
quite important/ fairly important
not very important/ not so important
totally unimportant/ completely unimportant

How much more.../ How much ...er

much much more...
far/ much
substantially/ considerably
somewhat
a bit/ slightly
a tiny bit ...er

How similar/ How different

completely identical to
virtually identical to
almost the same as
incredibly similar to
really similar to
somewhat similar to
very different from
almost totally different from
totally different from

How big a change/ What the trend is

accelerate
increase dramatically
rise sharply
climb substantially
creep up
flatten out
remain stable
drop slightly
fall quite a lot
fall rapidly
collapse

Discussion questions for ranking language practice

Use language which can be ranked like that above to discuss your answers to some of these questions, starting with any you like.

- How annoyed would staff be if you changed their office language to English?
- How big does your vocabulary need to be in order to be able to study at a foreign university?
- How busy are most university students in your country? How would that change if they had to take some or all of their usual classes in English instead of in their own language?
- How complicated would it be to change the start of the academic year (e.g. from April to October)?
- How different is learning a first language and learning foreign languages?
- How difficult is it to do academic research in your field without being able to read well in English?
- How disappointed would students be if they found the professors teaching in English were non-native English speakers?
- How expensive would it be to translate all university documents and websites into English?
- How good does your English need to be to be able to attend English-language university lectures on subjects such as social science?
- How good or bad is the English of the oldest university professors in your country?
- How hard would it be to write your final dissertation/ thesis in English?
- How important is studying abroad?
- How impressed would future employers be if you had the top score in an English-language test?
- How likely is it that Chinese as a foreign language will become more popular?
- How likely are you to have foreign colleagues in your workplace in the future?
- How motivated would you be if you had to reach a certain TOEFL or IELTS score before you could graduate from university?
- How much easier is it to learn a second language when you are young?
- How nervous would you be if your future employer decided to transfer you abroad?
- How often should English language learners use translation?
- How similar is learning English and other foreign languages?
- How tiring is it to take notes in a one-hour English-language lecture on another subject (e.g. psychology)?
- How unique is your language?
- How useful is having English conversations with other people from your country?
- What fraction of university professors in this country should be from overseas?
- What percentage of lectures in universities in this country should be offered in English?
- What proportion of university lecturers in this country wouldn't be able to run their courses in English?
- What would be a good proportion of overseas students in universities in this country? What would be too much?

Ask about any questions you don't understand, are not sure the answer to, etc.

University English policy roleplay discussion/ case study

Discuss and decide on an English policy for a university in your country (your own university if you are all from the same one). You have twenty minutes to decide on the policy in as much detail as you can, with reasons for each change (and reasons for not changing if you decide to keep anything the same).

Possible topics to discuss and agree on

- Academic English exams like IELTS and TOEFL
- Bilingual courses
- Business English exams like TOEIC
- Changes to other parts of the education system (high schools, etc)
- Dissertations/ Theses
- English in students' future research/ work
- English in university offices, meetings, club activities such as sports societies, etc.
- English language studies
- English-language academic papers
- English-language textbooks
- Entrance tests/ Entrance requirements
- First year students
- Foreign people moving to this country without being able to speak this country's language
- Foreign staff
- Foreign students studying in this country's universities
- Funding for these changes
- How to sell the changes to the students, faculty, local people, government, etc
- Learning and using other languages such as Chinese
- Learning other subjects through English/ English as a medium of instruction
- Listening and speaking
- Postgraduate courses/ Grad school (MBA, etc)
- Professors' English language skills
- Publishing
- Reading and writing
- Recruiting new staff and students (where from, etc)
- Special educational needs (braille, sign language, etc)
- Study abroad
- Technology
- Testing/ Exams/ Assessment
- The annual academic calendar (when the academic year starts, etc)
- The university library/ media centre
- What to do with students and staff who don't have the right level of English
- Time lines/ Time limits
- Checking progress of the plan/ Judging the success of new English language policies
- Changing the policies again later if anything doesn't go according to plan