

9 Controversies

Reading

1 Understanding the writer's opinion

1.1 You have been asked to write an essay with the title *Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of immigration*.

- a In small groups, make a note of some pros and cons of immigration.
- b What is your own view of immigration into your country?

Overall, does it have positive or negative consequences?

When you are reading academic texts, it is important to understand the writer's general opinion on a topic.

- 1.2 a While you were researching your essay on immigration you found the following extracts (A–F). Before you start reading, think about what information you hope to find in the extracts to help with the essay.
- b Read the extracts and write brief notes summarising what you understand about the writer's opinion in each one. What positive and negative consequences of immigration are mentioned?
 - c In pairs, compare your answers.

Extract A

Where illegal migrants and/or their children qualify for social benefits or education, social programs and educational systems may be stressed as transfers occur from indigenous residents to migrants. Ethnic tensions may rise as cultures clash. Those migrants who do not speak the country's primary language often have difficulty assimilating, and some of these problems may spill over into the educational system through higher costs of bi-lingual education and in other ways.

Greenwood, M. J. (2007). *Population: Migration*, in Lomborg, B. (Ed.) *Solutions for the World's Biggest Problems: Costs and benefits*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Extract B

One consequence of today's patterns of intense global migration is the creation of multicultural societies composed of groups representing very different cultural histories, values, and practices. In many respects nations and economies that embrace and encourage multiculturalism can reap tremendous economic and cultural benefits from the energy, creativity, and productivity that diversity generates.

Lull, J. (2006). *The push and pull of global culture*. In Curran, J. and Morley, D. (Eds.) *Media and cultural theory*. Oxford: Routledge.

Reading

- Understanding the writer's opinion
- Identifying main ideas and supporting information
- Recognising general nouns
- Understanding hedges
- Vocabulary building 1: formal and informal verbs; 2: opposites

Listening and speaking

- Tutorials: asking for and giving more information
- Pronunciation: intonation in *wh*-clefts

Writing

- Describing information in figures and tables
- Referring to figures and tables
- Referring backwards and forwards

Extract C

As the earth's population has continued to grow, a new kind of fear has emerged in the developed countries: an environmental one. The added population of new migrants increases the demographic pressures on all of a country's environmental resources. It reduces the amount of natural, undeveloped land remaining, leaving it farther away from many people and more crowded with visitors, as well as threatening plant and animal species which rely upon these habitats. And immigration adds more "automobile-using and toilet-flushing residents,"⁷² contributing to air and water pollution.

Erler, E. J., West, T. G. and Marini, J. (2007). *The Founders on Citizenship and Immigration: Principles and challenges in America*. Maryland, U.S.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Extract D

In the long run, dependence on cheap labor is not profitable – it delays modernization of plants, facilities and farms. As a rule, American labor is better educated and more productive and higher wages are justified by greater productivity. Not many years ago, grain was harvested by great armies of agricultural workers armed with scythes. Now, the crops are harvested by giant machines which are more efficient and more cost effective.

Meilander, P. C. (2001). *Toward a theory of immigration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Extract E

Indeed, demographic pressures within the developed world will make it difficult (at least costly) to continue ignoring the political and economic potential of international migration. The developed world's population is both shrinking (in number) and ageing. Across most of Europe, national birth rates are below their replacement rates. Russia and Japan face the same dire situation, while America and Canada are hovering on the brink. Soon there will be too few workers in these countries to pay for their elaborate welfare and social security needs (which they otherwise fight so hard to protect). Without an injection of young immigrant workers, the welfare of the developed world risks being retired along with its population.

Moses, J. W. (2006). *International Migration: Globalization's last frontier*. London: Zed Books

Extract F

Immigration, therefore, has two distinct consequences and these consequences propel the immigration debate. The nation, as a whole, gains from immigration. In other words, immigration increases the size of the economic pie available to natives. Immigration also redistributes income – from native workers who compete with immigrants to those who hire and use immigrant services. Immigration changes the way the economic pie is split between workers and firms.

Borjas, G. J. (1999). *Heaven's Door: Immigration policy and the American economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

 **Focus on your subject** Each academic subject has particular issues of debate and controversy. Being able to recognise writers' opinions can help you understand and evaluate the arguments on either side. When you are reading about these issues, try to work out whether the writer takes a particular position and what evidence they provide to justify this position.

2 Identifying main ideas and supporting information

2.1 You are going to read a text with the title *Isolates or socialites? The social ties of internet users*. What controversial issue do you expect the text to be about?

2.2 Read the text. For each paragraph tick the sentence (a–c) which summarises the main idea.

Paragraph 1

- a The internet gives us access to enormous amounts of information, and also allows us to buy things without going into shops.
- b The internet makes it possible both to keep in touch with people who live far away and also to avoid personal contact.
- c Railways, the telephone, and the internet are some of the most important developments in how people communicate.

Paragraph 2

- a Through the internet we can keep in contact with people using words, photos, video clips, and other images.
- b Email has had an important effect on social relationships mainly because it is cheap and because we can reply to emails at some time after we have received them.
- c Some argue that the internet has made it easier to make contact with friends and relations, so that relationships between people become closer.

Paragraph 3

- a Face-to-face communication develops trust between people and encourages them to help each other.
- b Face-to-face communication is more important than electronic communication for a healthy society, but some argue that the internet can encourage face-to-face communication.
- c We can use the internet to arrange to meet friends, or to encourage people to come to social activities organised for a particular community.

Paragraph 4

- a Some argue that electronic communication replaces face-to-face communication, and this can be a bad thing for people.
- b The same criticisms of the internet for its negative impact on social relations were previously made about watching television.
- c Because using a computer is a solitary activity, this can make people lonely and depressed.

1 The advent of the internet has been one of the biggest developments in the history of communications technology. Like the railways and the telephone before it, the internet has helped to make the world a smaller place, making it easier to undertake both business and pleasure with individuals and organisations located far away. At the same time it has enabled individuals to acquire from the comfort of their office or front room access to both a hive of information and a wide range of commercial services, activities that previously would have necessitated a trip to the high street. Seemingly the internet has both made it easier to maintain contact with our fellow human beings, especially those who do not live locally, and, at the same time, reduced the need to engage in social contact with others in order to conduct the everyday business of commercial or social life.

2 These apparently divergent features of the internet have resulted in a lively debate about whether its advent has strengthened or weakened the social bonds and ties between individuals. One school of thought argues that it has had a beneficial impact. It points out that the internet makes it much easier to get into contact with individuals who have similar interests to oneself, irrespective of where they live, thereby making it possible to create 'virtual communities'. Contact with friends and relatives who live some distance away can more easily be maintained too – not

► Adverbials

G&V 3, p137

just using words but also exploiting the ability to send photos, video clips and scanned images via the internet too. These apparent consequences derive principally from the opportunity afforded by e-mail to communicate asynchronously and to do so at no greater cost with someone halfway round the world than with a neighbour living next door (Hauben and Hauben, 1997; Wellman and Gulia, 1999; Wellman et al., 2001; Horrigan, 2002).

3 These arguments, though, do not address the possible impact of the internet on face-to-face communication. It is often argued that face-to-face communication helps develop bonds of trust and reciprocity between individuals in a manner that no other form of communication can achieve (Putnam, 2000; though for a dissenting view see Uslaner, 2002). Such bonds, fostered by and embedded in social networks, provide a stock of 'social capital' that helps make societies healthier, more caring and more efficient. Thus, whether or not the internet makes it easier for people to organise face-to-face meetings rather than just maintain electronic contact with those living far away is a vital question. Certainly, those who are optimistic about the impact of the internet think it does. After all, it can be used to make an appointment to meet a friend in the local pub or to advertise and encourage people to attend a communal social activity. Moreover, friends initially made on-line may subsequently be met face to face. In short, the ability to engage in 'on-line' social activity could help to stimulate greater 'off-line' social activity too (Robinson et al., 2000; Shah et al., 2001; Hampton and Wellman, 2002) – with consequential beneficial impacts on the stock of social capital.

4 On the other hand 'on-line' activity could serve to displace 'off-line' activity. Those engaged in a virtual network may spend less time participating in their local social networks. Even if they are not particularly predisposed to withdraw from face-to-face contact, time spent on the internet is time not spent doing something else, and one of the activities that might be displaced is socialising with friends and family (Nie and Erbring, 2000; Nie, 2001). Similar arguments have been, indeed, previously made about the growth in the second half of the 20th century of television watching (Steiner, 1963; Putnam, 2000); but whereas watching television can, in fact, be turned into a communal activity, using a computer is usually a solitary activity. Indeed, it has been argued that the solitary nature of internet use may result in people becoming lonely and depressed, thereby undermining their ability to form or sustain friendships (Kraut et al., 1998).

Park, A. et al (Eds.) (2007). *British Social Attitudes: Perspectives on a changing society*. 23rd report. National Centre for Social Research/Sage.

2.3 a The writer reports that there is a debate about whether the internet has strengthened or weakened the social bonds and ties between individuals. Take notes from the text on the arguments on both sides of this issue. Include notes on any supporting evidence. Then in pairs, compare your notes. Make any changes to your notes you think necessary.

b In pairs, discuss your views on this issue.

3 Recognising general nouns

General nouns are often used to refer to previous or following parts of a text. It is important to recognise these general nouns in order to understand the relationships between parts of the text. For example, in the following extract the general noun *arguments* is used to refer to and label the points made in the previous three sentences.

On the other hand 'on-line' activity could serve to displace 'off-line' activity. Those engaged in a virtual network may spend less time participating in their local social networks. Even if they are not particularly predisposed to withdraw from face-to-face contact, time spent on the internet is time not spent doing something else, and one of the activities that might be displaced is socialising with friends and family (Nie and Erbring, 2000; Nie, 2001). Similar **arguments** have been, indeed, previously made ...

3.1 Find the general nouns in bold in the text in 2.2. What do they refer to?

- 1 ... activities that previously would have necessitated a trip to the high street. (lines 6-7)
- 2 These apparently divergent features of the internet ... (line 11)
- 3 These apparent consequences derive principally from ... (line 18)
- 4 These arguments, though, do not address the possible impact of the internet on face-to-face communication. (lines 22-23)

4 Understanding hedges

- 4.1 a The following extracts from the text in 2.2 are missing the original hedges. In pairs, add the hedges in the box to the extracts and make any other changes necessary. Look back at the text to check your answers.

could helped to may might ~~one of~~ usually

- 1 The advent of the internet has been ^{one of} the biggest developments ^s in the history of communications technology.
 - 2 The internet has made the world a smaller place,
 - 3 The ability to engage in 'on-line' social activity helps to stimulate greater 'off-line' social activity too
 - 4 Those engaged in a virtual network spend less time participating in their local social networks.
 - 5 One of the activities that is displaced by spending time on the internet is socialising with friends and family
 - 6 Whereas watching television can, in fact, be turned into a communal activity, using computer is a solitary activity.
- b Can you suggest different hedges that could be used instead?
c Which other ideas in the sentences in 4.1a could be hedged?

5 Vocabulary building 1: formal and informal verbs

- 5.1 Complete the following sentences using formal verbs from the text in 2.2 with the same meaning as the words in brackets.

- 1 The internet has made it easier to undertake business. (do)
- 2 Individuals can _____ information from the comfort of their office. (get)
- 3 It is now possible to _____ 'virtual communities'. (make)
- 4 Friends and relatives can _____ contact via the internet. (keep)
- 5 The consequences of the internet _____ principally from the opportunity _____ by email to communicate asynchronously and cheaply. (come; given)
- 6 The internet may undermine people's ability to _____ or _____ friendships. (make; keep)

► Hedges

Unit 5, 6.1 p74,
Unit 6, 7 p90

► Using academic style

Unit 7, 8 pp106-107