

In class: Taking the floor

Note: We say the person who is speaking "has the floor". This expression comes from very formal meetings (e.g., in Congress) where each person stands up (on the floor) to address the other people present, and sits down when they finish.

So when you get everyone's attention and start speaking, we say you "take the floor"

Body language

Make eye contact with the person managing the discussion, and when you have something to say, raise your hand to let them know. Leaning forward in your seat can also serve as a signal that you wish to speak.

Sitting opposite the teacher or professor may make it easier to signal your interest in speaking. Sitting behind other people, or right at the back of the room, will definitely make it much harder.

What to say

Think about the language to use when you take the floor in a discussion.

Interrupting

Think of the discussion as a busy highway, and you as a driver waiting to enter from a side street. Often in order to force your way into the traffic, you need to pull out in front of another car – it is not always possible to simply wait for the traffic to stop to let you in.

There are times when you need to break in while someone else is speaking in order to make an important point. It is not rude to do that if you use suitable language. Here are some appropriate phrases to use when you want to interrupt someone else who has the floor.