Expressing yourself: ways of saying you are sure / not sure

Overview: In this lesson learners develop their awareness and understanding of expressions meaning “I’m sure” and “I’m not sure”, and practise using these expressions.

Total time for activities: 30–35 minutes

Level: upper intermediate to advanced

1. Before class, cut up the Student’s Copy so that you have five individual worksheets for each learner.

2. Distribute Worksheet A. Learners work on the task in pairs. Emphasise that sentences 1-5 should all be completed with the same word, and that sentences 6-10 should, likewise, all be completed with the same word.

   Answers
   Sentences 1-5: think
   Sentences 6-10: bet

3. (Optional) Ask them to translate the sentences into their L1, and to notice the different L1 equivalents of ‘think’ and ‘bet’.

   Check answers in plenary.

4. Ask what “I think” means in sentence 2, and what “I bet” means in sentence 9. Answers: In sentence 2, “I think” means that I’m not completely sure. In sentence 9, “I bet” means that I don’t actually know, but I feel sure that what I’m saying is true. Explain that this lesson will be about ways of saying you are sure or not sure about something you say.

5. Distribute Worksheet B. Learners complete the sentences individually and compare answers in pairs. Check answers in plenary.

   Answers
   1. I know for a fact that they’re planning to close more branches.
   2. You will no doubt be pleased to hear that your proposal has been accepted.
   3. They haven’t thought the scheme through properly - I just know it’ll be a disaster.
   4. There are no changes to the schedule, as far as I know.
   5. To the best of my knowledge, there are no plans for further closures.
   6. The situation’s pretty unstable - there’s no telling what’s going to happen next.
   7. You never can tell what crazy ideas they’re going to come up with.
   8. Who’s to say what the best course of action is?

6. Distribute Worksheet C. Learners complete the sentences individually and compare answers in pairs. Check answers in plenary.

   Answers
   1. a I’m absolutely sure you’ll enjoy it.
   b I’m absolutely positive I closed all the windows before we left.
   c I’m absolutely certain that no one else knows.

   2. a I’m pretty/fairly sure you’ll enjoy it.
   c I’m pretty/fairly certain that no one else knows.

7. Distribute Worksheet D, which summarises some common ways of expressing certainty and uncertainty. Allow time for learners to read through it and ask any questions they may have.
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8. Learners form groups of 3 to 5. Distribute Worksheet E. Learners take turns to ask and answer the questions. They do not have to work through the questions in the order in which they are printed; they can pick and choose whichever questions seem most interesting. They can also improvise and add further, similar questions. In answering, they should try to use as many of the phrases on Worksheet D as possible. They should feel free to disagree with each other and to develop the questions and answers into short discussions.

Follow-up

► Learners can make individual lists of the phrases from Worksheet D they are relatively unfamiliar with. In warmers or pre-lesson chat, you can use any of the questions from Worksheet E or similar questions which give an opportunity for learners to respond with different degrees of certainty.
Worksheet A

Which verb can be used to complete all sentences 1-5?
1  I ______ this is one of the nicest streets in the town.
2  I ______ there’s a cashpoint just round that corner.
3  We’ve got to ______ about how to get back home.
4  I didn’t ______ to ask whether the price includes drinks.
5  You didn’t ______ you’d end up working here, did you?

Which verb can be used to complete all sentences 6-10?
6  Speaker A: Are you coming with us? - Speaker B: You ______!
7  According to the forecast it’ll be warm and sunny tomorrow, but I wouldn’t ______ on it.
8  Speaker A: I was worried we were never going to get here. - Speaker B: I ______ you were!
9  I ______ all the tickets have been sold by now.
10 You drive, I’ll walk, and I ______ you £10 I can get there faster.

Worksheet B

Complete the sentences using words from the box.

Some ways of indicating that you are sure ...
1  I know for a ______ that they’re planning to close more branches.
2  You will no ______ be pleased to hear that your proposal has been accepted.
3  They haven’t thought the scheme through properly - I just ______ it’ll be a disaster.

... or not sure.
4  There are no changes to the schedule, as ______ as I know.
5  To the ______ of my knowledge, there are no plans for further closures.
6  The situation’s pretty unstable - there’s ______ telling what’s going to happen next.
7  You ______ can tell what crazy ideas they’re going to come up with.
8 ______ to say what the best course of action is?

Worksheet C

More ways of indicating that you are sure.

1. In which of the sentences below can ‘absolutely’ be added, to express very strong certainty?
2. In which of the sentences can ‘pretty’ or ‘fairly’ be added, to express slightly less certainty?

a. I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.
b. I’m positive I closed all the windows before we left.
c. I’m certain that no one else knows.
d. I bet he’s forgotten about our appointment.
e. I am satisfied that the correct procedures have been followed.
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**Worksheet D**

**Ways of indicating that you are sure about something**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm sure*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm positive*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm certain*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know for a fact*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I bet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These can be followed by ‘that’, e.g. ‘I’m sure that you’ll enjoy it’.

- You can use ‘I know’ when you feel sure about something although you don’t actually know it for a fact. In this case there is usually heavy stress on ‘know’. You can also add ‘just’, e.g. ‘I just know you’ll have a good time.’
- ‘I am satisfied’ is used especially by people in authority to indicate complete certainty when giving an official verdict.

You can also use these phrases to give short responses to yes/no questions, for example:

- Is it true? - I’m sure it is.
- Is it true? - I know for a fact that it is. / I know that for a fact.
- Is it true? - I bet it is.
- Is it true? - No doubt it is.

**Ways of indicating that you are not sure about something**

At the beginning of a sentence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As far as I know,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the best of my knowledge,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s no telling if/whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s to say if/whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You never can tell / You can never tell if/whether</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a short response to a question, e.g.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes/No Question</th>
<th>Response Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is it true? - I think so. / I think it is.</td>
<td>Is it true? - There’s no telling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it true? - Maybe (it is). / Perhaps (it is).</td>
<td>Is it true? - Who’s to say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it true? - As far as I know. / Not as far as I know.</td>
<td>Is it true? - You never can tell. / You can never tell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it true? - To the best of my knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worksheet E

► How many countries are there in the world?
► Did you put your left shoe on before your right one today?
► When was the wheel invented?
► What’s the past tense of ‘stride’?
► How long ago did the dinosaurs die out?
► How many languages are spoken in the world?
► Are you going to do any shopping today?
► Which is the world’s longest river?
► Can you do ten press-ups?
► Where and when was the first-ever language spoken?
► Will human beings ever colonise other planets?
► What’s the coldest place you’ve ever been in?
► How many centimetres are there in an inch?
► What is a light year?
► Are you going on any long journeys in the near future?
► Why is there so much salt in the sea?
► What’s your normal walking speed?
► What is a leap year?
► Is it possible for animals to learn human language?
► When did going to the cinema become a popular leisure activity?
► Why is the sky blue?
► Is there water on Mars?
► Can you remember the first English word you learned?
► Which main sources of energy do you think will be used in the future?
► When was the electric guitar invented?
► Where is the deepest part of the ocean?