
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute Vocabulary

Discourse markers: showing attitude

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hello! Welcome to 6 Minute Vocabulary. I'm Finn.

Catherine

And I'm Catherine. Today we're talking about words and phrases that we use to express our attitude to what we're saying or writing.

Finn

So two common examples are **fortunately**, which shows I'm pleased, and **I'm afraid**, which shows I'm sorry about something. So let's start by listening to Rob. He's talking about electric cars. Are you a fan of the electric car, Catherine?

Catherine

I'm not a fan of any car actually, Finn. If I had one I would probably consider electric.

Finn

Very environmentally considerate of you.

Catherine

Thank you. And before we hear from Rob, here's a question: What is Rob's attitude towards public transport and bicycles? Here he is:

INSERT

Rob

I must admit I'm not sure about the whole idea of electric cars. I mean **obviously** we need to find alternative forms of energy, but **if you ask me**, reducing the number of cars on the road should be the priority. **Ideally** we would all use public transport or bicycles. **Seriously**, I think people should be given tax breaks if they don't own a car! But **of course** that's not going to happen any time soon.

Finn

So Rob's attitude is that **ideally** we would all use public transport or bicycles.

Catherine

Or to put that another way, he thinks it would be ideal if we all used public transport or bicycles. By beginning the sentence with **ideally**, Rob expresses his attitude nicely in just one word. Right. Let's listen for more words and phrases that shows Rob's attitude in this clip.

INSERT

Rob

I must admit I'm not sure about the whole idea of electric cars. I mean **obviously** we need to find alternative forms of energy, but **if you ask me**, reducing the number of cars on the road should be the priority.

Finn

So he begins with the phrase **I must admit**... Now what does that tell us?

Catherine

Well, we usually use that expression when we're going to say something that might be unpopular. Perhaps we're a little embarrassed to say it.

Finn

Yes, Rob knows that a lot of people are keen on the idea of electric cars, but he's going to say something different.

Catherine

That's right. Then Rob used the word **obviously**. People use **obviously** to show that an idea is easy to see or understand.

Finn

And by using it here, Rob means that the need for alternative forms of energy is clear to him, even though he has other ideas on the subject too.

Catherine

Exactly. Because he then said **if you ask me**, reducing the number of cars on the road should be the priority.

Finn

So this phrase **if you ask me** it's like **in my opinion**, isn't it?

Catherine

It is, but it tells us more about the speaker's attitude. It's less direct than **in my opinion**, and it shows that Rob realises that other people might disagree. Let's have another clip.

INSERT

Rob

Seriously, I think people should be given tax breaks if they don't own a car!

Finn

Seriously. Now why does he use that here?

Catherine

Seriously shows that Rob knows that his idea might sound like a joke to some people. But he wants to make it clear that it's not a joke.

Finn

Oh yes, people often use it when they have been joking and they want to start being serious, don't they?

Catherine

Yes, they do. Right, listen again:

INSERT

Rob

But **of course** that's not going to happen any time soon.

Finn

Well, **of course** is a very familiar expression. Now here Rob uses it to show his understanding of the real situation.

Catherine

Does it also sound slightly critical of the government?

Finn

Yes, I think it does. He's not expecting any new government policies that will change the situation on the roads.

IDENT

6 Minute Vocabulary from BBC Learning English.

Finn

And we're talking about words and phrases that show attitude. **Obviously** they are very important for expressing and understanding what other people mean!

Catherine

That's right. But **I'm afraid** they can be tricky to define in a dictionary, can't they, Finn?

Finn

Yes, they can. In fact you can often only understand their real meaning from the context that they are in.

Catherine

That's right. And it's nearly the end of the show so obviously it's time for a quiz! So question one: Which is correct a) I must admit I haven't done much work today or b) If you ask me, I haven't done much work today.

Finn

That's a) **I must admit**.

Catherine

Correct. Good. Now question two: a) Ideally the weather will affect our plans for the day or b) Obviously the weather will affect our plans for the day.

Finn

And that one is b) **obviously**.

Catherine

Correct. And question three: a) OK, but seriously, what do you really think? b) OK, but of course, what do you really think?

Finn

And this time it's a) **seriously**.

Catherine

Yes it is. And well done if you got those right at home.

Finn

And now, here's a game you can play with your friends to help you practise these words and phrases. Have a conversation with them and try to use as many of these words and phrases as you can. Give yourself a point each time you manage to do it.

Catherine

That's all we got time for and there's more about this at bbclearningenglish.com. Join us again soon for more 6 Minute Vocabulary.

Both

Bye!

Vocabulary points to take away:

There are a lot of words and phrases used to express our attitude to what we are saying or writing. Two common examples are **fortunately** (I'm pleased) and **I'm afraid** (I'm sorry):

Fortunately, there wasn't much traffic on the roads.
I'm afraid I forgot to buy any bread.

Others are often less easy to define:

I must admit

used when you are going to say something that might be unpopular or that you are slightly embarrassed about:

- I must admit I don't really like his wife.

Obviously

used to say that an idea is easy to see or understand:

- Obviously, we want to help as much as we can.

If you ask me

used to give your opinion, especially when you think other people might disagree:

- If you ask me, too many people go to university these days.

Ideally

used to say what you think would be ideal, although you realise it's probably not possible:

- Ideally, we'd like a four-bedroomed house if we can afford it.

Seriously

used to show that you are not joking:

- Seriously, I'd like to have at least four kids.

Of course

used to show you realise that what you are saying is generally known and not surprising:

- The rush hour is the worst possible time to travel, of course.