



Simple Conversation Fundamentals

A few tips to improve the conversation.

EYE CONTACT

FOCUS: Maintain eye contact throughout your conversation. If you break eye contact, do it slowly, as if your pupils are connected by strings of taffy.

USE OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

CLOSED Q's: Can be answered yes or no. Or one word. "Fine." **OPEN ENDED Q'S:** Need details to answer.

Closed Q : Do you like the Cardinals? Yes. — vs — **Open Q:** How would you describe the Cardinals to a non-baseball fan?

SEEK THE DETAILS

NOT AN INTERROGATOR: It's important to ask interesting **open ended** questions that force the conversation partner to think and reply with more than one word. Challenge yourself to ask a question they've probably never heard before.

When you hear something interesting, ask how they felt in the moment. It's important **NOT** to interrogate your conversation partner, so instead of overwhelming them with non-stop questions, offer your reaction to their answer, your own similar stories, or rephrase what they've said to make sure you've got it right.

REMEMBER BODY LANGUAGE

STAY OPEN: To demonstrate openness, avoid crossing arms, or putting hands in pockets. Face your conversation partner, and focus intently to understand what he/she is saying.

MODERATE PACE OF SPEECH

SLOW DOWN: Pay attention to your rate of speech, and make sure it's not too fast (a sign of nervousness) or too slow (boring). If you're talking about something exciting, it's ok to speed up. If it's something more serious, it's best to slow down.

USE PAUSES

HOLD ON: When listening, it's polite to wait one or two beats after the partner speaks to offer your response. Don't be afraid to pause during your turn to speak. It shows confidence, thoughtfulness, and poise.

PRACTICE EXITING CONVERSATIONS

IT'S BEEN SO NICE TALKING TO YOU: To avoid monopolizing someone else's time, or being monopolized yourself, look for natural moments to end the conversation on a high note. It's polite to have another task to complete (my friend's just arrived and I have to go meet her, I need to say hello to Jim before he leaves, I need to be getting back). Practice artfully exiting conversations.

Conversation Starters

A few ways to start a conversation.

- **“Hi”**
Simple, it works, and puts pressure on the other person to think of something to say
- **Reference something specific about the surroundings**
Temperature, decor, crowd, sound, smell, etc.
- **Reference something specific about the event**
Meaningful, surprising, long, short, fun, quiet, etc.
- **Reference something specific, and positive, about the person’s appearance**
Fitness, hair, shoes, specific apparel, style, etc.
- **Ask what brought that person here**
How do you know X, how did you find out about this place, etc.
- **Reference something specific, and positive, about what the person is doing**
Looking relaxed in this tense environment, not sweaty despite it being 100 degrees
- **Reference current event or breaking news**
Did you hear [insert celebrity name] died? Doesn’t it seem like a lot of rock stars are dying before 70?
- **Playful banter**
I see you eyeing my ice cream you can only have 1 bite