

IDEAS FOR YOUR FIRST "CONVERSATION PARTNERS" MEETING

1. Find out how to pronounce and spell their name. Show them how to do the same with yours.

2. Ask some background questions:

How long have you been in the U.S.?

Why and how did you come to the U.S.?

Where are you from?

What part of the country?

Large city or rural area?

What is your family like?

What languages do you know?

How much English did you study before you came to the U.S.?

What did you study in your country?

What is your religious background? or

What is the traditional religion of your country?

3. Ask questions about their interests and activities:

What is your favorite food?

What sports do you like to play? Watch?

What do you like about the U.S.?

What do you dislike about the U.S.?

What is your favorite TV show?

What are some ways you like to practice English?

What are your favorite holidays in your country? Here?

4. Find out what particular things they would like to work on during the conversation time.
5. Be informed and willing to talk about current and historical political situations.
6. Be ready to answer questions about American culture.

CONVERSATION TOPICS

To guide international students through aspects of American culture
based on comparison with their own

family	meeting people and making friends
family roles	dress codes for different age groups
roles of men and women	cross-cultural experiences
roles of children	American efficiency or rudeness
marriage customs	school
birth customs	theatre/movies/television
death customs	musical events
polite customs	museums/art galleries
holidays	sporting events
gifts	medical care
birthdays	medicines available
entertaining	food expectations

SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Birthdays

(early in school year, non-threatening)

1. How are birthdays celebrated in your culture?
2. What are the most important birthdays in your culture?
3. How do people in the United States celebrate birthdays?
4. How are you going to celebrate your birthday this year?

Cross-cultural experiences

(later, when students know each other better)

1. What do you miss most about your culture?
2. What experiences have you had in this country (good or bad) because your culture is different from that of the United States?
3. What do you like most about being in the United States?
4. What have been some of the hardest things to get used to in the United States?
5. Are you learning the reasons behind some of these things?
6. How are you resolving the differences between the two cultures?
7. How is your life-style changing as a result of your new environment, and how do you feel about it?

What makes a good CONVERSATION PARTNER?

A S-P-E-C-I-A-L PERSON!

- SENSITIVE** Realize that these men and women were top students in their native language. Be sensitive to their feelings of embarrassment, inadequacy, etc. Watch for non-verbal clues of frustration, and be ready to encourage and reassure.
- PATIENT** Don't be afraid to repeat things often. Have realistic expectations of what your friend can do. (Remember when **you** took a foreign language!)
- ENTHUSIASTIC** Give them genuine and frequent encouragement; however, don't tell them everything is "great" or "wonderful" if it isn't--be selective in your praise. Don't be afraid to correct mistakes. Most students want and expect this.
- CREATIVE** Use your imagination. Your sense of humor can be one of your greatest assets. Think of ways to make tasks into games.
- INFORMED** Find out about your friend's background and culture. Use resources which will help you become a better tutor.
- ADAPTABLE** Be willing to put aside some cultural expectations of the way things "should" be. Be willing to change your agenda, pace, etc. to meet your friend's particular week-to-week needs.
- LOVING** Pray for your friend's salvation and progress. Look for ways to serve him or her outside of your weekly meetings.

A few important points to keep in mind:

Use a normal rate and volume of speaking.

Don't do all the talking. Remember that the goal is for your friend to practice speaking English.

Be aware of your use of slang words and idioms, and be ready to explain them.

Don't try to correct everything at once. Work on one or two things at a time.

Relax and enjoy your time together!

MORE TIPS FOR “CONVERSATION PARTNERS”

1. Areas to be sensitive:

- Primarily, we are called to share Christ, their greatest need!
- They need to sense our real love (not conditional love based upon their response to the Gospel). I Thessalonians 2:8
- Be a friend. (Do I have a close personal international friend, or are they merely “contacts” to me?)
- They need to see how Christ can handle problems of homesickness, pressure, tension, studies. (Am I prepared to counsel them from the Word in these areas?)
- Be a listener. Know how to ask the right questions.
- Be aware that internationals are just like Americans in many more ways than they are different. Their problems may differ in detail but not in kind. Draw parallels between cultures when possible.
- They need a “review and re’eat” approach. Never assume they totally understand after going over the statement once.
- Honesty is the best policy when contacting them. (Am I “sneaky” or open and genuine?)
- Be sensitive to the fact they their desire to please you might be mistaken as positive response or spiritual eagerness...so be patient!
- They have a need for “family life” ...something which host families can help us with. We make the mistake of trying to meet all these needs ourselves as students which Christian families can do better, and get a vision, too.
- They need to get away from campus for fun times, tours, hiking, shopping, etc.
- They have a need for transportation--for them and their friends
- They have a need for fellowship (socials), but in groups and not as a couple. This is the best way to see the difference Christ makes as they observe a group of Christians who love each other.
- Eating together--inviting them to your home or apartment for dinner, having lunch at the cafeteria, treating him/her to some American food--is considered a sign of real friendship in other cultures.
- They have a need to improve their English. Be willing to correct them politely and explain grammar. (But it’s best to ask their permission at the beginning: “Would you like me to help you with your English?”)
- They need to sense your eagerness to learn from them--about cooking, culture, foreign language, even religion.
- Be respectful of their ideas, customs and convictions.
- Do not impose your ideas, customs or convictions on them. Let them ask you similar questions.
- There will be many other needs...so be walking close enough to the Lord so He can point them out to you at the right time.

2. Common mistakes we often make in working with internationals:
- Giving them too much at once...we need to have specific objectives for each appointment.
 - Leading them on, asking for their opinion about our program but never giving them a chance to give it.
 - Coming on too strong...we need a "calm down" approach.
 - Tending to "talk down" to them instead of treating them as equal.
 - Telling them that "we will meet only for a short time," then taking longer; this builds a lack of trust.
 - Not being flexible with my schedule enough to meet internationals on evenings, weekends--times that suit their schedules.
 - When working with internationals, especially orientals, be sensitive to their cultural orientation of "losing face". You may lose them if you bring up their inconsistencies. Just love them, and believe the best.
 - Being in the American "rush habit". Be willing to spend more than one hour with them. Do not get caught in "appointment syndrome".

