

## Socialising (2): Keeping conversations going

**Topic:** Socialising and keeping conversations going

**Aims:**

- To raise awareness of some techniques for maintaining a conversation with a person you have just met;
- To analyse the effect of different types of questions, and to practise making different types of question;
- To come up with and analyse a bank of questions that can be used to keep conversations going;
- To analyse and practise a technique for turn-taking in a conversation.

**Level:** Intermediate (B2) and above

### Introduction

After struggling to break the ice, the next obstacle is to keep the conversation going beyond the initial conversation. For this reason, this lesson aims to provide students with a bank of around 15 questions that they would feel comfortable asking in a conversation with a new acquaintance. They will also learn more general techniques involving different types of questions and the skill of turn-taking. Finally, they will practise all the skills from the lesson in a role-play game.

#### 1. Lead-in: Conversation skills quotes

Divide the class into pairs and give each student one set of Conversation skills quotes. Make sure students know not to show their worksheets to their partners. They work alone to read the quotes and to try to guess the missing words. Make sure they realise that the list of words in the box at the bottom of the page includes words from their partner's quotes, not their own. Encourage students to ask you about the difficult words in the quotes (e.g. *would rather, to grant a request, a bore, worthless, provided (that), breath, to pay sb a compliment, to attend to sth, to attain sth, an institute, to realise sth, to seek to do sth, charisma, to be concerned about sth, a sure way to do sth, lively*).

Students then take turns to read one of their quotes aloud to their partner, saying 'blank' for the missing word. The partner then guesses which of his/her words completes the quote. If they are not sure, they may come back to difficult questions after they have completed the easier ones.

If you have an odd number of students, you will need to have a group of three, where two students both have the same list of quotes.

The purpose of this activity, as well as raising students' awareness of the important issues in the quotes, is to encourage two-way communication and sharing of ideas, so make sure they do not show each other their worksheets and instead solve the problem entirely through co-operation and communication.

When they have finished, check with the class. Go through each quote in turn to make sure everyone fully understands it, and what it can teach them about socialising skills. You could also ask students if they know any similar quotes about conversation skills.

**Answers**

1 story 2 understand 3 talks 4 questions 5 listen 6 interest 7 answer 8 say 9 listen 10 reply 11 communication 12 understand 13 emotions 14 I 15 themselves 16 Why?

**2. Types of questions**

Print and cut up enough copies of the worksheet for students to work in groups of three. Divide the class into groups and distribute the cut-up worksheets to each group.

Students work in their groups to match the six types of questions with the sets of examples and the comments about each type of question.

When you check the answers with the class, elicit at least one more example of each type of question from the class. You could also discuss with the class whether everyone agrees with all the comments. For question tags and statements with questioning intonation, make sure everyone understands the difference between rising (questioning) intonation and falling intonation for statements.

As a follow-up, students turn over all the cards, so they are face-down. They then take turns to turn over one of the larger cards (with the comments). They read the comments aloud to their partners, who have to remember the type of question that the comments refer to and some examples.

**Answers**

See the order of the cards on the worksheet.

**3. Making questions**

Print and distribute the worksheets so that each student has a copy. Students then work through tasks 1–3 in pairs or groups of three. When you go through the answers with the class, make sure everyone fully understands the rules for making question tags and negative questions. Pay particular attention to good intonation.

**Answers**

- 1 a. don't you? b. isn't it. c. wasn't it. d. was it. e. isn't there? f. shouldn't you? g. have you.
  - 2 a. Don't you work in marketing? b. Isn't the music (a bit too) loud? c. Wasn't the opening speech (very) inspiring? e. Isn't there going to be a prize-giving ceremony at the end? f. Shouldn't you tell the organisers that you want to go to the meal? g. Haven't you been to one of these events before?
- Statements (b) and (c) are more natural as questions without words like *a bit*, *too* and *very*.

- Statement (d) doesn't work as a negative question because the statement was already negative and it doesn't make sense as a request for information.
  - Statement (g) was also negative, but it works as a genuine request for information.
- 3 (Suggested answers) a. You work in marketing? d. The journey wasn't too bad? e. There's going to be a prize-giving ceremony at the end? g. You haven't been to one of these events before?

Students work through tasks 4 and 5 in their pairs. When you go through the answers with the class, write students' suggestions on the board. Make sure everyone has a list of at least 15 questions for task 5 which they would be happy to ask at a social event in a conversation with a stranger. This could generate some good discussion: which questions are acceptable / natural and which should you avoid, or save until you know somebody better.

### Suggested answers

- 4
- a. And what if you didn't have children? Where might you relocate to?
  - b. What sports would you do if you had a bit more time?
  - c. If you did decide to start a business, though, what would it be?
  - d. What would your perfect hobby be, if you didn't have to do all those things?
- 5
- Work: What exactly does your job involve? What are you working on at the moment? What's the best thing about your job?
  - Holidays: Have you had a holiday this year? Do you travel a lot for pleasure? Where would you recommend for a beach holiday in your country?
  - Hobbies: What do you do when you're not working? How did you get into that? How do you find the time?
  - Family: Do you have a family? What does your wife do? How old are your kids?
  - Home: So do you live in the city centre? Is it a good place to live? Would you recommend it as a place to live?

### 4. Conversation patterns

Print and distribute the worksheet to each student. Students discuss tasks 1 and 2 in pairs and then share their ideas with the class.

### Answers

- 1 The general technique is to answer a question (1, 2) and to expand on it briefly with one or two sentences (3) before bouncing the question back to the other person (4). The second speaker then has an easy way of continuing the conversation in two ways: firstly by answering (5) and expanding again (6), and secondly by picking up on whatever the first speaker said (7). In each case, the speaker is saying less than he/she could say, to give the other person a chance to ask about it. Of course, this only works if both sides are playing by the rules, but when it works, it can be an extremely effective and enjoyable way of making conversation.
- 2 1d 2b 3e 4a 5b 6e 7c

Students work in the same pairs to continue the conversations (task 3). After a few minutes, ask some volunteers to act out their conversations in front of the class.

**Possible answers**

A: So – which countries have you visited?

B: Well, mostly European countries – Germany, Switzerland, Holland.  
But last year we had an amazing holiday in Cuba.  
What about you? Have you travelled a lot?

A: Not a lot, but I've been to the States a couple of times.  
I worked there when I was a student.  
But tell me about Cuba. What was it like?

**5. Game: Keeping conversations going**

Students work in pairs or groups of three to make conversations, following the instructions on the card. Encourage them to experiment with the conversation patterns from task 1, but also to be flexible where appropriate. The conversations should be as natural as possible. If there are three students in a group, all three should be equally involved in each conversation. They should try to keep going for as long as possible before choosing a new conversation starter from the board.

Alternatively, tell them to swap partners after every two minutes and to start a new conversation with their new partner.

Monitor carefully as they are talking, and be ready to give and elicit feedback on the effectiveness of their skills at keeping conversations going.

**Worksheets - Socialising (2): Keeping conversations going**
**Conversation skills quotes (1)**

Read these quotes carefully to make sure you understand all the words. Ask your teacher about any words you don't understand. Can you guess the missing word in each quote?

1. "Many a man would rather you heard his \_\_\_\_\_ than granted his request."  
(Phillip Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield)
2. "The most basic of all human needs is the need to \_\_\_\_\_ and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them."  
(Ralph Nichols)
3. "Bore, n.: A person who \_\_\_\_\_ when you wish him to listen."  
(Ambrose Bierce)
4. "There is no such thing as a worthless conversation, provided you know what to listen for. And \_\_\_\_\_ are the breath of life for a conversation."  
(James Nathan Miller)
5. "You cannot truly \_\_\_\_\_ to anyone and do anything else at the same time."  
(M. Scott Peck)
6. "There's a big difference between showing \_\_\_\_\_ and really taking interest."  
(Michael P. Nichols, The Lost Art of Listening)
7. "The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my \_\_\_\_\_."  
(Henry David Thoreau)
8. "There are people who, instead of listening to what is being said to them, are already listening to what they are going to \_\_\_\_\_ themselves."  
(Albert Guinon)

Source of most quotes: <http://www.leadershipnow.com/listeningquotes.html>

Now read the quotes aloud to your partner, who has a list of the eight missing words. Your partner will suggest which word goes with which quote. Discuss the task together until you have completed all sixteen quotes.

Here are the missing words from your partner's quotes:

communication	emotions	I	listen	reply	themselves	understand	why?
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## Conversation skills quotes (2)

Read these quotes carefully to make sure you understand all the words. Ask your teacher about any words you don't understand. Can you guess the missing word in each quote?

9. "When people talk, listen completely. Most people never \_\_\_\_\_."  
(Ernest Hemingway)
10. "To listen closely and \_\_\_\_\_ well is the highest perfection we are able to attain in the art of conversation."  
(Francois de La Rochefoucauld)
11. "I only wish I could find an institute that teaches people how to listen. Business people need to listen at least as much as they need to talk. Too many people fail to realise that real \_\_\_\_\_ goes in both directions."  
(Lee Iacocca, Former CEO Chrysler Corporation)
12. "Seek first to \_\_\_\_\_, then to be understood."  
(Stephen R. Covey, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People)
13. "I would say that listening to the other person's \_\_\_\_\_ may be the most important thing I've learned in twenty years of business."  
(Heath Herber, Herber Company)
14. "When I left the dining room after sitting next to Mr. Gladstone, I thought he was the cleverest man in England. But after sitting next to Mr. Disraeli, I thought \_\_\_\_\_ was the cleverest woman in England."  
(A woman when asked her impression of the two English statesmen Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone after dining with them.)
15. "How can you have charisma? Be more concerned about making others feel good about \_\_\_\_\_ than you are making them feel good about you."  
(Dan Reiland)
16. "\_\_\_\_\_ " On my television show, I probably use this word more than any other. It's the greatest question ever asked and it always will be. And it is certainly the surest way of keeping a conversation lively and interesting.  
(Larry King, How to Talk to Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere)

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Here are the missing words from your partner's quotes:

Answer	interest	listen	questions	say	story	talks	understand
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**Types of questions**

<b>Open questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why didn't you come to this conference last year?</li> <li>• Where did you go on holiday this year?</li> </ul>	<p>In theory, these are good for 'opening a conversation up', because there are many possible answers. In practice, questions with why or how are often better at opening up a conversation than questions with where or when, which can often be answered with a single word or phrase.</p>
<b>Closed questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you had a holiday this year?</li> <li>• Do you do any sports?</li> </ul>	<p>In theory, these 'close down the conversation', by allowing a one-word answer: yes or no. In practice, only a very rude person would answer with a single word, so they can actually be very effective for keeping conversations going.</p>
<b>Negative questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hasn't the weather been awful this summer?</li> <li>• Shouldn't you wait for a better offer before you sell your house?</li> <li>• Didn't you use to work in China?</li> </ul>	<p>These questions are useful when you want to express your opinion in a way that shows that you want to involve the other person. As these examples show, they can be used to turn an obvious statement into a discussion, to make an opinion seem less direct and to check a fact that you're not sure of.</p>
<b>Hypothetical questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In an ideal world, what would your dream job be?</li> <li>• So what if money were no object?</li> </ul>	<p>These questions typically include the word 'would', or sometimes might or could. It's also possible to start this type of question with 'what if + past tense'. Questions like this aren't great for starting a natural-sounding conversation, but they're very useful for keeping a conversation going when you have run out of other ideas.</p>
<b>Question tags</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your wife's a doctor, isn't she?</li> <li>• It's been a great party, hasn't it.</li> </ul>	<p>These work in the same way as negative questions, by turning a statement into a question. These are often used to check something we are not sure of, as in the first example, which has rising (questioning) intonation, or simply to invite the other person to respond to your opinion, in which case there is falling intonation, as in a sentence.</p>
<b>Statements with questioning intonation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And there's nothing you can do about it?</li> <li>• You work in pharmaceuticals?</li> <li>• Really?</li> </ul>	<p>These are the easiest questions to make, but they can be a very effective way of checking information and encouraging the other person to expand something he/she said earlier. You can change the focus of the question simply by stressing different words.</p>

## Making questions

- 1. Add question tags to these statements.**
  - a. You work in marketing.
  - b. The music's a bit too loud.
  - c. The opening speech was very inspiring.
  - d. The journey wasn't too bad.
  - e. There's going to be a prize-giving ceremony at the end.
  - f. You should tell the organisers that you want to go to the meal.
  - g. You haven't been to one of these events before.
  
- 2. Turn the statements from (1) into negative questions. What changes do you need to make? Which statement doesn't work as a negative question? Why?**
  
- 3. Which statements from (1) could you say simply with questioning intonation? Which words would you stress?**
  
- 4. Respond to these statements with a hypothetical question to keep the conversation going.**
  - a. No, we're never going to relocate – at least, not while our children are young.
  - b. I don't really have time for sports these days.
  - c. I've thought about starting my own business, but I don't like the idea of the financial risks involved.
  - d. My hobbies? Er ... work, cooking, cleaning and sleeping.
  
- 5. Imagine you are talking to a stranger at a conference. Think of three questions you could ask about each the following topics.**
  - a. Work
    - 
    - 
    -
  - b. Holidays
    - 
    - 
    -
  - c. Hobbies
    - 
    - 
    -
  - d. Family
    - 
    - 
    -
  - e. Home
    - 
    - 
    -

**Conversation patterns**

1. **Look at the following conversations. They both follow the same pattern. What is the speaker doing in each sentence 1–7?**

A: So, do you have a family? Children?	1	A: Do you have time for sports?
B: Well, I'm married, but we don't have children – yet.	2	B: No, not really.
It's actually quite nice not to have children: it means we can see a bit of the world before we settle down.	3	I used to like running, back when I was a student, but it's very time- consuming.
What about you?	4	And you? Are you a sportswoman?
A: Yes, we've got two sons.	5	A: Well, I'm not sure if I'm a sportswoman, but I try to keep fit.
They're wonderful, but I know what you mean about seeing the world: it's very difficult with children.	6	I go to the gym a couple of times a week, and I also play tennis when I can.
So – which countries have you visited?	7	But tell me about your days as a runner. Were you good?

2. **Now match these descriptions to the sentences 1–7. You will need to use two descriptions twice.**

- The speaker bounces the question back to the other person.
- The speaker answers the question.
- The speaker picks up on something the other person said, and asks about that.
- Opening question.
- The speaker expands on the answer – one or two sentences.

3. **Now continue one of the conversations, following the same pattern.**

B: ➤

➤

➤

A: ➤

➤

➤

**Game: Keeping conversations going**

Use the questions you wrote earlier (Making questions, tasks 4 and 5) to have a conversation with a partner. Use the conversation patterns above to help you. Try to keep each conversation going for at least two minutes before you ask the next opening question.

