

## 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.