

Improving Conversation Practice Activities

The local AMVETS has nominated Colby for an award. According to the organization's representative, there will be a nice banquet and some social time before the award presentation. Colby is very honored by the nomination, but he is nervous to speak face-to-face with people he doesn't know very well. In an effort to help, Colby's teacher has advised him to practice using a few public speaking strategies during informal conversations with his family at home.

Now it's your turn:

First, practice having a conversation at the supper table or in the car as you drive to the store.

Concentrate on using the five "W" questions (Who, What, Where, When, Why) as you talk. These are questions that allow the other person in the conversation to speak more openly or fully on the subject.

Avoid asking questions that allow the other person to only answer yes or no. This will slow the conversation and make it more difficult to talk to one another.

Next, watch others as they have conversations. If adults are visiting your house, notice how they focus on each other and share the speaking time. After observing these other people, talk with your family members or friends about what you noticed.

Third, think about ways that you have conversations that are not face-to-face, such as social networking, texting, or speaking on your cell phone. Write a list of the types of questions you use during these communication times. How are these similar or different from face-to-face conversations?

Then, consider the use of electronic communication and video conferencing. How is this different or similar to being in the same place and talking with someone? What ideas do you need to be aware of when speaking to someone else over a computer? What ideas can you take from this type of communication and use during a face-to-face conversation?

Finally, go to the following websites to learn more about ways to improve your communication skills:

<http://public-speaking.in/guide/how-to-have-a-great-conversation-with-anyone>

At this site, you will find an article that lists some great tips to having a "good, meaningful, and entertaining conversation with anyone." It also lists some warnings for things not to do during a conversation.

Starting and maintaining conversations can be challenging at any age. However, there are a few **key strategies** that can help you improve your conversational skill.

1. When starting a conversation

- Introduce yourself
- Listen carefully
- Avoid speaking at the same time as the other person
- Establish eye contact

2. When continuing a conversation

- Maintain polite behavior
- Smile and use non-verbal responses
- Link your comments to the comments of your partner
- Paraphrase what they have said
- Share opinions when appropriate

3. When finishing a conversation

- Mention something that you have learned from the visit
- If you must leave, give a polite reason for leaving
- Say good-bye and that you enjoyed the visit
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*** Remember that conversations are a two-way street!**

Colby spent the week practicing to improve his informal communication skills. He took time to use the five "W" questions with his mom, dad, and sister during suppertime. He even utilized this strategy when he had a video chat with his grandma and grandpa. Colby now feels more confident and better prepared to speak to people he doesn't know at the AMVETS annual banquet and awards night.

Now it's your turn:

First, create a list of different people you have had a conversation with this week. Next, think about each of these people and try to consider what topics each person might find interesting. Thinking about what other people might enjoy talking about is a great strategy to use during informal conversations.

Next, write a list of topics that you find interesting. Knowing what topics you enjoy will allow you to open up and add to conversations with other people. It will also help others get to know you better!

Third, as you talk, really concentrate on listening to the other person. During the conversation, as you get to know them a little better, think about what topics they may be interested in discussing. Then ask questions about these topics.

Fourth, challenge yourself to speak in class discussions this week. It is always easier to talk about what you know. Find opportunities to speak when you are comfortable with the topic.

Fifth, pay attention to examples of bad conversationalists – people who only focus on themselves, people who are distracted by technology, etc. Observe how this type of conversationalist can limit the process of communication.

Finally, go to the following website to learn more about ways to improve your communication skills:

<http://leladavidson.hubpages.com/hub/Top-50-Open-Ended-Questions-for-Sparking-Conversation-With-Kids>

Open-ended questions lead people to speak more fully on subjects and topics during conversations. These open-ended questions tend to develop around the five "W" questions (Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How) rather than closed-questions, which allow people to answer with a simple yes or no. This site lists 50 possible open-ended questions and gives further links to great ways to use open-ended questions. Though many questions are geared towards children, with a little creativity, they can be adapted to other age groups.