

Being a Good Conversationalist



Thinking. Being thoughtful applies across the board, from the conversation topic to the listener's reactions. Ask yourself if it's likely that someone will be interested in the topic before you bring it up.

Listening. Instead of panicking over what to say next, focus on what's being said to you. Really *listen*. Here are some tips for sharpening your listening skills:

- Empty other thoughts from your mind and concentrate on what the person is saying.
- Make eye contact, nod occasionally, and intermittently say, "I see" or "Really?" to indicate that you not only heard but understood what was said.
- Once you've picked up the rhythm of the other person's speech, you'll be able to inject longer confirmations without seeming to interrupt.
- If you *don't* understand something, ask for an explanation, a habit that comes naturally to a good listener.

Interrupting. The only time it's okay to interrupt in the middle of a sentence is when you need to communicate something that honestly can't wait. Even then, precede what you say with "I'm sorry to interrupt" or a variation.

Personal space. A comfortable conversation involves more than just words; it has to take place in a comfortable space. Generally, stand no closer than about eighteen inches apart. Also be conscious of height differences. Stand far enough away so that the other person won't have to look up or down at you.

Body language. Some messages sent from body language are open to interpretation, but others come through loud and clear.

- *Posture when standing or sitting.* Slumping or slouching while speaking to someone conveys laziness, disinterest, and disrespect.
- *Facial expressions.* A smile denotes warmth, openness, and friendliness, but don't overdo it. A frown or furrowed brow suggests angry or worry, even though your words may be positive.
- *Eye contact.* Looking into the other person's eyes shows your interest in the conversation, but try not to stare.
- *Gesturing and fidgeting.* Using your hands to emphasize a point is fine, but gesturing nonstop is distracting.
- *Nodding.* Too much positive head nodding can make you appear overly eager to please, especially in a business environment.
- *Pointing.* Pointing can be misconstrued and also attracts attention to a person who probably doesn't want to be the object of curious glances and stares.