Ohio Program of Intensive English

Gordy Hall 155 www.ohio.edu/convpartners

**Global Conversation Partners**

**Resource Book**

Welcome to Global Conversation Partners! This resource book is designed to help you develop the skills and attitudes necessary to have a successful intercultural relationship. We are pleased that you have chosen to develop a friendship with a person from a different cultural background. Remember, cultural differences do exist, and developing relationships with people who are culturally different requires open-mindedness, respect for the other person, flexibility, the ability to listen without judging the other person, and good humor. Keep a positive attitude and you will be rewarded! There are many topics to talk about with your partner, but remember that the important thing is not **what** you talk about but **how** you approach your partner. If you are committed to understanding each other, you will have a rewarding experience.

General information about the program

1. Conversation partners should meet for **at least one hour each week** at a time and place agreed upon by both partners. You are free to meet for longer or more frequent time periods if you wish.
2. Global Conversation Partners is sponsored the Ohio Program of Intensive English (in the Linguistics Department). If you need assistance at any time during the quarter, do not hesitate to contact us via email to OPIEPartners@ohio.edu or visit the OPIE office in **Gordy 155**.
3. ***Research Projects:*** *If you are working on a research project and you would like your partner to help you, you must obtain their permission.*

If you cannot reach your partner (by phone or e-mail) and/or your partner has not attended two meetings, please send an e-mail to OPIEPartners@ohio.edu so we can fix the situation or find you a new partner.

# **Advice for International Students**

Global Conversation Partners provides a unique opportunity for an international student to develop a friendship with an American.Don’t be afraid to use your English language skills! Ask questions and express yourself. You will succeed in communicating your thoughts, ideas, and feelings. It is important for you as an international student to remember that YOU are the one who suffers from your lack of knowledge of the local culture, society, and ways of doing things. The less you know, the harder everything is for you and the less likely you are to succeed. So, when you have questions, ask them!

**What can you ask?**

* Ask practical questions such as where to get your hair done or where to find the book store
* Ask about opinions and experiences.
* Ask about American culture

***NOTE: Adjusting to another culture***

Most international students experience “culture shock,” part of the normal process of cultural adaptation experienced by individuals who travel to a new culture. This process of adaptation can be viewed in stages:

*Stage 1* ***Initial Excitement*** *– “Wow, this new culture is so interesting!”*

*Stage 2* ***Frustration*** *– “I don’t understand this culture. It is so different from my own. How can I live here? I feel like avoiding people and activities I do not understand. I notice some signs of culture shock.”*

*Stage 3* ***Adaptation*** *– “I feel more comfortable, like I belong here. I act like myself again. I balance my time and effort so that I can have fun, get my work done, and keep myself healthy.”*

*Stage 4* ***Re-entry*** *– “Now that I’m back in my home culture, I realize that I have changed and so have my friends and family. These changes are hard to understand and accept. I may struggle with regaining my sense of belonging here, but I will adapt.”*

If you are having difficulty adjusting to a new culture, this is normal. Talk to your conversation partner or a teacher.

# **Ways to Talk About Miscommunication**

*What can you do or say if you feel that you have a misunderstanding with someone from another culture?*

1. ***You can talk directly to the person right away:***
* “I’m sorry. Did I say (or do) something to upset you?”
* “I didn’t mean to upset you.”
* “I think we misunderstood each other.”
* “In my culture it’s a little different.”
* “I think there’s been a misunderstanding. Can you tell me if I said something that upset you?”
1. ***You can talk directly to the person a few days later:***
* “Do you have a few minutes to talk about what happened the other day?”
* “Can I talk to you about something? I’ve been wondering about what happened a few days ago.”
* “I don’t quite understand why there was a misunderstanding. Can we talk about it?”
1. ***You can explain the situation to a third person and ask for advice:***
* “Something happened to me the other day that I don’t understand. Maybe you can help me understand and tell me what you think I should do.”
* “Can I ask you about something that happened with an American / international student? I don’t know his/her culture well enough to understand.”
* “Why do you think he said that?”
* “What would you do in this situation?”
* “What would most Americans do in this situation?”

Ways to Explain Your Cultural Point of View

* “*In my culture, people usually/often* bow when they greet someone.”
* “*In my culture, people would not* kiss in public.”
* “*In my culture, people are expected to* disagree with each other openly.”
* “*In my culture, people usually don’t* hide their feelings.”
* “*In my culture, people feel uncomfortable* expressing their feelings.”
* “*In my culture, people are not expected* *to* ask questions during class.”

# **Advice for American Partners**

* **When you are (or think you may be) having trouble communicating, talk about the trouble you are having in communicating.** Using phrases such as “I don’t understand that point,” or “I’m not sure how that relates to what you said before,” or “I don’t think I made myself clear, “ or “Let me explain why I’m telling you this,” you can focus your attention on the process of communication between you and try to clear up any confusion.
* **Don’t be put off by an accent.** For some reason, many North Americans erect a sort of mental wall as soon as they hear a foreign accent. Often you can understand if you only make a little extra effort to listen closely.
* **Don’t assume that limited English proficiency implies limited intelligence.** On the basis of this assumption, some people “talk down” to international students, speaking to them as they would to a child. With a moment’s thought you will realize that your partner’s limited proficiency in English, like your own proficiency in your partner’s language, is a sign of limited opportunity to study and practice the language, and not a sign of limited intelligence.
* **Slow down.** Anyone learning a foreign language has trouble keeping up with a native speaker. If your partner says you talk too fast, try to slow down and speak clearly. (It’s hard to do!). Don’t talk louder unless your partner says he has a hearing problem.
* **Learn your partner’s characteristic mispronunciations.** Speakers of any language learn to hear and pronounce certain sounds that do not exist in other languages, so they will virtually always have trouble hearing or producing certain sounds in those other languages. For example, the Spanish language uses a “B” sound where English has a “V.” Many speakers of Oriental languages have difficulty distinguishing the English “L” sound from the “R” sound. If you pay attention, you can easily learn what sounds and words your partner customarily mispronounces, and then you can recognize those sounds or words even though they are not said in the way you would say them.
* **Be helpful.** The thing most learners of a foreign language want and need is a native speaker with whom to practice. Practice with your partner! Answer her questions. Explain grammar or slang she asks about. You’ll learn a great deal about your own language in the process of doing this. You’ll learn that English can be an extremely confusing language, full of irregularities and seemingly irrational uses, spellings, and pronunciations.
* **Be complete and explicit.** Be ready to explain your point in more than one way, and even to explain why you are trying to make a particular point in the first place. Give the background, provide the context, and make clear “where you are coming from.”
* **Avoid slang.** Most slang expressions are confusing to most people who are learning a foreign language. Do not to use them when talking to your partner.
* **Be patient.**
* **Pay attention to your partner’s responses**. You can usually tell whether you have made a mistake or failed to make yourself clear by taking time to notice your partner’s verbal and nonverbal reactions. If you do not know what nonverbal sign reflects puzzlement on your partner’s part, ask her to show you and then be alert for that sign when you are talking.
* **Paraphrase.** After your partner has spoken, but before you begin to make your own comments, restate what you heard your partner say and what you thought he meant. You can say something like this: “As I understand it, you are saying… Is that correct?” Only after he has assured you that you have heard him accurately should you add your comment. This can help avoid situations where you and your partner assign different meaning to the same word or phrase.
* **Ask for verification.** After you have spoken, try to get confirmation that you have been understood. Ask your partner to restate what you have said by saying something like this: “I want to be sure I made myself clear, so would you tell me what you thought I said?” It does not usually work to ask, “Do you understand?” Most people will say “yes” to that question, whether they understand or not.
* **Do not ask questions you would not or could not answer yourself.** If you would not want to tell your roommate about your sex life, for example, don’t ask him about his. If you could not describe your countrymen’s attitudes toward women’s liberation, don’t ask your partner what his countrymen think about it.
* **Analyze communicative behavior**. Learn to be aware not just of what is being said in a communications situation, but also of what is happening in the situation. Another way of saying this is that you can try to be aware not just of the content of the conversation but also of the process. Here are some aspects of the communication process that it helps to watch: Does your conversation partner seem to be paying attention? Are you paying attention? Do you both appear to understand each other’s meanings? Are there feelings such as anxiety, embarrassment, or defensiveness that might be interfering with you efforts to understand each other? If you become aware of the way the communication process works, you will be able to identify breakdowns and try to remedy them.

#  **Basic Topics to Discuss**

1. **Names** spelling, pronunciation, meaning, history
2. **Country, city, town, or village**
	1. Bring a world map or atlas to the first meeting. It is very helpful to show the location of countries and states.
3. **Climate**
	1. How many seasons?
	2. What are the seasons like?
4. **Native language**
	1. How many languages are spoken in your country?
	2. What language is used in schools, government, at home?
5. **Age**
6. **Family**
	1. married or single?
	2. children (ages and names)?
	3. nuclear (mother, father, and children) or extended (mother, father, children, and other relatives)?
	4. Where and with whom does your family live?
	5. How many relatives do you have?
7. **Education and profession**
8. **Major area of study in the US and why**
9. **Leaving home**
	1. How did you travel?
	2. Did you travel alone, with family, or with a friend?
	3. Did anything interesting happen on the trip?
10. **Expectations** Before arriving here, what did you expect the US to be like?
11. **Clothing**
	1. male/female, seasonal, traditional
	2. What do students wear?
12. **Architecture**
	1. Religious buildings, houses, historic buildings, monuments
13. **Work** How do people in your country earn a living?
14. **Recreation**
	1. sports
	2. hobbies
	3. leisure time

# **Further Discussion Ideas**

* Why are you seeking more education? Who or what influenced you to do so?
* How did you decide to come to Ohio University?
* What career do you plan to pursue? How did you choose it? Who, if anyone, influenced you most in choosing the career?
* Describe the inside of your parents’ house. Who lives there? Who visits it? Which rooms do guests enter?
* Talk about the neighborhood where your family lives. Are the houses similar to each other? Are the occupants of more or less that same social class? What kinds of relationships exist among the neighbors? (How often do they talk to or visit each other? On what occasions/ What do they talk about?)
* Who is in charge of your family’s home? Who makes that decisions that affect the entire family? Are the husband’s and the wife’s roles clearly distinct from each other? What are their roles? Are there distinct roles for the male and the female children? Are male and female children valued and treated equally?
* Discuss parties: Have you gone to many parties? How frequently? On what occasions? Who else was there? What usually happens? What are your criteria for a “good” party?
* At what age to people in your country usually marry? How do people decide whom they will marry? After they marry, what kind of relationship do they usually have with their parents? Do they live with them? See them frequently? Ask their advice?
* Tell your partner what stereotype (that is, general image) you have about the group of people (e.g., American, Latin, international student, chemistry major) s/he represents. Discuss the origins of your stereotypes.

***Many differences in attitudes or behavior can create disharmony between people who are roommates. Discuss some of these differences:***

* Different tolerance for noise in the room
* Different sleep and study schedules
* Differences in the amount of privacy that is desired
* Different ideas about he importance of keeping the room clean
* Different ideas concerning visits to your room by members of the opposite sex

# **Gestures**

*In your culture, what gesture do you use to:*

1. call the waiter
2. say “come here”
3. ask someone to wait and not interrupt until you are off the phone
4. show agreement with something your teacher is saying
5. show disagreement with something someone is saying
6. show that you can’t hear the speaker very well
7. show that you don’t know or understand something

*Demonstrate the following gestures to your partner:*

1. I mean YOU.
2. I understand.
3. OK, everything is fine.
4. I’m angry at you.
5. I’m talking about money.
6. I’m hoping for good luck.
7. That person is crazy.
8. That’s no good. Not OK.
9. I don’t know. Or I don’t care.
10. I mean ME.
11. That person is very smart.
12. I’m proud of myself and I did an excellent job.
13. That’s good. We did well.

***Acceptable or Unacceptable?***

*Look at the following list. Are these things acceptable (it is OK) or unacceptable (it is not OK) to do these things in your culture?*

* chewing with your mouth open
* sneezing without covering your nose or mouth
* yawning loudly
* picking your teeth in class after lunch
* eating in the classroom
* putting your feet up on a desk or chair
* burping loudly
* talking while chewing
* picking your nose in class

*Can you think of other unacceptable habits?*

# **What Do You Think?**

Are these statements true or false in the U.S.?

1. When you want to address a teacher in class, you can say, “Teacher” without saying his or her name.
2. If you are not sure if a woman is married, you can use “Ms.” and her last name. “Mr.” is used for married men only.
3. When you are introducing yourself to an employer or teacher, you never give your last name.
4. Teachers usually call students by their last names.
5. If someone introduces himself to you and gives his first name, you can call him by his first name.
6. If you do not understand what someone says, it is often all right to interrupt and ask for an explanation.
7. Americans communicate nonverbally about 10% of the time.
8. At the end of a conversation, sometimes Americans say things like, “We really should get together soon” or “I’ll call you some time.” Does this mean the two people will definitely see each other soon?
9. You have a lunch date with a friend at a restaurant at 12:30 pm. What time should you arrive?
10. You should never look at an older person directly in the eyes when you speak with him/her.

Thanks for joining Global Conversation Partners. We hope you and your partner will enjoy learning about each other’s cultures!