

# How to Have a Conversation with an American

## **S Say two or three sentence answers to questions.**

Many students give only one word answers to questions, but this doesn't encourage conversation. Develop longer answers (3-5 sentences) to the basic questions, i.e., Where are you from?; How long have you been here?; Why did you come to America? Practice these so you can use them comfortably, then your conversations will get off to a good start. Also say your name (what you want them to call you) clearly and maybe even spell or write it. If the American can't understand your name when you first give it, it discourages them from trying to communicate with you from the beginning.

## **P Practice polite phrases.**

Often polite phrases are more difficult grammar, but learn them. Example, "Would you like to go?" or "Would you like something to drink?" Practice these often. Ask your American friend to let you know if you could have said something more polite. This gives them the freedom to help you.

## **E Express interest in the other person.**

Ask the questions back to the American. If they ask, "What is your name?" ask them, "What is your name?" Sometimes you might need to change the question slightly. For example if they ask, "Where are you from?" ask them "Have you lived in Missouri all your life?" If you ask them questions they will feel you care and will be more interested in you. You will stretch your conversation out longer and both of you will be more satisfied. Often the American is more afraid of you than you are of them.

## **A Ask questions.**

There are three types of questions you should learn:

A) **Questions and statements for further learning** – Teach questions like:

1. How do you spell that?
2. What does (word or phrase) mean?
3. Please repeat that.
4. I didn't understand that; could you say it differently.
5. What is that?

B) **Questions for conversation** – Develop questions to ask others to keep the conversation going. You have a responsibility to keep the conversation going. If this is left up to the American partner they will soon feel like a policeman interrogating you. This stifles the relationship. Explore your interest and passions and develop a list of questions to use to see if others have the same interest. Also develop questions to draw out other people's interest and passions. Usually a good conversation is one where the people find things in common to talk about.

C) **Questions for learning about culture** – Ask questions about what you see and hear that is different from your culture. Also try to discover why it is different without making judgments of whether it is good or bad. If you are always saying America is bad, the American will soon withdraw from the relationship.

## **K Keep trying to learn.**

Don't say "I don't speak English" or "My English is bad". Instead say: "I'm learning English." This will encourage other Americans to talk with you. Most students try to be humble by saying their English is bad, but the American will think I won't be able to talk with them. By saying, "I'm learning English" the American will think; maybe I can talk with them.