

Do This, Not That

The following material was compiled by Laura Golden, ODT, through common sources and personal experience. Some of this material has been used in Conversation 101 classes offered by Pathways to Independence. Reproduction of this material is approved. Laura Golden has asked that if reproducing or using the information outside of Pathways to Independence (St. Louis, MO), that her name not be removed and she request a donation be made to:

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Thank you.

Do This, Not That

General Rules

- Do not interrupt conversations
- Address a friend by his or her name
- Be polite
- Show interest in others, e.g., ask questions about the other person's day and his or her interests
- Use appropriate voice volume
- Do not invade the personal space of others (arm's length between you and the other person)
- Keep your hands to yourself unless you are shaking hands or it is a person who is comfortable with you hugging him or her
- If in a group, bring up a subject everyone can talk about
- Make sure your comments are age-appropriate, audience-appropriate, and not offensive to others
- Be aware of your body language and that of others
- Ask questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer
- Give the other person time to think/speak
- Use your 5 "W"s to keep the conversation going
 - Who**...are you getting together with this weekend?
 - What**...will you be doing for your birthday?
 - When**...is Jimmy Buffet coming to St. Louis again?
 - Where**...are you going on vacation this year?
 - Why**...is The Fox is a great place to see a show?
 - When appropriate, tie your questions to something the other person just said.
- Be an active listener
- Ask questions, but do not overwhelm the person with too many questions
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification of directions or a topic

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Conversations

Starting the Conversation:

- Do not stop someone to talk if they are busy, in a hurry, or looking at his or her watch
- Don't interrupt another conversation
 - If it is REALLY important and you MUST interrupt, say "excuse me" and apologize to both people for interrupting
 - When they acknowledge you and indicate it's all right to speak, start by saying "thank you"
- Look at the person or persons that you want to talk with
- Address the people by their name
- Stand at least arm's length away from everyone
- If joining an existing conversation, wait until there is a pause in the conversation for you to start talking and interject with something related to what they are talking about.
- Try to add information to the conversation

During the Conversation:

- Always look at the people. Be aware of their body language and facial expressions (if they look bored, uninterested, confused, annoyed, or uncomfortable, end or change the conversation)
- You may change topics only when people are finished speaking on that subject
- When you change a topic it should usually be related to what you were speaking about earlier or something that everyone in the conversation is interested in
- Ask questions about the topic
- Add information to the topic
- Be animated by using gestures and facial expressions

Ending the Conversation:

- Make sure everyone has had a chance to talk
- Use closing expressions, like "I see that the event is starting"
- Complement the other person. "You had really good ideas. It was good talking with you"
- Thank the other person, "thanks for sharing with me"
- Use a final closing statement like, "O. K., see you later"
- Close the conversations with a handshake

Conversation with a new person:

- Pay attention to the person's body language and attitude (whether to approach or walk away)
- Smile and introduce yourself
- Ask them what their name is
- Approach the person with a conversation topic in mind
- Ask them about their interests
- At end of conversation, say "it was nice to meet you"
- Could schedule a future time to meet up with them or ask if you will see them at another event

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General Topics to Avoid

(Unless You Know That Your Audience is OK with Discussing the Topic)

- Politics
- Religion
- Sex
- Health Problems
- Family Problems
- Problems that your friends have
- Money/The Economy
- Difficulty Finding Work
- Jokes about any of the above, races, cultures, social class

Inappropriate Topics in Different Situations

- Work
 - How you do not like work, your boss, or your coworkers
 - Gossiping about others at work
 - How much money you or others at work make
 - Offensive statements or jokes about others including sexual topics
- PTI
 - Topics that are not of interest to others at the event
 - Topics that others at the event do not know much about
 - Try and keep conversation topics geared towards the interests of your peers
 - Gossip about other participants
- Public Places
 - Health problems
 - Personal problems
 - Controversial topics
 - Offensive jokes
- With Strangers
 - Your life story
 - Personal information
 - Health problems
 - Personal problems
 - Controversial topics
 - Offensive jokes

Using Humor

1. Evaluate the situation. Is this a good time and place for humor?
2. Evaluate the speaker. Read his or her body language. Interpret his or her facial expression. Would he or she appreciate humor at this time? Would he or she be offended by a joke?
3. Is the subject of the humor appropriate?
4. Be sure the humor was taken correctly.

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Phone Calls

- Timing
 - Don't call too early (before 9 a.m.) or too late (after 9 p.m.)
 - Find out when the other person is available or like to talk on the phone
 - Do they like talking on the phone every day or do they only like to talk on it every few days?
- Introduce yourself
- State who you are asking for
- Have conversation topic(s) in mind and ready to be talked about
- Be friendly
- Smile
 - It makes you sound more cheerful on the phone
- Be respectful
 - Especially if the person lives with someone else and the other person answers the phone
- End the conversation when there is a lot of silence
 - Examples: "I have to go now," "It was great talking to you," "Lets catch up again soon"
- Leaving message
 - State your name
 - State who you are leaving the message for if you called a number shared by multiple people
 - Don't make it seem like they MUST call you back immediately
 - Tell them to call back at their convenience
 - Leave your phone number slowly and repeat it

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Getting Together

Inviting Others to Get Together

- Can ask in person, through email, text message or by telephone
 - Use skills from General Rules, Initiating a Conversation, or Phone Calls cheatsheet
- Have an activity in mind
- Make sure activity you are inviting person to is something you both like
- Have a date or two in mind for you to hang out
- Make sure to establish date, time, and location before ending conversation
- If you do not have the other person's phone number, ask for it
 - Call a day before to make sure the other person can still get together
 - If you need to cancel, make sure to call and let other person know as soon as you know

Declining an Invitation

1. Listen to the invitation before you respond.
2. Say, "(Name), I am very sorry."
3. Provide at least one good reason why you can't attend the event.
4. Thank the person for thinking of you.
5. Share that you would appreciate a similar invitation in the future.
6. Thank the person again.

Example: "John, I'm sorry that I can't attend this Saturday because I have work. Please think of me the next time you're planning a party. I'd love to come."

* If you don't want to be invited to such an event, skip parts 5 & 6. It's a subtle way to let the person know you're not interested.

** If you're invited to something that does not interest you, state honestly that it is not something that you like to do.

Do This, Not That

Manners While Eating

- Be polite and courteous
- If you need to leave the table, ask to be excused
- Do not yell across the table
- Wait until everyone has their food before you start eating
- Do not reach across others, ask for item to be passed
- Do not talk with food in your mouth
- Be patient and courteous to your server/host
- Use a napkin
- If you do not like the food that another person is eating, do not express disgust with it
- Do not ask to eat other's food
 - Only try other's food if they ask if you would like some of their food
- Do not ask others if they are done with their food and if you can finish it for them

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Tips for Active Listening

- **Face the speaker.**
 - Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.
- **Maintain eye contact**
 - to the degree that you all remain comfortable.
- **Minimize external distractions.**
 - Turn off the TV. Put down your book or magazine, and ask the speaker and other listeners to do the same.
- **Respond appropriately to show that you understand.**
 - Murmur (“uh-huh” and “um-hmm”) and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as “Really,” “Interesting,” as well as more direct prompts: “What did you do then?” and “What did she say?”
- **Focus solely on what the speaker is saying.**
 - Try not to think about what you are going to say next. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes her point.
- **Minimize internal distractions.**
 - Focus your attention on the speaker and not your own thoughts.
- **Keep an open mind.**
 - Wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking.
- **Avoid letting the speaker know how you handled a similar situation.**
 - Unless they specifically ask for advice, assume they just need to talk it out.
- **Even if the speaker is launching a complaint against you, wait until they finish to defend yourself.**
 - The speaker will feel as though their point had been made. They won’t feel the need to repeat it, and you’ll know the whole argument before you respond.
- **Engage yourself.**
 - Ask questions for clarification, but wait until the speaker has finished. That way, you won’t interrupt their train of thought. After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn’t misunderstand. Start with: “So you’re saying...”

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Conflict Resolution

1. Evaluate the situation. Is this a good time and place for your interaction?
2. Evaluate the speaker. Read his or her body language. Interpret his or her facial expression.
3. Make eye contact with the person.
4. Be pleasant towards the person. They are more likely to respond positively if you are pleasant.
5. Ask the other person if they would like to sit down with you in a comfortable place so you can talk privately, but maintain a safe distance.
6. Listen calmly and actively to what he has to say.
7. Repeat what they have said so they know you are listening.
8. Express your point of view calmly and factually.
9. Brainstorm some solutions together. Look at the consequences of each choice. Is it probable that the problem would be better or worse with that solution? Work together to find a solution acceptable to both parties. Find a way both parties can "win" some of what they want.
10. Choose a solution.
11. Make an agreement and keep your word. Who will do what? When will they do it and for how long? You can also build in agreed upon consequences, if either party breaks the agreement.
12. Take ownership and responsibility for your part of the agreement.

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Dating

Asking Out on a Date/ Asking for Phone Number

- Avoid cheesy pick-up lines
- Say something like “I really enjoyed getting to know you and would love to hear more about X and get to know you better”
- Don’t demand it
- Try to accommodate to the other person’s schedule if you are asking the other person out
- Try and pick an event/activity of interest for both of you
 - This is where paying attention during the conversation comes in handy!
 - For the 1st date, doing an activity gives you more things to talk about and fills in the silent times

Date

- Be respectful
 - No phone with other people unless it is an emergency
 - Offer to pay the bill for both of you
- Be chivalrous
 - Hold the door open for the other person
 - Say “please” and “thank you”
- Have topics for discussion ready to go in case you have dead space in your conversation
 - Ask and use open-ended questions to keep conversation going and give you more to work with
- Avoid touchy subjects the first few dates - May offend the person or put him/her on the defensive
 - Past Relationships
 - Sex and feelings
 - Embarrassing and too personal on a first date
 - Talking only about you
 - Come across as egotistic, self-centered, and insecure
 - Every detail about work
 - Religion
 - Politics
 - Can cause you two to disagree rather than having a fun, enjoyable date
 - Marriage and Children
 - Too soon!
 - Unpleasant topics or people
 - Don’t complain about people and things you do not like
 - Makes you seem like a negative person
 - Money
 - Don’t talk about how much you have or don’t have
 - Bad Habits
- Around Others
 - Avoid public displays of affection
 - Avoid inappropriate comments that are meant for only you two

If both of you are in PTI, events are for interacting with everyone, not for dates