

Cross-Cultural Education & ESOL
(English for Speakers of Other Languages)



Conversation Partners



NHTI

Concord's Community College

Welcome to the Conversation Partners Program

Use this handbook as a guide and resource.

Purpose of the Conversation Partners Program

The goal of the Conversation Partners Program is to facilitate cultural exchange between native English-speaking students with non-native English-speaking students outside of the classroom environment and thereby promoting cross-cultural communication and maintaining a friendly environment at NHTI— Concord’s Community College. For the non-native English speakers, the Conversation Partner Program is an opportunity to meet Americans, learn more about American culture, and practice their spoken English. For native English speakers, the Conversation Partners Program provides an opportunity to meet people from different countries and to learn more about different cultures.

How to Get Started

Fill out a sign-up form and return it to the ESOL Coordinator in Sweeney 301. Include your full name, school email, phone number, and the times when you are available for your conversation meeting. We will use your email and phone number to contact you. Please provide a school email and the phone number you can be reached at during the day. Use “Comments” section to state your interests and requests. We try to accommodate all requests; however, not all special requests can be accommodated.

Your Meeting

After you submit your conversation partner form, we will contact you to let you know when your meeting will take place. Please respond either by phone or email to confirm your availability. The day before your appointment, we will call you to remind you. Please arrive on time for your conversation meeting. Check-in is in the office of Cross-Cultural Education and ESOL, Room 301 in Sweeney. We will bring you and your partner to a conference room on NHTI's campus. **You should not change the meeting location for any reason.**

Your meeting will be forty-five minutes to one hour long. Please be mindful of the time limit. At the end of your meeting, please check in with the ESOL office to let them know how your meeting went.

If you are unable to come to your scheduled meeting, please call as soon as possible to cancel. When one partner cancels, we try to find a substitute instead of canceling the meeting. In this case, we call students asking if they can attend a meeting on a short notice. If you cancel or do not come for the scheduled meeting, we will contact you after all other participants have their turn.

If you have concerns because you have not been contacted, please feel free to contact us anytime by calling the ESOL office at 271-7724 or emailing nberlin@ccsnh.edu.

“The Conversation Partners project helped me see a part of the world through the voice of someone who lived it. “

Zoe Eldridge, Human Services

Tips for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

- Be an **active listener**. Be sensitive to various meanings of silence, attitudes, and resistance, or non-comprehension of ideas.
- **Be patient**. Give your conversation partner time to respond. If you do not understand a phrase or a word your partner is using, let him/her know and ask for clarification.
- Maintaining **eye contact** in American culture generally signifies that you are interested in what the person is saying. If you look down or away from a person rather than meeting his or her gaze, you are considered to be distracted or uninterested in him or her. Also, if you neglect to make eye contact with a person, you may be thought to lack self-confidence. However, in many cultures throughout the world, direct eye contact is much less common and even considered inappropriate.
- **Be direct**. Do not assume that the other person has the same background information that you do.
- Don't be afraid of **silence**. Your partner needs time to process what you have said and formulate an answer. English is a fast-paced language, and American speakers are frequently uncomfortable with pauses that last more than a few seconds. However, there is a great deal of variation in acceptable pause times from one language to another.
- Sit with **good posture**. If you don't know what to do with your hands, keep them folded on your lap. Avoid crossing your arms in front of your chest.

- Do not raise **your voice**. Speaking louder does not increase a person's comprehension. However, you may need to speak up if you are shy and soft-spoken.
- Speak at a **natural speed**. Speaking too slowly could be insulting. Slow down only when absolutely necessary. Your partner will probably not understand everything, which provides an opportunity to practice asking for clarification. If you are asked to repeat something, repeat your exact words. Then you can offer a paraphrase if there is still misunderstanding.
- **Paraphrase** to ensure that you have understood what your partner meant to say. Repeat back what you have heard and/or get your partner to repeat back what he/she has understood.
- **Give feedback**. This affirms that you have understood properly and gives your partner a chance to correct or confirm what you have heard.
- Be aware of how your own assumptions may affect what you perceive to be hearing.
- **Let go of your own viewpoint** and try to see things from your partner's perspective.
- Don't jump to conclusions: **suspend your judgment and reactions**. Instead, ask questions that may help resolve misunderstanding.
- Be aware of **abbreviations** and **slang** since they can be confusing to non-native speakers. This does not mean that you should not use them; just understand that a non-native speaker might not understand what they mean. Be prepared to explain their meanings.

Policy Guidelines for Conversation Partners

1. Silence and put away your cell phones for the duration of the conversation with your partner. Do not text and make calls during the conversation.
2. Respect one another. While differences of opinion may occur, it is the responsibility of all parties to be mutually respectful of each other's opinions and ideas.
3. The Conversation Partners Program is not an opportunity for you to promote personal, political, or religious agendas. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to share and learn about another culture.
4. No recording devices of any kind may be used during the conversation.
5. Appropriate behavior must be exhibited at all times.
6. The ESOL Office will not share your personal information with your conversation partner. Use good judgment when sharing any personal information.
7. Any type of violation of the campus rules will be subject to college review and disciplinary policies.
8. Any type of mention of harm or threat or personal intent to harm another will lead to immediate college review and disciplinary policies. Notifications may be made to Security and any other sources deemed important to have the right to know.

9. Abuse of substances that inhibit judgment during the Conversation Partners Program is prohibited. Being intoxicated while at school is unprofessional and will lead to the immediate action of dismissal from the activity.
10. If there is any safety concern or inappropriate behavior issue, end the conversation immediately and contact the ESOL Office as soon as possible by calling 603-271-7724 or seeing Natasha Berlin, ESOL Coordinator. The ESOL office is located in Sweeney, third floor, Room 301. If no one is available, contact Campus Security at 271– 6310.
11. All students are expected to follow the college’s student code of conduct. Please see the Student Handbook for more information.

“Thank you for giving a chance to join with American speakers. I got an opportunity to build up confidence while speaking with American people without hesitation.”

Karna Gurung, General Studies

“I am a new student and the program helped me to meet people on campus.”

Alex Martinez, General Studies

“I’ve never talked to anyone from a different culture because I was too shy. After talking to my partner, I was happy that I got to break that shy barrier.”

Jon Sinclair, Human Services

Conversation Topic Ideas

The best way to succeed as a Conversation Partner is to be interested in learning from your partner. Avoid being the only one who asks questions. This should be a give-and-take process between native and non-native speakers. Be aware that socially acceptable topics for discussion may differ from culture to culture.

Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Talk about your home, the members of your family, your upbringing, etc.
- Compare and contrast birthday traditions, coming of age celebrations, marriage and wedding customs, funeral rites, etc.
- Inquire about special food, clothing, rituals, and beliefs
- Discuss and/or demonstrate American vs. other culture behaviors for greeting, visiting, tipping, etc.
- Ask whether your partner is experiencing culture shock and how he/she is adapting to life in the United States
- Tell each other about which places (countries, cities, and tourist spots) you have visited
- Discuss common holiday observations and religious celebrations
- Discuss what food is served during a traditional/typical breakfast, lunch, or dinner
- Discuss what special foods are prepared on holidays, birthdays, wedding

- Talk about rituals, etiquette/manners, eating utensils, etc. associated with food
- Discuss language and translation challenges, alphabets and writing (script or character) pronunciation, grammar, etc.
- Talk about how various emotions are expressed and which of them are culturally and socially acceptable or permitted
- Compare non-verbal communication (movements of the hands and body), symbolism of clothing accessories, etc.
- Talk about primary and secondary schooling, the ages when children begin their education, the length of the school day and year, teaching methods, and preparation for college
- Discuss college life, the lecture system, typical course assignments, workload in your degree program or your favorite course
- Discuss what people enjoy doing as a pastime when not working or studying
- Introduce each other to favorite hobbies
- Explain the basics of popular national sports
- Bring objects to encourage conversation. Try objects from trips, vacation photos, cookbooks with pictures, or handicraft.

Conversation Partners FAQs

What does a conversation partner do?

A conversation partner agrees to meet for about forty-five minutes to one hour, one-on-one with another student whose native language is different from his/her own, at a mutually convenient time and in the safe environment of NHTI facilities in order to talk, listen, and learn.

How will my partner benefit from our conversation?

By meeting with your partner you can help him/her learn about your cultural traditions and values.

How will I benefit from our conversation?

By meeting with your partner you can learn about his/her cultural traditions and values. Together, you will explore differences and similarities between cultures.

What if I cannot pronounce my partner's name?

Your partner may have just as much trouble with your name as you do with his/hers. Teach your partner how to say and spell your name and ask your partner to help you say and spell his/hers. Write it down. Practice saying the name several times. Do not be embarrassed to ask your partner to repeat as many times as it takes.

Am I expected to correct mistakes and pronunciation?

It is not your role to correct your partner's mistakes. Asking for clarification will encourage your partner to rephrase, repeat what was said more clearly, or ask you for help in discovering what caused the miscommunication.

What do I do if my partner uses a word or a phrase that I don't understand?

Let your partner know if you don't understand some word or a phrase he/she uses. You can ask your partner to explain the meaning of the word/phrase as well as write it down.

Conversation Partners Program is completely voluntary. Many students have found the experience of meeting new people and sharing their culture to be very rewarding.

“This was my first experience meeting someone from another culture and talking with them for an extended period of time. We had a wonderful conversation.”

Donna Ames, Human Services

“I did enjoy meeting with the native English speakers. It was a good opportunity to meet local students, and I improved my English speaking skills. I also feel more comfortable and confident talking with Americans now.”

Kookhee Ma, General Studies

“It was a good experience; I think we learned some things from each other.”

Luke A. Cochran, Criminal Justice

Thank You!

Thank you for participating in our program. If you wish to participate again next semester, please send an email to nberlin@ccsnh.edu.

If you have any suggestions on how this handbook could be improved, please let us know. Share your experience with us so we can continue to improve and promote the program.



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