

ESOL

English for Speakers
of Other Languages



CONVERSATION PARTNERS HANDBOOK

ESOL Office
NHTI – Concord's Community College
Learning Commons, Room 130
31 College Drive, Concord, New Hampshire 03301
603-230-4000 | www.NHTI.edu

Welcome to the Conversation Partners Program!

Purpose

The goal of this program is to facilitate cultural exchange between native English-speaking students with non-native English-speaking students outside of the classroom environment, thereby promoting cross-cultural communication and maintaining a friendly environment at NHTI. For the non-native English speakers, this program is an opportunity to meet Americans, learn more about American culture, and practice spoken English; for native English speakers, it provides an opportunity to meet people from different countries and to learn about different cultures.

Getting Started

Fill out a sign-up form and return it to the ESOL Office in the Learning Commons, Room 130. Include your name, school email, daytime phone number, and the times and days when you are available to participate. We will use your email and phone number to contact you. Use the "Comments" section to state your interests and requests. We try to accommodate requests when possible.

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

Conversation Partners FAQs

What does a conversation partner do?

A conversation partner agrees to meet for about 45-60 minutes one-on-one with another student whose native language is different from their own at a mutually convenient time and in the safe environment of NHTI facilities to talk, listen, and learn.

How will my partner benefit from our conversation?

You can help your conversation partner learn about your cultural traditions and values.

How will I benefit from our conversation?

Your conversation partner can teach you about their cultural traditions and values. Together, you will explore the differences and similarities between your 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 theirs. Teach them how to say and spell your name, and ask them to

help you say and spell theirs. Write it down, and practice saying the name several times. Do not be embarrassed to ask your partner to repeat it 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. By instead asking for clarification, you will encourage them to rephrase, repeat what was said more clearly, or ask you for help to discover 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 do not understand a word or a phrase they use. You can ask your partner to explain the meaning of the word/phrase and write it down.

Your Conversation

After you submit your form, we will contact you via email to let you know when your conversation will take place. Please respond either by phone or email to confirm your availability.

The day before or morning of your conversation, we will contact you to remind you.

Please arrive on time for your conversation meeting. Check-in is in the ESOL Office in the Learning Commons, Room 130. We will bring you and your partner to a conference room on NHTI's campus. You should not change this location for any reason.

Your conversation will be 45-60 minutes long. Please be mindful of the time limit. At the end of your conversation, check in with the ESOL Office to let them know how your conversation went.

If you are unable to attend your scheduled conversation, call the ESOL Office as soon as possible to cancel. When one partner cancels, we try to find a substitute instead of canceling the conversation. We will attempt to contact other students asking if they can attend a conversation in your place. If you cancel or do not come for the scheduled conversation, we will contact you again only after all other participants have a turn.

If you have concerns because you have not been contacted, please contact us anytime by calling Rosie Smith at 603-271-6484 x 4410 or emailing rhughessmith@ccsnh.edu.

Tips for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Be an active listener. Be sensitive to various meanings of silence, attitudes, resistance, and non-comprehension of ideas.

Be patient. Give your partner time to respond. If you do not understand a phrase or a word, ask them for clarification.

Maintain eye contact. In American culture, this signifies that you are interested in what the person is saying. If you look down or away rather than meet their gaze, you are considered to be distracted or uninterested. If you do not make eye contact, you may be thought to lack self-confidence. However, in many cultures, direct eye contact is much less common and can be considered inappropriate.

Do not be afraid of silence. Your partner needs time to process what you have said and formulate an answer. The English language is fast-paced, and American speakers are frequently uncomfortable with pauses that last more than a few seconds. There is a great deal of variation in acceptable pause times from one language to another.

Sit with good posture. You may want to keep your hands 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. You may need to speak up if you are shy or soft-spoken.

Speak at a natural speed. Speaking too slowly could be insulting. 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 they 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 assumptions affect what you perceive to hear.

Try to understand things from your partner's perspective and viewpoint.

Suspend your judgment and reactions. Ask questions to 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.

Conversation Topic Ideas

The best way to succeed as a conversation partner is to be interested in learning from your partner. This is 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.

- Talk about your home, your family, and your upbringing.
- Compare and contrast birthday traditions, celebrations, marriage and wedding customs, funeral rites, etc. Discuss what special foods are prepared on holidays, birthdays, and weddings.
- Discuss common holiday observations and religious celebrations.
- Ask 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 they are adapting to life in the United States.
- Tell each other about the places you have visited.
- Discuss what food is served during a traditional/typical breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Talk about the 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 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, the workload in your degree program, and your favorite course.
- Discuss what people enjoy doing when they are not working or at school. Introduce your partner to your favorite hobbies.
- Explain the basics of popular national sports.
- Bring objects to encourage conversation. Try objects from trips, vacation photos, cookbooks with pictures, or handicrafts.

Policy Guidelines for Conversation Partners

1. Silence and put away your cell phones for the entire 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. This program is not an opportunity for you to promote personal, political, or religious agendas. It is an opportunity for you to share and learn about another culture.
4. No recording devices 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 violation of campus rules will be subject to college review and disciplinary policies.
8. Any mention of harm, threat, or personal intent to harm another will lead to immediate college review and disciplinary policies. Officials will inform security and other sources deemed important.
9. Abuse of substances that inhibit judgment during the program is prohibited 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 603-271-6484 x4410 or seeing Rosemarie Hughes-Smith, ESOL coordinator . The ESOL office is located in the Learning Commons, Room 130. If no one is available, contact Campus Security at 603-271-6310.
11. All students are expected to follow the college's student code of conduct. Please see the Student Handbook for more information.

"This experience helped me realize that no matter where we come from, or our maiden language, we all have things in common, triumphs and tribulations, and the desire to overcome and succeed."

– **Brett Colon**, Dental Hygiene

"The conversation partner program encouraged me to make connections with people outside of my circle of friends. I liked how we did not have any topic in particular to discuss and we able to talked about anything. It was great to learn about another culture and tradition."

– **Puja Patel**, General Studies

"My partner and I were able to discuss a wide variety of topics and find a number of things in common."

– **Alexandra MacDougall**

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

– **Zoe Eldridge**, Human Services

"Conversation Partners offers students an unique opportunity to share each other's country and culture. From my conversations, there are countries that I hope to have the chance to visit and explore. I also have a new friendship from the experience."

– **Sue Caviello**, Addiction Counseling

Thank You

Thank you for participating in our program. If you wish to participate next semester, send an email to rhughessmith@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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