Conversation Partner Program
Tips and Guidelines

When to meet

- Meet with your partner for at least 20 – 40 minutes every week.
- Be respectful and responsible. If you have to cancel a meeting, contact your partner before the meeting. Reschedule as soon as possible.

Where to meet

- Meet in a public place on campus such as a lounge, cafeteria, or the Crossroads. Meeting at the same time and place every week is easiest, but you decide what works best for you.
- Do activities together. For example, you may wish to go to Koret and play basketball, go to a restaurant, or check out student events, if you both like to do that.

Discussion Ideas

- Get together to relax, talk and share ideas on any subjects that interest both of you. If you both agree, you can practice another language in addition to English. Remember, your partner is not a tutor.
- Use conversation exercises to facilitate your meetings. We have some exercises that you can use to add variety to your conversations.
**Discussion Tips**

- **Be patient.** English is an “impatient” language. 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 time from one language to another. Give your partner time to respond.

- **Repeat and rephrase.** If your partner does not look like they understand you, repeat what you just said. If they still seem confused, try to find a way to rephrase what you just said using different words and/or simpler grammar. Talking slower may help. **Talking louder does not.**

- **Focus on key words.** Even the most advanced nonnative speaker doesn't understand 100% of what is being said. Instead, what students hear are key words. Knowing that, you can emphasize the most important information, slowing down for the main ideas.

- **Don't overcorrect.** Resist the urge to correct everything that the students say incorrectly. Consider the idea of comprehension versus perfection. Can you understand what the student is trying to say? Let them speak, and when they are finished, you may gently remind them of a few of their mistakes.

**Can no longer participate**

- If you must drop out of the program during the semester, tell your partner and contact cpp@usfca.edu so someone else can be paired with your partner.

**Questions??**

Contact the CPP office at 415-422-6862 or cpp@usfca.edu

if you have any questions or problems.
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Activity 1: Getting Acquainted

Find out the following information about each other. Use the box, "Useful Language" to help you make questions accurately.

**Useful Language**

* Asking for Personal Information:
  - What's your first name/last name/nickname?
  - When is your birthday?
  - Where were you born?
  - Are you married/single/divorced?
  - How many brothers/sisters/children do you have?
  - What do you do?
  - What other language(s) do you speak?

Other topics for questions:

  - Places you have lived
  - Hobbies you have
  - Plans you have
  - Hopes for the future
  - Previous education
  - Previous jobs
Activity 2: Important Life Events

Talk about important events (experiences) you have had in your life. Use the box, "Useful Language" to help you make questions accurately.

Useful Language

What was the event?
When did it happen?
Where did it happen?
How did you feel at the time?
How do you feel now about it?
Why is it important to you?
Activity 3: Family Trees

Talk about your families. Use the box, "Useful Language" to describe your family relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Useful Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Topics:

Where does he/she live?
How old is he/she?
What does he/she do?
How has family life changed in your country since your parents were your age?
What are the advantages and disadvantages (good things, bad things) of living with your family?
**Activity 4: Clothing**

Talk about the different ways people dress. Consider the different clothes for different activities, and also for different ages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do People Wear…</th>
<th>in your country</th>
<th>in the United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the supermarket?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To a restaurant?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the movies?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home, to sleep?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do teachers dress in your country?
What clothing would you wear indoors in your country, but never outside in public?
What has surprised about American clothing customs?
Is there any clothing from your country that you will not wear in public in the United States?
Are there things you have seen people wear in the United States that you would never wear in your country?
How are the clothing customs between your countries similar or different?
**Activity 5: Holidays**

Talk about special celebrations and holidays in your country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do People Celebrate ...</th>
<th>in your country</th>
<th>in the United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The beginning of the new year?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The beginning of a new season (spring, summer, fall, or winter)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An important religious event?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An important historic event?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's Day; Father's Day, Grandparent's Day?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What holiday or custom do you most enjoy?  
What holiday custom have you learned that is from a different culture?  
What holiday custom from your own culture have you introduced to a person from another culture?  
How do you celebrate birthdays?  
For which holidays do you send greeting cards or give gifts?

Activity 6: Health and Illness

Talk about the different ways people treat common illnesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Do People Do For…</th>
<th>in your country</th>
<th>in the United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fever?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rash?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back pain?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toothache?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleeding?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A broken bone?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your country can children go to school if they have a fever, cough, or a rash?
In your culture are there plants or foods you use to help you get well or keep you from getting sick? Describe.
In your culture to people ever pray, change, or perform rituals when someone is sick? Explain.
Do American doctors interact the same way with their patients as doctors in your country?
Has anything surprised you about the way Americans treat sickness?

Activity 7: Food

Talk about differences in food and eating habits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are Some Foods That are...</th>
<th>in your country</th>
<th>in the United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taboo foods?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not taboo but not often eaten?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite main dishes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite desserts?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite snacks?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite breakfast foods?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorite holiday foods?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What food(s) would you never eat because of religious or family beliefs?

When you were a child what food did you refuse to eat that you now eat?

What new food have you most recently learned to eat?

What is your favorite food from your own culture?

What is your favorite American food?

What American food don't you like?

From Dresser, N. (1993). Our Own Stories, p. 4-5
Activity 8: Family Patterns and Values

Interview each other about your family structure and values, using the following questionnaire. Make up questions of your own.

1. In your family, who gave you your names? How were your names chosen?

2. When you were a child, who took care of you when your parents were not home?

3. When you were a child, whom did you sleep with?

4. When you were growing up, who lived in your household?

5. What were the children's responsibilities in your household?

6. When you were a child, which did your parents try harder to teach you independence or cooperation?

7. In your country, what do people think of a young person of 18, not married, who moves out from his or her parent's home?

8. What do people think of a 27-year-old person who lives at home with his or her parents?

9. Nowadays, when you have a problem, do you usually go to a friend or to a relative for help? Explain.

10. In your country, when people get old, where do they live and what money do they live on?
Activity 9: Male/Female Roles in the Family

Interview each other about your male and female roles in the family, using the following questionnaire. Make up questions of your own.

1. Do most couples in your country hope for sons or daughters? What is your own opinion?

2. Do most parents expect little girls to act differently from little boys? If so, in what ways? What is your own opinion?

3. In most families in your country, are sisters expected to do what their brothers tell them to do? What is your own opinion?

4. In most families in your country, do the sons and daughters do the same kinds of jobs around the house? Please explain. What do you think about this?

5. In most families in your country, do husbands and wives share the housework? Please explain what they share. What do you think about this?

6. How much do fathers help take care of the children in your country? How do you feel about this?

7. Will parents pay as much attention to their son's education as to their daughter's education? Do they think it is equally important for sons and daughters to finish their education?

8. How do most husbands in your culture feel about their wives working? Do you agree?

9. In most families in your culture/country, who pays the family's bills and takes care of money matters?

10. When parents or grandparents get old, who takes care of them in your country/culture?

Adapted from *Face to Face*, 1985, p. 73ff.
Activity 10: Male/Female Roles in the Workplace

Interview each other about your male and female roles in the workplace, using the following questionnaire. Make up questions of your own.

1. What are the traditional careers or jobs for women in your country?
2. What are the traditional careers or jobs that are for men only?
3. Do men and women always get the same pay if they do the same job? Please explain. Are there any laws about this?
4. Do you think there are any jobs that women can't do as well as men?
5. Do you think there are any jobs that men can't do as well as women?
6. If a man and women apply for the same job, are the chances better for the man? Are there any laws about this?
7. Do most women in your country/culture continue to work when they get married? Why or why not?
8. Do most of the women that you know who have children have a paid job as well? What do you think about this?
9. Did your mother have a job while you were growing up? Did most women your mother's age work? Why or why not?
10. When working women have babies, do they a paid maternity leave? How much time do they usually take off from work after a baby is born? Is there such a thing as a paternity leave?
11. In the jobs you have had, have males and females had the same opportunities? Please explain.

Adapted from Face to Face, 1985, p. 73ff.
Activity 11: Marriage Customs

Interview each other about marriage customs in your country/culture, using the following questionnaire. Make up questions of your own

1. About what age do most people you know marry? Why?

2. What do people do when they decide to get married? Do they ask their parents or tell them?

3. How long does a typical engagement last?

4. Is it a problem if a son or daughter wants to marry someone outside of his or her religion, race, or ethnic group?

5. Describe some traditional marriage customs, such as the bridal shower, rings, the honeymoon?

6. Who usually pays for the wedding itself? The rings? The furniture and the other household items for the couple's first home?

7. Does the bride take the husband's family name? Explain.

8. Is it common for a man and woman who are not married to live together? Is it accepted?

9. Do most couples today usually have children soon after marriage? Is there pressure on them to do so?

10. Is divorce common today in your country/culture? What do you think the reasons for it are? Is it accepted?
**Activity 12: A Wedding I Attended**

Interview your partner about a wedding he/she attended. Ask your partner the questions on the form below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When was the last wedding you attended?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who got married?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where was the wedding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many people were at the wedding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did the bride wear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did the groom wear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there a reception (party) after the wedding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you eat?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you drink?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there music?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there dancing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the bride and the groom go on a honeymoon?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from *Face to Face, 1985*, p. 78ff
Activity 13: Dating

Together with another student, answer each of the questions about your country/culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When it comes to dating</th>
<th>Your country</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can an unmarried male and female go out alone together? Beginning at what age?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can a male visit a female’s home without being engaged?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can a woman date someone other than the man she will marry?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must parents approve of their son's or daughter's date?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do young adults find marriage partners? (Friends? Family? Dating services? Church?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements? Other?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a typical activity for a first date in your teens? In your twenties? Older?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long do young adults usually date before they decide to get married?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do people ever go on blind dates?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activity 14: School Days

Talk about your high school days using the questions in the box below.

What was your best subject?
What was your worst subject?
What subject was the most interesting?
What subject was the least interesting?
What subject was the easiest?
What subject was the hardest?
Who was your favorite teacher? Why?
How long was a school day?
Where did you eat lunch?
Did you do other activities in high school, such as sports, or music?
Did you study foreign languages? If so, what?
When you were in high school, what did you want to do after graduation?

From Dresser, N. (1993). Our Own Stories, p. 4-5
Activity 15: Superstitions

Talk about Superstitions using the questions below.

1. Some people in the United State think the four-leaf clover is “lucky”. Do you agree? What are lucky things in your country?

2. Many people in the United States believe if you walk under a ladder, you will have bad luck. Do you agree? What things are believed to bring bad luck in your country? What are other things considered “unlucky” in the United States?

3. Do you believe in superstitions? Why or why not?

4. Who told you about the superstitions you know? What did that person say?

Adapted from Talk your Head Off (1997), p. 42-43
Activity 16: Sleep

Talk about sleep using the questions below.

1. What is your daily sleep schedule? How many hours of sleep do you usually get? Do you get enough?

2. When you can’t sleep what kinds of things do you do? Do you drink hot tea?

3. Some people allow their pets to sleep in bed with them? Do you do that?

4. Do you sleepwalk or talk in your sleep?

5. Do you remember your dreams? Do you have a favorite dream or least favorite dream?

6. What time did you usually go to bed when you were a child? Did your parents or family members do anything special to get you to go to bed when you were little? (tuck you in, say goodnight, sing a lullaby, read a book, etc…)
Activity 17: Nature/
Environment

1. The United States has government recycling centers. People bring things that can be
recycled to the centers, and they receive money for them. Are there recycling centers
in your country? If so, how much do people get paid for each item recycled? If not,
why do you think there aren’t any recycling centers?

2. Is recycling common in your country?

3. Do you think it is the government or the individual’s responsibility to take care of the
planet?

4. What natural disasters are common in your area?

5. Have you ever personally encountered a natural disaster? What did you do?

Adapted from Talk your Head Off (1997), p. 78-79
Activity 18: Professions

1. What professions are well respected in your country? Why?

2. What professions have a reputation for employing unprofessional, unethical, or unskilled individuals? Why?

3. What profession would you like to have when you graduate? Is it the same job you hoped you would have as a child?

4. What does it mean to be a professional?

Adapted from Talk your Head Off (1997), p. 150 - 151