

10 Tips for Being a Better Conversationalist

With the rise of cell phones, email, and text messaging, face-to-face conversational skills have declined.

We know that digital communication is most likely here to stay. Yet, at the same time, many recognize that there is still an irreplaceable value to face-to-face conversation.

So, how can we revive the art of conversation?

The following 10 conversation tips are derived from Harvey Newcomb's 1852 work, [*How to Be a Lady*](#). While the title may sound quaint, and while some will react to the idea of a man telling a woman "how to be a lady," you may be surprised at how relevant Newcomb's pointers are to our modern conversation woes.

1. **"Avoid *affectation* [speech designed to impress].** – Instead of making you appear to better advantage, it will only expose you to ridicule."
2. **"Avoid *provincialisms*.** – There are certain expressions peculiar to particular sections of the country. For example, in New England, many people are in the habit of interlarding their conversation with the phrase, 'You see.' In Pennsylvania and New York, the same use is made of 'You know.' And in the West and South, phrases peculiar to those sections of the country are still more common and ludicrous. [Hah!] Avoid all these expressions, and strive after a pure, chaste and simple style."
3. **"Avoid all *ungrammatical* expressions."**
4. **"Avoid *unmeaning exclamations*, as, 'O my!' 'O mercy!' &c."**
5. **"Never speak unless you have *something to say*.** – 'A word

fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.'”

6. **“Avoid *prolixity* [wordy and extended speech].** – Make your language concise and perspicuous, and strive not to prolong your speech beyond what is necessary, remembering that others wish to speak as well as yourself. Be sparing of anecdote; and only resort to it when you have a good illustration of some subject before the company, or when you have a piece of information of general interest. To tell a story well, is a great art. To be tedious and prolix in story-telling, is insufferable. To avoid this, do not attempt to relate every minute particular; but seize upon the grand points. ...”
7. **“Never interrupt others while they are speaking.** Quietly wait till they have finished what they have to say, before you reply. To interrupt others in conversation is very unmannerly.”
8. **“You will sometimes meet with very talkative persons, who are not disposed to give you a fair chance. *Let them talk on.*** They will be better pleased, and you will save your words and your feelings.”
9. **“Avoid, as much as possible, *speaking of yourself.*** – When we meet a person who is always saying *I*, telling what he has done, and how he does things, the impression it gives us of him is unpleasant. ... True politeness leads us to keep ourselves out of view, and show an interest in other people’s affairs.”
10. **“Endeavor to make your conversation *useful.*** – Introduce some subject which will be profitable to the company you are in. You feel dissatisfied when you retire from company where nothing useful has been said. But there is no amusement more interesting, to a sensible person, than intelligent conversation upon elevated subjects. It leaves a happy impression upon the mind.”