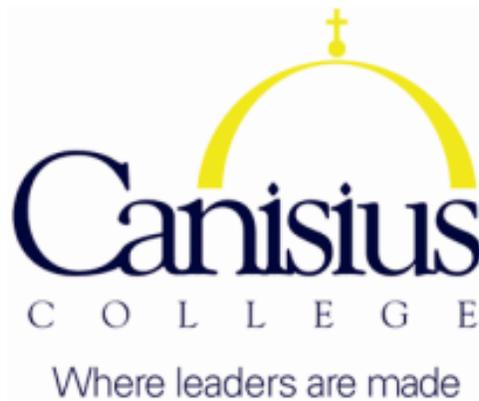


Conversation Partners Program



Guidelines and Suggestions Spring 2012

English as a Second Language (ESL) Program
Bagen Hall, Room 202

www.canisius.edu/english-as-a-second-language/

This handbook is indebted to materials posted at College of William and Mary, Kent State University, the University of Iowa, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute for some of the materials noted here. We appreciate the permission we have been given to use these wonderful resources. Please see:

College of William and Mary. (2011). Conversation partner program handbook. *College of William and Mary*. Retrieved from: www.wm.edu/as/graduate/graduatecenter/conversation/CPPhandbook.pdf

Kent State University. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <http://cphp.kent.edu/iss/currentstudents/conversation-partner.cfm>

University of Iowa. (n.d.). FAQ: Meeting with ESL students. *University of Iowa*. Retrieved from: <http://clas.uiowa.edu/files/esl/Tips%20for%20meeting%20with%20ESL%20students.pdf>

Worcester Polytechnic Institute. (2011). Conversation partner program handbook. *Worcester Polytechnic Institute*. Retrieved from: <http://www.wpi.edu/Images/CMS/InternationalHouse/CPHandbook.pdf>

Program Expectations and Goals

Program Expectations:

1. Meet with your partner once a week for at least an hour.
2. Be open minded.
3. Be both a teacher and a student.
4. Complete the program evaluation which will be provided at the end of the semester.
5. Enjoy each other's company and have fun!

Goals for English as a Second Language (ESL) students:

The goal of this program for ESL international students is to improve your English outside of the classroom in an informal environment. It is also the program's goal to help you build relationships with American students at Canisius College. You will also be either helping a language student with learning your native language or introducing an international relations major to your culture.

Goals for language students:

The goal of this program for language students is to practice your language abilities with native speakers of that language. It is also the program's goal to help you build relationships with the international students studying at Canisius College. As a participant in this program you will not only be conversing in the language that you are learning but also in English to assist international students with their English.

Goals for students in International Relations, Political Science, International Business and other majors:

The goal of this program for American students seeking careers involving global communication and for students with a deep interest in other cultures is to learn more about another culture and to build relationships with the international students studying at Canisius College. You will be assisting international students with their English by conversing in an informal environment.

Tips for Working with Your Partner

Name Pronunciation

It can be troubling trying to figure out how to correctly pronounce a name you are not familiar with. You might be surprised to learn your partner may be having as much trouble pronouncing your names as you do theirs. Teach your partner how to say and spell your name. Ask your partner to help you say and spell theirs. Write it down. Write how it sounds down. Practice saying the name several times. Do not be embarrassed to ask your partner to repeat it as many times as it takes.

Be a Moderator & Facilitator

Conversation Partners act as moderators and facilitators. While you should come prepared with a few topics to discuss, be open to suggestions from your Conversation Partner. Avoid being the only one who asks all the questions. This should be a give-and-take process between native and nonnative speakers.

If you are working with more than one student at a time, be aware of group dynamics. Encourage participation from quieter people, and try not to let any one person dominate the conversation.

Pause Time

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.

Be patient. Give your conversation partner time to respond. You can also help your conversation partner practice asking for clarification if in fact they do not understand what they are hearing.

Respect Each Other

The Conversation Partner Program is not an opportunity for you to promote personal, political, or religious agendas. Rather, it is an opportunity for you to help someone master English, and at the same time, learn more about another culture. While differences of opinion are bound to occur, it is the responsibility of all parties to be mutually respectful of each other’s opinions and ideas.

How should I behave to be culturally sensitive?

- Show your interest in your partner by sitting forward and giving your full attention to the conversation.
- Ask if it is okay. If you are not sure if a question is culturally appropriate, begin it by saying, “I hope it’s okay if I ask you . . .” A sincere desire to know is usually appreciated, regardless of topic.
- Do not carry on private conversations with other friends, answer your cell phone, lean back in your chair with your legs stretched out, look at your watch, or gaze off

in the distance while meeting with your partner. Your ESL partner will notice these behaviors and think you are bored and do not really care about learning about them or their culture.

Learning the International Student's Language

Begin by telling your partner (in English) your language proficiency level ("I just began studying Arabic," "My Chinese is okay, but I make many mistakes," "I am almost fluent in Spanish.") Then, when you are ready to practice your second language, ask if it is okay that you begin speaking your partner's native language. Now it is your turn to ask your partner to clarify, draw pictures, and slow down!

Make sure that one language does not dominate your meeting time; the idea is to help both of you practice your second language while learning about each other's culture.

Helpful Hints

While in many ways our international students are just like everyone else, there are difficulties unique to working with nonnative speakers. Here are a few helpful hints:

1. *Repeat and rephrase*

If students don't 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.

2. *Focus on key words*

Even the most advanced nonnative speaker does not 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.

3. *Write important information down*

If something is important, consider writing down the information. Many times students nod "yes, yes, yes" when really they don't understand.

4. *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, but try not to interrupt them while they are putting their thoughts together.

5. *Explain abbreviations*

Abbreviations can be confusing to nonnative speakers. This does not mean that you should not use them; just understand that a nonnative speaker might not understand what they mean.

6. *Limit slang and be ready to explain*

Likewise, slang expressions can be very confusing to nonnative speakers, although

they love to learn them. The international students will pick up slang expressions from you that you are not even conscious of using. When you think about it, there is a vast amount of slang being used. Do not overwhelm the students with everything you have ever heard. Try to stay focused on what they are most likely to hear.

7. *Have a translator handy if possible*

Though certainly not a requirement, it is helpful if one or both of you have access to an electronic translator—even Google’s language tools feature which you can access using any internet browser.

Questions to help get a conversation going . . .

1. What did you do for fun last summer?
2. What has surprised you when you met American people in the USA?
3. What is your most difficult subject now?
4. Are you a member of any student groups?
5. What annoying habits does your best friend have?
6. Who is your favorite teacher of the subjects you are studying now?
7. What are the qualities you want in your professor?
8. How did you decide what college to attend?
9. What characteristic about yourself do you like/dislike the most?
10. What annoys you about living where you live now?
11. What annoys you about driving a car?
12. Is there anybody in the news whom you dislike intensely? Who and why?
13. Do you think a government should be allowed to execute prisoners? Explain.
14. If you/your wife were pregnant and you found out that the baby would have a serious birth defect that would cause it to have a painful and miserable life, what would you do?
15. What are your life goals for the next five years?
16. What are you most passionate about in your life? Why?
17. A close relative of yours is in an accident that leaves him/her in a coma. The doctor says that he/she is completely brain dead and the only thing keeping him/her alive is expensive respiratory equipment. If you had to decide whether to turn the equipment off or keep it running, what would you do?
18. Would you prefer to be a successful businessman/businesswoman or a successful father/mother? Why do you think you would choose one over the other?
19. If you found a briefcase filled with cash, what would you do? Would you try to return it to the owner or keep it for yourself?
20. If you saw three men attacking someone in an isolated place, what would you do?
21. If your conversation partner had only one day to spend in your city (province, country), where would you take him/her? Why there?
22. What is the most important lesson your parents taught you? Explain.
23. Where do you like to spend time alone?
24. Who is the greatest person of your nationality to live (in history)? Why?
25. Do you have any personal heroes? Who are they? (Name both living and dead)

26. What film have you seen recently that you liked? Explain why, how, etc.
27. What is a problem in your country that you'd like to see your government/people attack?
28. What charities would you donate to if you had the money and time?
29. Can you sing? What type of songs do you enjoy? Who sings these songs best?
30. Where would like to go on your honeymoon? Why?
31. If you were stuck on an island, what book would you want with you? Why?
32. What makes you optimistic/pessimistic about a recent story in the news? Explain.

Ideas of topics to discuss:

- Cultural traditions and customs
- Special holidays
- Traditional food
- Education Systems
- Political structures
- Favorite pastimes: films, outings and other social functions
- Art and/or artists
- Culture shock
- Current events
- Places to visit
- Family and social relations
- Values and assumptions.
- Watch a movie or t.v. show and then discuss it.

Suggestions for Meetings

Things to do during your first meeting:

- You may want to schedule a weekly meeting time and location and determine the best way to communicate with each other in case of cancelations or schedule changes.
- Generate a list of goals and expectations that you have for your time together.
- Brainstorm some activities you would like to do or event you would like to attend.

Below are suggestions for activities to do to make the conversation meetings more interesting and dynamic!

- Meet for coffee or other non-alcoholic drink.
- Eat lunch on campus together or go out to eat at an ethnic or American restaurant.
- Cook a meal together.
- Play a card or board game.
- Attend a sports game together (Canisius Athletics' events are free for students!)
- Share pictures.
- Talk about differences in US educational institutions, culture and communication styles.
- Volunteer together in the community. (Visit Campus Ministry)
- Attend a campus or community event together. (See below)
- Celebrate a holiday or tradition together.

Campus and Community Events and Activities

Canisius CPLD Campus Programs and Activities

www.canisius.edu/campus_leader/events.asp

Griffins After Dark

www.canisius.edu/campus_leader/griffinsafterdark.asp

Fun, late night (11am-1pm) on campus activities.

Canisius Cinema

www.canisius.edu/campus_leader/cinema.asp

Missed a movie on the big screen? Canisius Cinema has got you covered on select Friday nights at 10pm in Penfold Commons (unless otherwise noted). Come watch pre-released movies that have left the theater, but are not yet available on DVD and enjoy some FREE popcorn.

Canisius Athletics

www.gogriffs.com

Buffalo/ Niagara Events Calendar (Buffalo/ Niagara CVB)

www.visitbuffaloniagara.com/things-to-do/calendar-of-events/

Buffalo News' Events Calendar

<http://events.buffalonews.com/events/>

Look at your MyCanisius portal and at posters around campus for additional ideas. Also, check out the events hosted by the International Student Programs Office.

(www.canisius.edu/isp/).



"Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

— Stephen R. Covey
7 Habits of Highly Effective People