



Middle School

National FFA Organization

Lesson MS.37

CONVERSATIONS IN GROUPS

Unit.

Stage Two of Development—WE

Problem Area.

How Do I Initiate Relationships with Others?

Precepts.

H2: Present self appropriately in various settings. **B2:** Interact and work with others.

National Standards.

NL-ENG.K12.4 - Communication Skills - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.



Student Learning Objectives. As a result of this lesson, the student will ...

- 1 Demonstrate methods of initiating a conversation.
- 2 Formulate open-ended questions.
- 3 Identify effectively for personal clues in a conversation.



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Time. Instruction time for this lesson: 50 minutes.



Resources

Garner, Alan. *Conversationally Speaking: Tested New Ways to Increase Your Personal and Social Effectiveness*, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981.



Tools, Equipment, and Supplies

None provided.



Key Terms. The following terms are presented in this lesson and appear in bold italics:

- ▶ Closed question
- ▶ Free information rule
- ▶ Open-ended question



Interest Approach



Let's describe a time when we had to have a conversation with people we didn't know very well.

Possible responses: at a holiday party; at a dance; dining out with parents; parents' friends visiting the house; on an airplane trip



- How does talking with people we don't know very well make us feel?

Possible responses: nervous; self-conscious; stupid; tongue-tied; shy



Is it the talking or the listening that makes us nervous?

How would you like to learn a way to have great conversations without being the one doing all the talking? The key to being a great conversationalist is getting other people to talk. People like to talk about themselves when they think others are interested. Today we're going to learn a few techniques to help you get other people talking and feeling good about talking with you. By the end of today's activity, we'll be trying out the three techniques that we cover.



SUMMARY OF CONTENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Objective 1. Demonstrate methods of initiating a conversation.



Please listen to and read the information I write on the board. Then write it down so we can remember and use the information; take out a sheet of paper and a pencil or pen.

I. Methods of initiating a conversation

A. Three topics for opening a conversation

1. Our situation
2. You
3. Me



The initial difficulty most people encounter in having a conversation is thinking of something to say first. Most people struggle over how to open a conversation. Even if they can think of something good to say, they get tongue-tied. We can simplify the opening line problem if we just think for a moment. There are only three topics we can talk about with someone we don't know or someone with whom we have little in common:

1. Our situation
2. You (the other person)
3. Me

Enter this information on the writing surface under the heading "Three Topics for Opening a Conversation."



Let's be sure to record this information in our notes so we can refer to it as we discuss this topic.

Give the students 30 seconds or so to write their notes.



Furthermore, there are only three ways we can use these topics:

B. Three ways to use the above-referenced topics

1. Ask a question
2. Express an opinion
3. State a fact

Enter this information on the writing surface.



Let's write these down on your paper so we can refer to them as we discuss this technique.

Give students 30 seconds or so to write their notes. Use a Little Professor Moment to reinforce the concepts.





Let's take riding the school bus, for example. Let's say we would like to strike up a conversation with someone we don't know well, but have seen on the school bus. How can we combine the three topics and the three forms of communication to open a conversation?

Possible responses: ask a question about riding the bus; express your opinion about riding the bus; state a fact about riding the bus; ask a question about the other person; state an opinion about the other person; state a fact about the other person; ask a question about myself; state an opinion about myself; state a fact about myself



Those are all great possibilities. Hint: Choose something the other person can respond to with more than one or two words. Choose the combination of topic and form that will make it easiest for the other person to respond. Which do you think would work?

Best responses: state an opinion about the other person and follow up with a question; ask a question about the situation; ask a question about the other person



It's always easier for someone to talk to us if the conversation isn't too personal. Asking a question about the situation would be the least threatening. We could also state an opinion about the other person and use that to ask a question. People will love to talk to us if we make them feel good about themselves. Using the bus-riding example, we might say, "What do you think of the new bus driver?" Or, "Those patches on your backpack are really cool-where did you get them?"

Now that you've figured out a way to get the other person to start talking, let's see if you can figure out a way to keep him or her talking.

Objective 2. Formulate open-ended questions.

II. Two types of questions: open-ended and closed

A. What's the difference?

1. Definition of **open-ended questions**: questions that usually start with how, why, or what
 - a. They require more than one or two words to answer.
 - b. They stimulate a conversation and keep it rolling along.
2. Definition of closed questions: questions that start with the words are, do, who, when, where, or which
 - a. They can be answered in one word.
 - b. As a result, they close the door on a conversation.



Once someone starts talking to us, what's the best way to keep him or her talking?

Correct response: keep asking questions



 Right, keep asking questions! But what kind of questions?

Possible responses: cool questions; funny questions; interesting questions; questions that are more than yes or no questions

 Thanks for your input. Let's try it once. Is there a willing volunteer who can help us demonstrate? I'll be the opener.

Ask the student volunteer to have a seat with you in the front of the classroom. Then you, the teacher, attempt to initiate a conversation with a series of closed questions.

 So, how was school today?

Okay.

 You did get to eat lunch today, didn't you?

Yep.

 Did you get your homework turned in to your science class?

Yep.

 Did you do anything fun in ceramics class?

Nope.

 Did you see Johnny after school today?

Nope.

 Are you ready for dinner?

Yep.

 Do have any homework?

Yep.

 Do you need any help?

Nope.

 Okay, well, nice talking to you. Don't stay up too late.

Thank the student and have the student sit down.

 What was the matter with all the questions I was asking?

Correct response: they only needed yes or no answers





Who was doing all the talking?

Correct response: you were, because the other person just said one or two words



Right, who was feeling the stress?

Correct response: you were, because you had to keep thinking of other questions to ask



How can I alter some of those questions so I don't have to work so hard and so I can get more information?

Correct response: ask questions that have to be answered with more than one word



Yes, give me an example.

Possible responses: What did you do in school today? What did you eat for lunch today? How did your teacher like your science project? What are you working on in ceramics now? What did you do after school today? Who did you see after school today? What homework do you have tonight? How are you going to do spend your evening?

Write "open-ended question" on one side of the writing surface and "closed question" on the other.



Give me an example of an open-ended question.

Possible responses: What did you do in school today? What did you eat for lunch today? How did your teacher like your science project? What are you working on in ceramics class now? What did you do after school today? Who did you see after school today? What homework do you have tonight? How are you going to spend your evening?

Enter one strong example on the writing surface.



Now give me an example of a closed-ended question.

Possible responses: When are you going to bed? You're doing your homework, aren't you?



Record the definitions and an example of both an open-ended and a closed question so you can refer to it later.

Now that we know how to start a conversation and we understand open-ended questions that keep conversation going, let's see if we can identify topics that our new friends what to talk about.

Objective 3. Identify personal clues in a conversation.

III. Listen to the speaker for clues.

A. What does he or she want to talk about?

B. **Free information rule:** anything anyone mentions in a conversation that takes the conversation in a specific direction and establishes what the topic will be



Enter the following on the writing surface: Free Information Rule: anything anyone mentions in a conversation can become the topic of conversation



Now that we've figured out how to start a conversation and we've learned a technique that enables you to ask questions that will keep people talking, we'll move on. We could keep the conversation going by asking question after question, but that could be exhausting and lead nowhere.

If we knew what the other person wanted to talk about, we could just nod and listen. To discover the other person's interests-what he or she wants to talk about-you need to start listening to the speaker for clues. This is called the free information rule-anything anyone mentions in a conversation can become the topic of conversation. You will want to write down the definition of the free information rule in your notes so you can refer to it later.

Let's go back to the school bus example. Remember one of the openers we came up with was, "Hey, I really like all those patches on your backpack; where did you get them?" If we listen to the answer, we will probably get some hint about things that are of interest to the other person. Someone give me a possible answer to that question.

Possible response: I got them on a trip this summer.



What does that tell us about the speaker? He or she took a trip.

Possible response: I bought them at the mall.



What does that tell us about the speaker? He or she may have favorite stores at the mall.

Possible response: I stole them from a sixth-grader.



What does that tell us about the speaker? He or she could be a bully or a thief, and we may not want to talk with him or her anymore.

We can use the information people reveal in conversations as topics for further conversation. For example, if the speaker says he or she got all the patches at the mall, what kind of open-ended question could you ask then?

Possible responses: Why do you like that mall? What is your favorite store?



Review/Summary



- You've got the hang of it now. The next thing we're going to do is let you try out your new conversation techniques in class, but let's review the three techniques before you divide into pairs.

Use a Choral Response Moment to review the following information.



Conversation Tool Number 1: Conversation openers. What are the three topics for opening a conversation?

Correct response: our situation; you-the other person; me





And what are the three ways to use the topics?

Correct response: ask a question; give an opinion; state a fact



Conversation Tool Number 2: Open-ended questions. With what words do open-ended questions begin?

Correct response: *how; why; what*



And with what words do closed questions begin?

Correct response: *are; do; who; when; where; which*



Great! Now we're ready to practice our new conversation skills. Our job is to open a conversation with another classmate in the room, to obtain some free information from him or her, and to ask a couple of open-ended questions. You'll use five minutes for your conversation.

Then we will write down the questions we used and the information we learned about the other person. When we're finished, we will switch and give your partner five minutes to repeat the process. Open the conversation, listen for and obtain information, and ask open-ended questions. We will be turning in your conversation summaries at the end of the period.

Break the class into pairs, preferably with people they don't usually talk with. Have one member of each pair open a conversation with his or her partner, listen for and obtain some free information, and follow up with a couple of open-ended questions. Then ask that person to write a summary of the questions asked and the information obtained. Next, have the partner repeat the process.

Give the class ten minutes to conduct the activity. Move around the room to ensure that each pair is trying out its new skills. When the activity is complete, ask the students to return to their seats and put chairs or desks back where they belong. Gain the class's attention and continue.



Before we hand them in, please write down one or two questions you may have about the conversation skills on your summaries. We will turn in our summaries and questions in two minutes.

Collect the summaries and, if time allows, read a few of the questions and provide answers thereto.



Now our challenge is to use our new technique on someone outside of class. Be prepared to share your experience.



Application

►Extended Classroom Activity:

Have students observe a conversation at some time during the day. Did the individual use a conversation opener, open-ended questions, or the free information rule? Have students conduct an additional round of the conversation activity after answering the class's questions.



FFA Activity:

Challenge students to open a conversation with someone from a different chapter at the next FFA activity.

►SAE Activity:

Challenge students to open a conversation with someone at their next project activity, such as a field day, jackpot, workday, or horse show.

✓ Evaluation

Give participation credit for conversation summaries. Give credit for writing questions for clarification on the summaries.

Answers to Assessment:

No assessment



