

The English Conversation Partners Program

Thank you for being an English conversation partner through the Rutgers International Friendship Program sponsored by the Center for International Faculty and Student Services.

This guidebook was created for the English and international conversation partners to provide mutually beneficial learning experiences and lesson ideas. While there are more formal classes where language mechanics (vocabulary, pronunciation/phonetics, and grammar) are taught, the English Conversation Partners Program is an informal meeting that emphasizes information exchange. It allows both participants to learn more about each other's culture, provides the non-native English partner an opportunity to practice conversing in the host language, and fosters international friendships.

Partnerships are coordinated by the Center for International Faculty and Student Services. Then the general process below is followed:

- ❑ Make contact with your partner (via telephone or e-mail).
- ❑ Set up a time and place to meet.
- ❑ Agree on a conversation concept for a one-hour session.
- ❑ Read background information about your partner's culture before meeting him/her.
- ❑ Enjoy each other's conversations.
- ❑ Follow up once a week or bi-weekly for progress.

The topics in this guidebook may be adapted for each casual meeting. Conversation ideas can also be modified according to both of your interests. Other topics may be generated spontaneously during the session.

To make the most of this experience, find out more about your partner's cultural background, be sensitive to political situations and religious beliefs, meet regularly, keep an open mind, and think positively. The important point is that you both have fun while learning!

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Topic: Holidays

Objective

Learn about special days throughout the year and how they are celebrated by law or custom.

Preparation

Bring a current 12-month calendar to the session.

Optional: Make a list of holidays celebrated in each country or refer to the “Appendix” (www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cifss/predeparture/passport/pp2h.htm).

Optional: Invite each other to celebrate the special holiday.

Conversation Ideas

- Compare and contrast common holiday observations (new year, Valentine’s Day, etc.) each month.
- Discuss other special days, such as independence and legal holidays, religious celebrations, etc.

Topic: Travel and Transportation

Objective

Learn about geography and gain insights to tourism.

Preparation

Bring an atlas or maps of the world, USA, New Jersey, and partner's country to the session.

Optional: Share travel photos or brochures.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Ask your partner to show on the world map which routes he/she traveled to get to the USA and explain his/her preparation for entry to the USA and admissions to Rutgers.
- ❑ Point out in the map of New Jersey the location of Rutgers and popular places to visit in the state and in neighboring states.
- ❑ Tell each other which places (countries and/or states) you have toured and visited.
- ❑ Make suggestions for spring break travel or plans for vacations during other school breaks.

Topic: Food

Objective

Learn about daily meals and special menus for celebrations and possibly try new foods and exchange recipes.

Preparation

Optional: Eat at the campus café or dining hall together.

Optional: Meet at an ethnic restaurant and sample new dishes.

Optional: Exchange a favorite recipe or home cooked dish from each other's country.

Optional: Go to a cultural festival sponsored by a Rutgers international student club or the community.

Optional: Host each other for lunch or dinner at home.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Discuss what food is served during a typical/traditional breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
- ❑ Find out what special foods are prepared on holidays, birthdays, weddings, etc.
- ❑ Talk about rituals, etiquette/manners, eating utensils, etc. associated with food.

Topic: Family

Objective

Learn about family structures (nuclear or extended), values, and domestic lifestyles.

Preparation

Bring a family photograph or album to the session.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Share favorite memories about your family, relatives, etc.
- ❑ Talk about parents' professions, your home, your family vacations, your upbringing, etc.
- ❑ Tell each other about any pets (dog, cat, fish, bird, etc.) you or your family own(ed).

Topic: Rites of Passage

Objective

Learn about customs that commemorate important milestones people reach in their lives.

Preparation

Optional: Share photographs of occasions that you each have celebrated or attended.

Optional: Invite each other to witness these special events.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Compare and contrast birthday traditions, coming of age celebrations, marriage and wedding customs, death and funeral rites, etc.
- ❑ Inquire about special food, clothing, rituals, beliefs, superstitions, etc. associated with each occasion.

Topic: Customs

Objective

Learn about interesting cultural behaviors, etiquettes, beliefs, proverbs, etc.

Preparation

Refer to “Getting to Know Us” (www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cifss/predeparture/passport/pp2e.htm).

Optional: Read the profile about your partner’s country from Culturegrams (the book is available in the library or can be purchased individually from www.culturegrams.com).

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Discuss and/or demonstrate American vs. your partner’s cultural behaviors for greeting, visiting, tipping, dating, etc.
- ❑ Ask whether your partner is experiencing culture shock and how he/she is adapting to life in the USA.
- ❑ Answer questions your partner may have about American values and behaviors.
- ❑ Find out about the various stereotypes and enlighten each other about realities.

Topic: Education

Objective

Learn about educational systems, teaching methods, and transmittal of knowledge.

Preparation

Refer to “Academic Services” (www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cifss/predeparture/passport/pp2b.htm).

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Find out what each other is studying/doing at Rutgers, why he/she chose his/her academic major or career field, 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 important lessons, and preparations for college.
- ❑ Inquire how your partner learned English and about the USA.
- ❑ Tell how Americans typically learn about the world and other languages.
- ❑ Share success tips on studying.

Topic: Jobs

Objective

Learn about employment opportunities on campus, after graduation, and abroad.

Preparation

Optional: Bring a classified ads page from the newspaper.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Share financial tips for college (scholarship opportunities, part-time jobs, possible tuition waivers, money management strategies, etc.). Realize the tuition differences for in- and out-of-state students and international students.
- ❑ Talk about your part-time job/internship/assistantship/fellowship experiences.
- ❑ Discuss how your partner is preparing for his/her occupation after graduating from Rutgers. Or, if you are not students, discuss each other's current occupations.
- ❑ Compare and contrast what information may be included in a resume (and whether personal data, photographs, etc. are necessary).
- ❑ Optional: Practice "interviewing" each other for a job. Ask possible questions and critique the answers for improvement and preparation for an actual job interview.
- ❑ Optional: Visit the Rutgers employment office or see postings on the bulletin boards around campus for various job availabilities.
- ❑ Consider what it would be like to work in your partner's country and internationally.

Topic: Communication

Objective

Learn about language, expressions, gestures, and communication styles.

Preparation

E-mail each other and note the language (conversational tone, mechanics, etc.) use via this communication channel/medium.

Optional: Bring a current newspaper/magazine to the session.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Share/demonstrate greeting and departure behaviors and rituals.
- ❑ Discuss language and translation challenges, alphabets and writing (script or characters), pronunciation, vocabulary-building, etc.
- ❑ Talk about how various emotions are expressed and which of them are culturally and socially acceptable/permitted.
- ❑ Compare nonverbal communication (movements of the hands and body, symbolism of clothing and accessories, etc.).
- ❑ Look at newspapers, magazines, or other media (such as websites) to observe what each culture may value.

Topic: Numeric Systems

Objective

Learn about different currencies, weather temperatures, clothing sizes, and other measurements.

Preparation

Refer to “Getting to Know Us” (www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cifss/predeparture/passport/pp2e.htm).

Read the profile about your partner’s country from Culturegrams (the book is available in the library or can be purchased from www.culturegrams.com).

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Optional: Ask your partner to bring coins and bills from his/her country and explain the exchange rates and monetary values.
- ❑ Talk about the weather, climate extremes, and seasons.
- ❑ Discuss metric vs. USA measures, cooking (kitchen measures and oven temperatures), etc.

Topic: Sports and Recreation

Objective

Learn about national pastimes and each other's interests and hobbies.

Preparation

Optional: Bring a deck of cards or favorite board game to the session and play together.

Optional: Bring supplies needed to do a craft project.

Optional: Go to the gym and work out together.

Optional: Support the Rutgers athletic program by attending a sporting event together.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Discuss what people enjoy doing as a pastime when not working or studying.
- ❑ Introduce each other to favorite hobbies and crafts (stamp or coin collecting, weaving, etc.)
- ❑ Optional: Explain the basics of popular national sports (for example, baseball vs. cricket).

Topic: Arts and Entertainment

Objective

Learn about fun activities and gain insights to cultural values.

Preparation

Optional: Go to a movie (or rent a video cassette or DVD), play, concert, or museum together.

Optional: Go to a cultural festival sponsored by a Rutgers international student club or the community.

Optional: Listen to music from your partner's country.

Optional: Teach each other basic steps if you plan to go out dancing.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Discuss stereotypes portrayed in the movies and television shows, storylines and characters, cultural values/themes, popular actors and actresses, etc.
- ❑ Compare and contrast music and dance styles in America and in your partner's country. Ask about popular singers, bands, and other entertainers.
- ❑ Talk about the symbolism of artistic designs and other creative expressions.

Topic: Issues

Objective

Learn about various social, economic, religious, and political issues.

Preparation

Keep an open mind as this topic may be considered controversial and sensitive.

Stay current with events reported from the news media.

Conversation Ideas

- ❑ Compare and contrast the social roles of and relationships between men and women in each other's countries, intermarriage, alternative lifestyles, impact of divorce, etc.
- ❑ Learn about each other's opinions on taxation, trade/commerce, imports/exports, resources, industry, business practices, work ethics, etc.
- ❑ Share about each other's religious traditions and rituals, symbolism, doctrines, celebrations and special days, etc.
- ❑ Discuss national history, political ideology, government structure, leadership, domestic and foreign policies, laws, etc.
- ❑ Talk about other issues such as civil rights, ethnic relations, environment/animal protection, humanitarian aid, war, medical research, etc.

Topic:

Objective

Learn about

Preparation

Conversation Ideas

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