



Five College Center for World Languages

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1A: Conversation Partners

1A: What is a Conversation Session? What is a Conversation Partner?

Conversation Sessions

Conversation sessions provide a chance for learners to practice using the language. The session is conducted entirely in the language students are learning with an opportunity to ask questions in English at the very end of every session. Conversation sessions focus on using the language in the types of situations one might encounter in everyday life. Students commonly engage in role-plays, question and answer activities, description, narration, and problem-solving exercises. In beginning level courses, typical topics are greetings, introductions, getting acquainted conversations, telephone calls, asking for directions, shopping and bargaining, and talking about schedules and events in the past, present or future. More advanced students will practice more complex speech activities that involve expressing opinions, giving reasons in arguments, and discussing current events and cultural issues.

What Makes a Good Conversation Session?

Here are some characteristics of a good conversation session:

- students are actively speaking throughout the session;
- activities encourage students to create language rather than read from a book or piece of paper;
- every student gets an equal chance to participate;
- the interactions are almost completely in the target language; English is used sparingly;
- every student in the session arrives well-prepared;
- the conversation partner arrives well-prepared;
- questions, problems, and corrections are dealt with in a constructive manner.

What is a Conversation Partner?

In this program, the term "conversation partner" is used to refer to the person who leads the conversation session. That person might be undergraduate conversation partner who has been formally educated in the language, a visiting foreign language teaching assistant, a graduate student tutor, or a language lecturer. The role of the conversation partner is to facilitate activities that make active use of the language. In a successful conversation session, the students will be the ones doing

most of the talking for at least 90% of the time. The conversation partner may engage students in dialogue or may have students work in pairs with one another. The conversation partner will use the language being learned throughout the session. At the end of the session, the conversation partner will give students a chance to ask questions in English.

Conversation partners do not present a lesson; instead they participate in conversation with the students studying the target language. Their role is in the guidance of the session in order to ensure that the students are having ample time to speak and practice speaking the target language with them. A conversation partner is meant to help students actively make use of linguistic functions that they would encounter when using the language in its authentic and native context. For example, a conversation partner would not teach students about using the verb “to be” but would rather engage students in conversation by asking questions that utilize the verb such as “How are you?” “What time is it?” etc.

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