

Taking Turns in a Conversation

It is important to take it in turns when conversing with someone. Let them answer your questions and give them a chance to ask you one in return if they want to.

Talk about things that you know the other person likes as well as the things that you like. If you both like the same things then you could talk about these.

Ultimately, it is important to remember that a conversation should go back and forth and not be dominated by either speaker. Try not to say more than a few sentences at a time and try to include a response to, acknowledgement of or question about the last thing you conversation partner said. It is also important not to interrupt your conversation partner and to let them finish what they are saying before you start to speak.



Some people think of turn-taking in conversation as a tennis game, one person says something (hits the ball away) and then the other person says something (hits the ball back) and so on.

However, this can be an overly simple way of looking at a conversation as it doesn't take into account how we should respond to what our conversation

partner is saying and convey to them that we are listening to them and are interested in what they are saying.

Here is a more detailed explanation from Groovy Druid of www.wrongplanet.net:

"When a person, call him Alan, starts up small talk, he originates communication. The other person, Beatrice, then communicates back that she received his communication, and they have completed a cycle. This is a very important: Alan proves he can originate communication, and Beatrice proves she can receive communication and acknowledge it.

Ideally, then, the cycle reverses direction. Beatrice originates her own communication, and Alan replies and shows that he has received it. At this point, they have both proved to one another that they can give and take communication...

...Alan and Beatrice might sound like this:

Alan: (originating – [putting forth a topic of conversation])

I played the course at Pebble Beach the other day.

Beatrice: (receiving – [acknowledging what Alan has said])

What a nice day to do it.

Beatrice: (originating [putting forth her own experience on Pebble Beach, as visiting this beach is an experience they share])

I went to the beach there a couple of years ago and thought it was gorgeous.

Alan: (receiving [acknowledging what Beatrice has said and responding, keeping on topic])

It's funny: I've been there several times, but I've never left the golf course!



And the conversation will continue in this vein until the two part and begin anew with other people. We...would likely label this chit-chat as drivel, if we didn't know to look for the pattern underneath the superficial exchange. The pattern is vital. Alan and Beatrice establish that they can give and take communication well. By following the pattern, they build rapport and respect for one another's abilities.

I can't tell you how impressed people will be if you can exercise this pattern at least part of the time."

Another example is this:

"The general technique is to answer a question and to expand on it briefly with one or two sentences before bouncing the question back to the other person. The second speaker then has an easy way of continuing the conversation in two ways: firstly by answering and expanding again, and secondly by

picking up on whatever the first speaker said. In each case, the speaker is saying less than he/she could say, to give the other person a chance to ask about it.

- **James:** So – which countries have you visited?
- **Adam:** Well, mostly European countries – Germany, Switzerland, Holland. But last year we had an amazing holiday in Cuba. What about you? Have you travelled a lot?
- **James:** Not a lot, but I've been to the States a couple of times. I worked there when I was a student. But tell me about Cuba. What was it like?"

The ability to take turns in conversation is something that will improve with practice. Try practicing with a trusted friend, family member or support worker and after the conversation ask them for their feedback on your turn-taking skills.