

Conversation Starters



It's not always easy to start chatting with a new person. But you don't have to let the cat get your tongue—instead, remember these tips, and you'll always have something to say.

ASK A QUESTION. Ask for the time, for directions, for a weather update—any question you ask (that actually relates in some way to the situation you're in) will automatically get the person you ask to talk to you.

SHARE A SINCERE COMPLIMENT. Giving someone false praise is phony—but if you can compliment someone on something *specific* and *true*, you'll make her feel more comfortable opening up to you. Tell someone that you liked her essay in class, or that she has cool earrings, or that you thought she did a great job at the game. You don't have to stalk someone, or go out of your way to find out information about her—just start opening your eyes and paying attention to the kinds of details that often go overlooked.

COMMENT ON POP CULTURE. If you start reading newspapers and magazines, you'll always know what's going on in the world (or even in the Hollywood gossip scene!) and have something timely to say. You can read many newspapers and some magazines online without having to pay for a subscription—try www.nytimes.com and www.usatoday.com to get started.

LEND A HAND. Hold the door. Share an umbrella. Offer to tutor someone in a subject that you're good at. When you reach out to help someone, you'll have something specific to bond over. That said, don't always put *other* people first. A true friendship involves *both* people working at it. Helping is a good way to make initial contact, but you shouldn't *always* be the one making all of the effort. (If you are, people will start to see you as a pushover or take advantage of you—and you'll end up resenting them, instead of connecting with them.)

