Communication Strategies for International Graduate Students
Prepared by Core Programs in the Graduate School

Maintaining Conversations

I. Warming up the conversation.
   • Course work: How many courses are you taking this quarter? Have you ever worked with Professor X?
   • Research: Are you planning to attend any conferences this year? I heard that you collaborated with Dr. XX on her research project, what was the research project about?
   • News: Have you been following the news about the environmental issues? Do you listen to any good podcasts about current events?
   • Previous contact: If I remember correctly, you were planning to defend your thesis this month. How is it going?
   • Other topics: the city, the weather, what you do for fun or to relax, movies, TV shows, restaurants, books...

Exiting Conversations

II. Say something positive about the conversation.
   • It was really nice talking to you! I appreciated hearing your perspective on X.
   • I’d love to continue this conversation...

III. Indicate what you need to do or where you need to go.
   • If you will excuse me, I need to...
   • I have a class at 1:00 p.m., so please excuse me for rushing.
   • Some colleagues are expecting me, so I can’t talk right now...

IV. Add one final positive comment and leave.
   • It’s really nice to see you again.
   • We should get together to chat more about... Let’s stay in touch/I will be in touch.

Making Appointments, Seeking Advice, andExpressing Gratitude

V. To make an appointment:
   • I am calling to make an appointment with you to discuss my research project. I will need about 30 minutes of your time to go through questions I have.
   • I know that you have a busy schedule this month. Would you be able to find 20 minutes to see me? I’d like to discuss my upcoming job interview with you.
   • When would you be available to talk to me about...? Would 1:00 p.m. work for you?

VI. To request advice:
   • I would like to seek your guidance on...Would you advise me how I should go about...?
   • I thought that I would share some of the preliminary findings and my thoughts with you to see if I am on the right track before I go much further.

• I understand that you are the expert in this area/in the area of X. I was hoping that you might explain/help me to understand...

VII. To express gratitude (NOTE: It is always good to send a brief email of thanks after a meeting):
• I very much/really/greatly appreciate the time you have taken to ...
• Thank you once again for taking the time to speak/meet with me the other day.

Academic/Research group meeting/discussion

VIII. Asking for repetition
• Would you mind saying/repeating that again? I didn’t (quite) catch what you said.
• Excuse me, would you mind speaking a little more slowly, please?

IX. Seeking clarification or elaboration
• Could you explain what you mean by...?
• Could you expand a little bit on what you said about...? Could you elaborate on the point you made...?
• You mentioned (earlier) that... Do you mean...?
• You might have already said this, but I wasn’t sure what you meant when you said...

X. To express disagreement
• I am not sure that I entirely agree with you. Here is what I was thinking...
• I understand your point, and yet there is evidence that suggests that...
• Perhaps there is another way of looking at this issue – for instance...
• Interesting. I wonder if...

Professional Conferences

XI. Conference presentation strategies
• Getting started: Today, we are going to talk about...
• Give instructions about questions: If you have questions, please feel free to stop me. (Or please hold your questions until the end, unless you need me to clarify something, then please stop me).
• Signal transitions: So far, we have discussed... Next, I want to focus on...
• Emphasize points: This is the most crucial step in the process... ; More important than this is...
• When don’t know the answer: That’s a great question! I have been curious about that myself. (or) People have been looking into that issue, but I have not followed it myself closely. (or) I have that detail in my other file, I can get back to you with the exact answer after we are done here today.

XII. Networking: Questions to ask.
• How did you get started in...?
• What do you love/enjoy most about what you do?
• What has surprised you about this line of work...?
• Where do you see the field/industry going next?
• What advice would you have for me if I wanted to...?
• What do you enjoy doing on your own time?