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Number 345



Tips for Topic Maintenance

by Rynette R. Kjesbo, M.S., CCC-SLP and Julie A. Daymut, M.A., CCC-SLP

During a conversation individuals take turns sharing their thoughts and opinions about a topic. It is important to stay on topic so everyone can follow along and participate. If the topic of conversation changes too many times or too quickly, the conversation becomes difficult to follow. Some students have difficulty maintaining a topic of conversation. Use the "tips" below with students to help them increase their understanding of topic maintenance. Then, once students have learned these important strategies, they can have discussions to further their learning. Ask questions like, "What are some situations in which you had to stay on topic?" or "What would happen if the person you were talking to changed topic every time he/she spoke?"



Know the topic before speaking.

Instruct students that it is important to understand what the topic of conversation is *before* participating in a conversation. Teach them about *self-talk* (statements we say or think to ourselves) and how this technique can be helpful in social situations. For example, have students practice saying (aloud or silently) "*I will make sure I know what others are talking about before I join a conversation.*" Knowing this "rule" can help them join in a conversation easily.

Ask questions to learn about the topic.

Teach students about the importance of *asking questions* when having conversations. Tell them that a great way to participate in a conversation and to stay on topic is to ask questions. Emphasize that this helps them learn more about the current topic. Students can practice the self-talk statement, "*I will stay on topic and get more information about it by asking questions*" to help with this.

Use comments and non-verbal gestures to show you are listening.

Tell students that *comments* and *non-verbal gestures*, such as nodding your head, agreeing with comments, and making eye contact, can help keep a conversation going. Let students know that these behaviors are all ways to show that you are listening and following the topic of conversation. Have students practice these non-verbal skills while role-playing, then see what other comments and non-verbal gestures they can come up with to help move conversations along.

Add information about the topic to the conversation.

Remind students that conversations require both *speaking* and *listening*. Discuss the importance of sharing what you know about a topic during a conversation, but also talk about the importance of listening to others' comments and ideas. Be sure to tell students that what they have to say and contribute is *important*... we all have something to share!

Let everyone have a chance to talk.

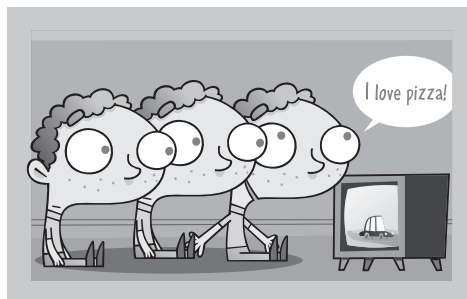
Make sure students understand that a conversation is meant to allow *everyone* to have a chance to give information, ask questions, or comment about the current topic. To help with this, students can practice the self-talk statement, "*I will not dominate the topic and will let everyone have the opportunity to talk about it.*"

Wait to talk about unrelated topics.

Instruct students in the difference between comments that are on *topic* and those that are *off-topic*. Remind them about the importance of turn-taking in conversation, and that they need to wait until everyone is finished talking before introducing a new topic.

Practice identifying others' off-topic remarks.

Help students identify off-topic remarks by focusing on *listening* to others' comments. Provide them with opportunities to focus on conversations they are not part of, and then provide feedback for what remarks were on topic during the conversation and which ones were not. Role-playing or watching videos are great ways to do this.



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