

Topic 1: Getting Acquainted

Tell your partner about yourself before you ask each of these questions.

- What name do your family and close friends call you?
- What is your birthplace?
- What languages do you speak?
- What do you say to people who ask, "Tell me, what kind of work do you do?"
- What do you like to do more than anything else in the world?
- What three adjectives other people might use to describe your personality?
- What was the happiest year of your life?
- Where did you spend your best vacation?
- What is your favorite food?

Topic 2: Coming the U.S., Aspirations, Day-to-Day Existence

COMING TO THE UNITED STATES

- Describe the events leading up to your arrival in the U.S.
- Talk about the decisions you had to make, and the things you had to take care of before you could leave your country.
- Recall your first impressions of the U.S.
- Compare your impressions upon arrival to the picture that you had of this country before you arrived.
- Describe your first speaking encounter with a native speaker of English.

ASPIRATIONS

- Talk about the most important goals in your life right now.
- Describe any frustrations you may be experiencing in trying to achieve your goals.
- Explain why learning or practicing English is so important to you.

DAY-TO-DAY EXISTENCE

- Compare your lifestyle in the U.S. with your lifestyle in your country.
- Living in a foreign country can be extremely trying. Talk about some of the difficulties, other than speaking another language, that distress you the most.
- How do you keep in touch with your family and friends back home?
- If you prefer to telephone, what is the time difference between New York City and your country?
- If you prefer to write letters, mention how long it takes letters to reach your country.
- If you prefer to e-mail your family, friends, or colleagues, do you do it often?

Topic 3: Interests, Preferences, International Background and Experience

INTERESTS

- Talk about some of your interests, hobbies and favorite pastimes.
- Describe the kinds of things you like to read for pleasure. Compare them to the materials you must read for work or other purposes.
- Describe the social and professional activities that give you the most opportunity to speak English.

PREFERENCES

- Talk about the time of day, the day of the week, and the season of the year you enjoy most
- Describe the kind of natural environment you enjoy best or would like to live in.

INTERNATIONAL BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

- What countries have you visited or lived in?
- Do you have any immediate plans to travel or pursue an international career?
- What languages do you speak or are you studying?

Topic 4: Names, Nicknames, and Terms of Endearment

NAMES, NICKNAMES, AND TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

- Give a brief history of your own given and family names: where they come from and what they mean, if anything, in your language. Mention any unusual circumstances surrounding your family's choice of your given name(s).
- Describe how masculine and feminine names are differentiated in your country.
- Explain how names are changed in your country, either by choice, or upon marriage.
- If you changed your name in any way after you came to the U.S., explain why.
- Recall some of the English names you have seen or heard. Ask your partner to tell you whether these names are common or unusual.
- Describe the nicknaming customs followed in your country. Mention some of the more common nicknames in your country. Talk about your own nickname(s).
- Describe some of the "pet" names reserved for family members in your country.

Topic 5: So Little Time

SO LITTLE TIME

- Compare the pace of life in your country to that of where you live in the U.S. Talk about your own perception of time and different attitudes about the value of time you've noticed since you came to the United States. Mention such activities as waiting on line, talking to people in person, talking on the telephone.
- What are some of the activities you value most in life, and how do you find the time to pursue them?
- If you decided to spend three more hours a week practicing English, how would you find the time?
- What time-wasting activities do you resent the most.
- How much free time do you have?
- Do you have more, or less, free time in the U.S. than you had in your country?
- Who do you think has more free time: men or women? Why do you think so?
- Watching TV consumes 37 percent of the free time women in the U.S. and 39 percent of the free time of men in the U.S. Compare the amount of time people in the U.S. spend watching TV to the amount of time people in your country spend watching TV.
- Time-management experts advise people who want to get control of their time to keep a minute-by-minute log of how they spend their time for a week. How helpful do you think this advice is?

Topic 6: Languages in General, Your Language, Your Background in English

LANGUAGES IN GENERAL

- Talk about your interest in languages, and describe the pleasure you get from learning new languages.
- What other languages besides English are you planning to learn?

YOUR LANGUAGE

- Give a brief description of your native language.
- How many different languages, or dialects of your country's official language, are spoken in your country? How well do you know these languages or dialects?
- How difficult would be for an English speaker to learn your language?
- Has your language "borrowed" any English words and expressions?

YOUR BACKGROUND IN ENGLISH

- Describe how, where, why, and from whom you learned English.
- What version of English (British, Canadian, Australian, American) were you taught?
- Have all of your teachers been native-English speakers? Which versions of English did they speak?
- Can you distinguish the various regional and national accents of English speakers? Which versions of English did they speak? How much opportunity did you have to speak English before coming to the U.S.?
- How much do you think your English has improved since coming to the U.S.?
- How many opportunities do you have to speak English during a typical week?

Topic 7: Your Language Goals, Your Learning Style

YOUR LANGUAGE GOALS

- What aspects of the English language give you the most trouble: listening comprehension, speaking, learning new words, understanding grammar, or writing?
- On what aspect of English would you most like to concentrate in your sessions with your partner?

- How quickly do you want your English to improve?
- What level of fluency are you aiming for?

YOUR LEARNING STYLE

- Do you learn best by listening to a teacher, or by studying on your own?
- Are you good at memorizing?
- Do you like to take tests?
- What was the best learning experience you ever had?
- If you wanted to find out your level of English proficiency, what kind of test do you feel would most accurately assess your present English skills?

Topic 8: Your Country's Assets and Attributes, Attitudes

YOUR COUNTRY'S ASSETS AND ATTRIBUTES

- Describe what you like best about your country and your village/town/city.
- What are some of your country's most popular tourist attractions?
- What would you change about your country and your village/town/city, if you could?
- What do you think is the most critical problem facing your country at this time?
- How do you keep up with current events in your country?
- If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you like to live?

ATTITUDES

- Would you describe the people of your country as optimists or pessimists?
- Where do you think people in the US get most of their ideas about your country?

- How do people in your country perceive people who live in the US?

Topic 9: Your Country's Economy, Education, Government and Politics

YOUR COUNTRY'S ECONOMY

- How does your country's monetary system work? What's the current exchange rate in relation to U.S. dollars?
- Compare the prices of basic necessities, such as food and clothing, in the U.S. to the prices in your country.

EDUCATION

- How does the educational system in your country differ from the educational system in the United States?
- In the U.S., the school "year" lasts about nine months, from late August or early September to late May or June. When does the school year begin and end in your country?
- How much does it cost to get a college education in your country?
- Are teachers respected and paid well in your country?
- What was your last year in school like?

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

- How do you feel about discussing politics with people?
- What form of government does your country have?
- What's your opinion of the U.S. form of government?
- What country do you think has the best form of government?

- Which world leader do you most admire?

Topic 10: Your Country's History, Land, Climate, Lifestyle and Recreation

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

- How interested are you in your country's history?
- What events in your country's history have most affected you or your family personally?
- What famous figures in your country's history do you feel everyone should know about?
- What would your life have been like if you had lived in your country 100 years ago?

LAND AND CLIMATE

- Looking at a map of your country with your partner, point out all the places where you have lived, worked, or visited
- How does the climate and topography of your home region compare to the climate and topography of the New York metropolitan region?
- What's your favorite kind of weather?

LIFESTYLE AND RECREATION

- What's the biggest difference between your lifestyle in your country and your lifestyle in the U.S.?
- How would you describe the cuisine of your country to someone who had never tasted it?
- What foods and beverages are unique to your home region?
- How many hours a day and how many hours a week do most people in your country work?

- What are some of the more popular leisure activities in your country?

Topic 11: National Calendar, Population and Society

NATIONAL CALENDAR

- The U.S. has ten national holidays: New Year's Day (1 January), Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday (third Monday in January), President's Day (celebrates the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, third Monday in February), Memorial Day (last Monday in May), Independence Day (4 July), Labor Day (first Monday in September), Columbus Day (second Monday in October), Veterans' Day (11 November), Thanksgiving (fourth Thursday in November), and Christmas (25 December). Although they are not official national holidays, other days Americans observe include: Valentine's Day (14 of February), Mother's Day (second Sunday in May), Father's Day (third Sunday in June), and Halloween (31 of October). What are your country's national holidays?
- What are your favorite holidays, and why do you enjoy them so much?
- Two minor American observances predate the founding of the U.S. Groundhog (2 February) comes from the legend that if a groundhog sees his shadow when he emerges from his winter home, winter will last only six more weeks. April Fools' Day (1 April), an old English holiday, is a day to play jokes on people. Do you observe days such as these in your country?
- U.S. workers get one or more weeks of paid vacation a year. Generally they're permitted to take their vacation at any time throughout the year. When do workers take their vacations in your country?

POPULATION AND SOCIETY

- How does the population of your country compare to the population of the U.S. in terms of size, density, and growth?
- How would you describe the racial, ethnic, and religious makeup of your country?
- Does your country have a definite class structure?

Topic 12: Relationships

FAMILIES

- Talk about the importance of the family in your country and describe the make-up of a typical family unit
- Compare living alone with living within the structure of a family.
- On U.S. TV, people like to talk in great detail about their family problems. How do you feel about this?

CHILDREN

- Compare child-rearing in your country to child-rearing in the United States.
- Has there been a change in the status of women in your country that has affected child-rearing?

MEN AND WOMEN

- In your opinion, do men get along better with other men, or do women get along better with other women?
- Which do you think is an easier role to play today: being a man or being a woman?
- Why do you think the divorce rate is rising so fast in Western societies?
- When do you think it's appropriate for a woman to ask a man out for a date?
- What if you could create the perfect lifetime companion? What kind of person would he/she be?

FRIENDS

- What does friendship mean to you? How does your concept of friendship compare with U. S. -style friendships?
- Compare someone you like very much with someone you don't care for at all.

OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

- Talk about an alternative social structure you know about, such as a commune, a kibbutz, akolkhoz, a collective farm, an ashram, asysterhood, a brother, a sorority, or a fraternity.
- How do you feel about pets? Talk about the pets you've owned or would like to own.
- How would you describe an ideal relationship between an employer and an employee? Compare you ideal relationship to your personal experience of such relationships.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

- What if a young man from your country told you that he is homesick and miserable in the United States, and that he misses his girlfriend? What if he told you he thinks she may have lost interest in him, or may even be dating someone else? What would you tell this man to do about this situation?
- What if you had good news to tell someone in your country? Whom would you call first, and why would you want to speak to this person?
- What if tomorrow you arrived in your country on an all-expense -paid two-weeks visit? What would you do and whom would you see? What changes do you think people would notice in you since your absence from your country?