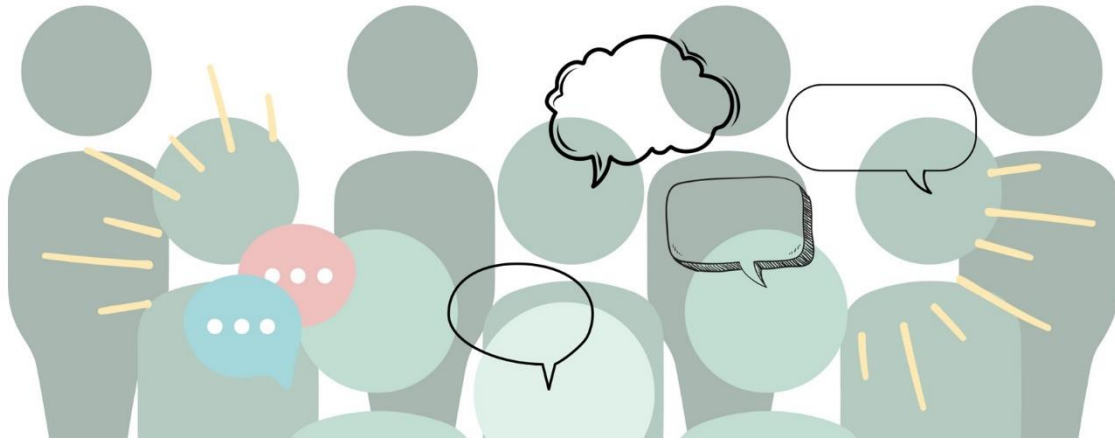


# 5 Little Rules Every Conversationalist Should Follow

*Shôn Ellerton, December 22, 2022*

*By following five little rules, conversations can become much better.*



Do you like trying to solve the world's problems in a conversation? Engage in topics surrounded by controversy? Talk about our energy crisis? Debate whether we are contributing to climate change? Speculate if England will ever again win the World Cup? Or, even to formulate the best way to make a non-alcoholic wine taste like wine?

Most of us like to engage in conversation from time to time and here, I've come up with five little rules to make a conversation a better one. Although, they seem simple in nature, they are not so easily adhered to. I've been guilty of not following them on many occasions!

## **1. Listen and try not to interrupt**

One of my favourite pastimes is chatting at the local coffee shop or sitting back with a glass of wine or whisky in small company discussing the big issues that affect our daily lives. We all have a lot to say, often with very little time to spare. What happens to most of us including me, is the temptation to interrupt the other person. Not only is it rude, but by doing so, we may miss out on additional nuance and context to the conversation. For us to better our knowledge, we need to listen to others. Think of this as a reverse analogy of losing weight by spending more calories than what you consume. In other words, gain knowledge by taking more in than giving out.

## **2. Allow others to speak by not hogging the limelight**

It is important to listen, but it is also equally so not to hog all the time when it's time to talk. It is *very* easy to get carried away into a monologue which could bring three unwanted effects. People get bored listening and want nothing more than to interrupt and butt in. They may perceive that person as being all-knowing and supremely self-important. And finally, long monologues can lead into topic-change without others having a chance to have their say.

## **3. Be mindful when changing topics**

This leads nicely into changing topics. We all know how easy it is to change topics, and during an engaging conversation, especially in a casual situation, they often change on the fly in a seemingly sneaky way. Now, it wouldn't be natural to stick to only one topic in, say, an evening with friends who want to engage in intellectual banter. However, it is important to be mindful when thinking about introducing a different topic. Does anyone else want to say anything about the current topic before changing? Because once the topic is changed, it is often awkward to go back to the old topic once the new one has started. Perhaps the best way to be mindful of changing topic is to wait for a gap in the conversation signalling that everyone has had something to say about it. A more prolonged gap or silence suggests that a new topic of conversation is needed.

## **4. Focus on what is being said rather than focus on what you're about to say next**

We might be getting into the realm of neurolinguistic programming, but one of the most difficult things to overcome whilst engaging in scintillating conversation is *not* to focus on what you are wanting to say next. Doing so impairs one's ability to absorb the conversation thus potentially missing out vital information. In a more formal structure, such as a timed debate between two speakers, it is common practice to take notes of what the other speaker is saying before it is time to speak. In a casual setting, sometimes letting go of what one wants to say and following the flow of conversation is the best way. It's easy to spot the person holding back on what to say and not fully listening to the conversation.

## **5. Develop a thick skin and refrain from avoiding topics you don't like**

And finally. And *most* importantly. Whether one is in a casual conversation, a more formal debate, or on social media circles, it's possible that topics of disagreeable, controversial, or even offensive topics of conversation might pop up now and again. There is no problem if one chooses not to engage and sit back in the sidelines. No one is going to accuse anyone for not participating, or certainly shouldn't be. For those wishing to air their views, this is quite normal and healthy, but they must also be prepared to engage accordingly. Conversations with opposing and conflicting views can get heated but a good conversationalist should keep an open mind and be willing to discuss them. However, those that do *not* sit on the sidelines and forcibly air their opinions and then block any attempt, whether it is through talking over them or by changing the subject, of others with opposing views exhibits abject and objectional behaviour. They often exhibit narcissistic, prideful, and arrogant behaviour likely to draw a cult of followers with similar confirmation biases.

There is a good saying here. If you can't handle the heat, stay out of the kitchen!