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About the Author

Alyson Bryan has wide experience interacting with people in social and [business](#) settings.

Alyson said, "I started when I was a teenager helping my mother who was a keen fundraiser for several organizations."

"Then, I worked for a few businesses and continued some fundraising from time to time. Now, I help my [partner](#) with our business, so I've had to cut back on other activities."

Alyson said, "I believe that everybody can benefit by improving their communication skills, whether they're in business or not."

"If you have [children](#), you'll probably be involved with their [schools](#) and other activities. And those same skills can be helpful in social activities as well."

Alyson said, "They can also make it easier when we deal with professional people and administrators, [doctors](#), and technicians."

"I wrote this [book](#) to help anyone who wants be able to deal with people in any situation without becoming stressed or feeling inadequate."

"Most people have unpleasant encounters occasionally despite our best efforts. But, practicing small talk helps us to become better able to deal with whatever situations we encounter.

That might be in our workplace or at a public event. Being able to communicate and be [confident](#) is a huge advantage for anyone."

"The better we can connect with any one so that we understand and respect each other, the better the world will be."

Introduction

The pace of modern [life](#) is getting faster all the time.

We have a lot of [pressure](#) on our [relationships](#) and interactions with people in [business](#) and social activities.

This [book](#) will help you improve your skills in both social and business areas.

"Your first impression can never be erased. You can lose people's interest in those first 30 seconds and it can take many attempts to get it back."

You can avoid common mistakes and become a better talker and understanding people's body [language](#) which can give you unspoken clues.

It's easy to follow the [tips](#) in this [guide](#) which is based on experience in a wide variety of situations.

None of the suggestions make great demands on you but they will take a little tweaking to fit your particular situation and temperament.

When you have read the book, go to those sections which you find most important and get started,

A happier and more productive future is ahead of you!

Alyson Bryan

Why First Impressions Are Very Important

“Never forget that you only have one opportunity to make a first impression – with [investors](#), with customers, with PR, and with [Marketing](#).”

Natalie Massenet

Whenever we meet someone for the first time, we are imprinting an impression of ourselves on their [minds](#) which will affect whatever interactions and other dealings we have through the rest of our lives.

In this chapter, I outline some basic suggestions for meeting people and starting a conversation with them.

Be open and approachable.



Your Handshake

Don't try any mind games or tests of [strength](#).

Keep your palm vertical.

Make eye contact and keep smiling through the introductions.

Shake hands, release your grip and step back.

I learned to stand straight but relaxed.

Make [eye](#) contact and move your focus around their face if you are just with one person.

If there are more people in the group, move your attention to the person who is speaking or whoever in the group is the subject of the speaker's comments.

Give the person or group you are with your full attention, especially when someone is talking.

It is very off-putting if someone moves their attention away from the group to scan the room, as if looking for someone more of interest to them.

When You Speak

Don't hurry your movements or [speech](#).

Fast movements can distract their attention from what you say.

Talking fast makes it harder for them to understand what you say and your [message](#) may not get through.

Start talking a little slower than you usually do.

When you know that you're are being understood and responded to well, you can start talking at your usual rate and the other people will be able to still fully keep up.

Be Ready to Speak Anywhere Anytime!



This guide is mainly focused on communicating with people one-to-one or in small groups.

But, there are many occasions when even non-business people may have an opportunity and a need to speak to a reporter about a matter of public concern or a community group which they support or even to members of that group as an office-holder.

The ability to speak well on such occasions will also help when you have a stressful situation of any kind.

I said in the introduction that the ability to chat and connect with other people in all sorts of situations is valuable to anyone, not just those who have a [business](#) or other interest to promote.

There can also be a need for making a [speech](#) at important [family](#) events. The audience may be small but you always want to do justice to the person being honored and not bore your relatives and their families who have probably heard all of your jokes before!

The experience of speaking in public is one that is dreaded almost above a visit to the [dentist](#) by most people in this country.

But, it becomes easier like so many things which we [fear](#) without even having experienced.

Speaking off the Cuff!

The [secret](#) to speaking off the cuff is to rehearse everything first!

A magician friend told me, "Comedians practice all their jokes, including those ad-lib comments they seem to just think up when they are interviewed."

Many performers have done the same jokes hundreds of times. They have stock routines specially prepared and rehearsed to fit many occasions. The aim is not just to make them look and sound good when they do a [show](#) or

an interview, they ensure that they give the audience or the viewers something they will enjoy!

After all, their reputation is on the line and it would do them no good if their jokes got no laughs, would it?

So, we should follow their lead and rehearse anything we're going to say in public, whether it is likely to be publicized or not.

Getting Trained

There are many ways to get some [training](#).

Organizations like Toast [Masters](#) International and Jaycees (Junior Chamber) have organized training in public speaking for members of their [clubs](#) which are spread around the world.

These workshops are good ways to improve your speaking [power](#) and ability to think on your feet in a friendly location with supportive and experts instructors.

Speaking Styles

There are just three basic speaking styles:

1. Aggressive

Aggressive [speakers](#) are easy to recognize.

They try to keep a firm grip on the conversation.

They will often win the discussion but lose support in the long term.

They don't want to share the credit for any positive outcome.

They probably make people feel uncomfortable but feel that it is the other person who is causing the problem.

2. Assertive

The Assertive person is a good listener and willing to acknowledge other people's point of view.

But, they also don't hesitate to promote or defend their own suggestions.

3. Passive

A non-assertive speaker is, in their own view, just being cooperative. They may have better [ideas](#) than some which more forceful people in the group put forward, but they will seldom offer their alternative view.

They want to be seen as a team member but they are short-changing themselves as well as the other people because they are not contributing their knowledge and experience to the group's discussion.

People don't always stick with their main speaking style. They may change from Passive to Aggressive when they are with people whom they [believe](#) are subordinate to them.

They have possibly had problems getting their ideas across during childhood in [school](#) or at their [home](#), so they overact when they are able to do so.

A person that uses a passive-aggressive manner will [sound](#) as fair-minded and cooperative as anyone else. But they are mainly focused on getting their suggestions up and winning recognition for their input or even, at times,

others' contributions.

In most situations, the assertive mode is likely to get the most cooperation.

Practice dealing with the different conversation styles

If you have met some people that are hard to work with or cause problems in other situations, you may want to work through how you can best deal with their tactics without compromising your [goals](#) or principles.

Aggressive people are difficult to interact with, especially when they are in higher positions.

The best you can do is to make your points and show you will work with them up to a point.

They are often very experienced in office politics and it may come to a point where your best [course](#) is to move on.

Making Your Conversations Flow

If you feel nervous when you are talking with friends, colleagues or potential customers, the best advice is that more experience will give you better results more quickly than anything else.

The flow I referred to is being able to present a calm appearance and well-controlled manner with any group and on just about any subject.

If you hear yourself using the dreaded "um" and "ah", the [remedy](#) is to think about what you are going to say before starting to speak. The "um" and "ah" are fillers while your [mind](#) sorts out the next few words you want to use.

This may be because of nerves or a tendency to try to perfect each thought you express.

You will be easier to understand if you try using a couple of seconds of silence instead of the "um" and "ah".

Fast Talk Reduces Understanding

Most inexperienced [speakers](#) talk faster when they are with people they don't know very well, than they do when they are with close friends or [family](#).

They seem to want to say their piece but not take up too much time or offend anyone.

The faster pace can be off-putting and reduce the level of understanding people get from what they say.

The first suggestion by many speaking [coaches](#) to new clients is to slow their talking rate about 5%.

When they slow down their pace, they become easier to understand and get better responses from the other people.

Connecting with People



There are no [secrets](#) to making connections with people. We can easily work out what to do from how we feel and react to other people.

But, we get inside our own heads and start thinking what might go wrong.

That almost ensures that something definitely will!

I may seem a little uncaring with that comment.

It isn't true. I can remember how I felt when I started socializing more than a couple of years ago.

I also remember the first talks I gave while my whole [body](#) trembled so much I thought the folks watching would notice.

The thing to remember is that most people go through those experiences at some time and they have similar feelings to you, so they will support your effort just as you will when you are more experienced and are listening to another nervous speaker.

They don't enjoy your nerves or flubbed words any more than you do.

What they do like is your attitude and steady improvement.

The best advice I have to reduce the effect of nervousness is to focus on giving the people you are with something worthy of their time and attention.

Good Questions



Questions are important in our conversations. As well as getting information, which can help further interact with the person you asked, that person has the attention of the group.

Your question also can demonstrate that you are interested in them and their activities.

Use “open questions” which give them room to answer with more than a simple “Yes” or “No”.

If they answer with a single word anyway, they may be indicating that they don’t want to share more information with you at that time.

But most people will respond with some detail.

Keep It Interesting

Make sure that you stick to topics which will be interesting and possibly helpful to the people you are talking with.

If you ever have been in a conversation where someone keeps switching the topic to something which is mostly only of interest to them, I sympathize.

Whether it is their [pets](#), their [business](#) or their [kids](#), they are not making any meaningful connection. They will also find none of this group will be eager to have more talk with them in future.

Small talk and Body Language

Some people think that Body Language is sneaky or even false, but my experience is that using body [language](#) principle whenever you are talking to people is useful and not unfair.



But, there are some potential risks when you use body language and your [techniques](#) are obvious or distracting.

The first point is that Body Language is more of an art, in my opinion, than a proven [science](#).

The reason is that the gestures and other clues we use for Body Language may not always be an accurate indicator of how a person is feeling or thinking.

And, people that just have started to use Body Language have to be careful about [drawing](#) conclusions from limited data. Always consider what particular signs might indicate other than the standard [Body](#) Language answer.

For instance, people do cross their arms over their chest when they are losing interest in what is being said to them or if they are disagreeing with it, but they also do it when they are tired or cold.

Be subtle when checking for signs. After all, the most important rule with small talk is to pay attention to whoever is speaking.

Body Language can help you in your interactions if you [practice](#), but may take a lot more study than most realize to get to get great results.

When you look for clues about someone's body language, look at their feet for clues. People who are stressed may often make small movements with their feet while maintaining a composed appearance above their waist.

Work on your own body language. [Check](#) yourself for poor posture or tendency to put out signals which are either too revealing or inaccurate.

Making Your Body Language Work for You

Many people know some of the signals revealed by body language, but they may not be using their own body language to their advantage.

The best way to review your own body language is to have a video made of you when you are with a group.

If you have not seen yourself on video before, you may get a few shocks. You will almost certainly note some points which could be improved.

Many [coaches](#) suggest that you adopt a [power](#) pose when appropriate.

Two common ones are standing tall with feet apart or sitting with [arms](#) behind your [head](#).

Obviously, these poses would not be appropriate in many situations but you can get some of the effect on your own system by adopting the outstretched arms pose for a minute or so before you actually enter the office.

The boost will last a few [minutes](#) and your natural enthusiasm will take over.

Research suggests that these poses increase testosterone in your [blood](#) and may lower cortisol, a [hormone](#) related to [stress](#).

Phone Talk Tips

Telephones and smart devices carry millions of interactions every day.

Some people don't think how important their calls are.

A phone call may give you a chance to make an [impression](#) on someone you don't know that may improve your future lot.

So, it's worthwhile to work on this [method](#) of communication as hard as any other.

Always take a deep, calming [breath](#) before you pick up the handset or tap the screen.

Put a genuine [smile](#) on your face before you say anything. It really will positively affect the impact of your words by the person at the other end.

Keep your [voice](#) upbeat through the call.

Don't waffle. Even though calls may be very cheap with some systems, you should keep your calls short to show you respect the other person's time..

Always end the call with a polite and upbeat phrase.

Make sure the connection has been dropped before making any comment about the caller or whatever was discussed. Many [businesses](#) and individuals have suffered when their negative comments were heard by the other party during or after the call.

Many devices and even older handset microphones can pick up what is being said anywhere in the room where they are placed.

Better still, don't say anything negative!

Leave a Message that will be acted on!

Think carefully about the message you will leave if someone is unavailable when you call.

Your message may be one of hundreds. Most will be rushed, casual efforts which may be hard to understand or have no good reason why they should be answered. A few [minutes](#) thought can ensure you get a reply so that you

can interact further with that person.

Make your sign-off as personal and memorable as your original greeting so that your calls stand out without being too showy.

The time put into creating a memorable message will pay for itself very quickly.

Keep Your Small Talk Positive

The news services are often full of death, disaster and destruction – people must like [reading](#) and listening to reports of those terrible events.

But, negativity should be avoided when you are talking to people face to face, unless they are directly involved.

When we load our chatter with negativity, we cast a dark cloud over the group and guarantee that the exchanges will not be memorable or ones which the other people will want to continue for long.

There are some people who do gather to share their negative opinions of most of the rest of us but their talk is small-minded and very sour.

The dark cloud over these conversations will drive other people away from the group in search of more interesting and enlivening talk.

As well as your talk, make sure your face and [body language](#) are showing positive signs.

This is a good time to give some suggestions for including humor in your small talk and when that's not a good [idea](#).

Using Humor with Your Small Talk

We all like to laugh and know it's a good way to improve most human interactions.

When we want to use humor to add some fun to our small talk sessions, these points should help you do it successfully.

The first rule with comedy is only use jokes which you know the punchline and are sure that most of the other people won't.

The jokes on last night's TV [shows](#) will not work the next day because most will have seen them professionally performed and you won't have them to that standard.

If the joke dumps on anybody, that [body](#) better be yours.

Getting a laugh at somebody's expense will make them feel small and not do your reputation any good. But, if you make yourself the target, most people will appreciate you sacrificing yourself to give them a laugh.

Also avoid bringing in controversial topics just for a laugh.

Practice your jokes. Remember every performer practices their jokes because nothing hurts a reputation more than a joke that doesn't work.

Humor which relates to the topics you're discussing will get the best response.

Don't load the conversation with humor – it works best when used as seasoning, not main [course](#).

Keep any jokes short like your other contributions to the conversation. Long jokes bomb unless you are able to maintain the interest of the group and avoid them guessing the punchline before you give it to them.

Give other people's humor a good [hearing](#) and appropriate acknowledgement.

Don't use their joke as an introduction to another of yours. It will look like you're trying to top their effort. Save your joke for another time (even refer back to the one they told tonight on that later occasion).

There's a proven link between good humor and good [health](#).

Sometimes, you can add to the appeal of your joke by linking someone in the group to it. But, only do that if they will be as amused as you are when the punchline is revealed.

Telling jokes can help you improve all your talking techniques because it's probably the hardest to do well.

Looking for suitable jokes will help you maintain a positive and light-hearted attitude.

Stay Up to Date



Although there are many options to help keep us informed and about current issues and new [developments](#), many of us are cutting back because of the demands of our [jobs](#) and other activities.

But, it's important to have some knowledge of these topics for the health of our [businesses](#) and possible new opportunities.

Checking reliable sources regularly also helps us to keep our small talk interesting and accurate.

As well as the sites and commentators online, I like to watch for local appearances of people involved in cutting edge ventures.

Seeing them and [hearing](#) from their own lips the new information helps to make it real and easier to remember.

I also believe that we need to keep [learning](#) and most scientists agree that it's a great way to help protect us from some of the major problems associated with aging.

Recent research confirms that a healthy [brain](#) continues to have the ability to create neural circuits and add more information to our subconscious through our whole lives.

Previously, this functionality was thought to start deteriorating after our mid-teens.

The important point is that using this power costs us nothing but requires that we maintain our [health](#) with good [food](#), [exercise](#) and mental stimulation.

How well it keeps working depends on how we treat it.

We can improve our lives by engaging with more people.

Every few years someone announces that something which had previously been consider a fact is ot any longer.

Mostly, this is good news, with new breakthroughs in [medicine](#),

transportation or other fields.

So, if someone has told you that you cannot achieve a [goal](#) you [desire](#), get a second opinion!

Listening is the Way to Star at Small Talk



People who are successful at small [talk](#) are all good listeners!

They don't just hear the words, they understand the meaning and can interpret the emotion which comes with them.

This point is so important, we should be teaching every child how to listen effectively.

That would help them in all their interactions. Right now, we can help our own [children](#) and ensure a better future for them.

Part of that teaching is to be an example of a good listener which they might use as a role model.

Just as most people think they are great [speakers](#) because they've been doing it through their whole lives, they think they all have great listening skills.

The benefits of listening well are several.

People appreciate your interest. Good listeners always leave a good [impression](#) which spreads to our other interactions with those people.

It's really simple. Would you prefer to deal with someone that has an aggressive speaking style or someone that, while assertive, shows genuine interest in what you have to say?

It's easy to improve your listening skills.

Start by focusing on each message you get from someone. Keep looking at them if they are with you or ensure that you don't have distractions if you are talking on the phone or online.

If you don't understand what they told you, ask for clarification.

No-one [minds](#) that! They appreciate the demonstration of genuine interest.

Respond to them in a way that shows clearly you understood and appreciate

their information.

Working on our small [talk](#) makes good sense.

It is the way to making great connections with the people we [meet](#) and also reduces friction and misunderstandings.

3 Minute Relaxation

The most important thing about connecting with people is getting any nervousness under [control](#).

The easiest way I found is to meditate.

This [system](#) needs no special tools and words.

You just need to breathe!

The only other requirements are to have a quiet, private space and a few minutes alone.

You can even do this on your parked [car](#). That has a risk that someone will bang on the window to [check](#) if you are alright or just to annoy you.

But, that should not have any lasting effect.

You could even use a locked cubicle in the toilets where you work!

Just set yourself on a seat or the [floor](#), whichever is comfortable to you.

Relax.

Close your [eyes](#).

Breathe out, then take a slow, steady breath in and follow it down to your stomach.

If you put your fingertips on your stomach, you should feel pressure there as it expands.

Otherwise, you are breathing too shallow.

Take a few breaths until you feel that pressure.

Then, you can start breathing slowly and deeply.

This alone makes the [exercise](#) valuable for almost everyone as you will breathe better for the rest of your [life](#).

After you have breathed in, let your [mind](#) slowly follow the breath up and out through your nose.

Take your time at each stage and repeat at least 3 times.

More Top Small Talk Tips

The impression people have of you depends in part on your appearance. AN important factor in that is your general [health](#).

Some less well-known factors can make a big difference.

Look after your feet: We depend on them for so much but [doctors](#) will tell you that few people look after their legs and feet as well as they do their [face](#), [teeth](#) etc.

Perfect Speech level: To find your best vocal level for speaking, repeat the "um" [sound](#) slowly for about a minute while keeping your lips together.

Open Questions: If someone starts a conversation with a question to you, don't use closed answers, like "Yes" or "No" which leave them no opening to continue. Give them a little information which they can extend the conversation with if they want to.

Silence is NOT Deadly: People often [stress](#) if there is a pause in their conversation and they can't immediately think of something to say. But, a pause is good at times.

Safe questions: keep a few safe and simple questions for such moments. If the other person has not given out any information or opinion which you can use to add to your chat, comment favorably on some aspect of the venue, entertainment or the gathering in general.

Avoid negative comments because they might end your conversation abruptly.

Small Talk Success is Yours!



I know you will find small talk a valuable skill in your social and [business](#) dealings.

It's easy to improve your skills as you use them every day in your regular activities. You can always find some examples, good and bad, among the people you deal with.

Use Small Talk to help yourself and others. It's the quickest and cheapest way to improve your connection with those great people you meet every day.

Alyson Bryan

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