

conversation concerns

In addition to the anxiety associated with the meal, many hosts worry whether the conversation will flow easily amongst their guests. Most of us have experienced that awkward silence where no one knows what to say, or a lively debate turning into a heated argument. Without stating the obvious, dinner parties and entertaining are not just about the food - conversation is an integral part of the occasion. As a host you are largely responsible for ensuring that the conversation does not become boring, uncomfortable or overly intense.

Here are some pointers to encourage lively and varied conversation:

- Ask open-ended questions. Asking “why did you decide to travel to Cambodia” is much more likely to evoke an interesting response than “I heard you travelled to Cambodia recently”, which may result in a “yes” or “no” answer.
- Be aware of non-verbal clues that your guests may be bored.
- Avoid sensitive or controversial topics that may make your guests uncomfortable. If such a conversation is taking place, discreetly interject and change the subject. Another strategy would be to introduce the next course.
- Include others in the conversation and use interpersonal skills to ensure everyone feels included.
- Show interest in others and you can't go wrong.
- Don't monopolise the conversation, no matter how interesting you think you are!
- Encourage the introverts to participate in the conversation.
- Save arguments or nit-picking with your partner for another time.
- Choose topics that interest all guests present. For example, avoid talking about work with a colleague if not all guests are your work-mates.
- Avoid unpleasant topics such as diseases.
- Listen intently to the conversation – you can never lose by being a good listener.
- Topics such as travel, books, restaurants, hobbies, sports, theatre, films, studies and music are safe and interesting topics to introduce.

A great product that I stumbled across recently is TableTopics Conversation Starters. Described as “the nervous host's best friend”, these sets of conversation starting questions are guaranteed to get your dinner table conversation flowing. Each card poses a different question, from the super fun to the never-thought-about-that-before serious. They retail for about \$50 AUS are available on the internet on various sites, including <http://hartandheim.com.au/index.php?cPath=93>