

# The Talking Point

What is your blood type? Have you eaten? How old are you? How much money do you make?

LEVEL: Intermediate / Advanced

TIME: 15-20 min

LANGUAGE FOCUS: Translation, Pragmatic Competence, Cultural Propriety

SKILLS: Introductions, Conversational Skills, Recognizing Prejudices and Predispositions

MATERIALS: 15-20 topics

GOAL: Allow the students a chance to discuss avoided subjects or misunderstandings that can occur as a second language learner.

STUDENTS WILL: Discuss their own cultural taboos and topic appropriateness and then recontextualize them amongst each other and in the American cultural setting.

PROCEDURE:

- Introduce the topic of cultural taboos and topics that are avoided in the culture at hand. No need to go in excessive detail or length, but focus the discussion on the adverse reactions that can occur such as anger, passive aggression, cold shoulder, etc.
- Present a pool of topics for class on a worksheet with definitions (in no particular order) and ask them to sort those topics into categories based on how appropriate it is to talk about those topics with; Close Friends/Family, Colleagues/Classmates, or Strangers.
- The topics range from health, financial income, age, or religion among other types of topics.
- A tally will be collected on the results of the survey and the students will be asked to discuss in small groups why certain topics were placed in certain categories.
- The class will then be asked to consider general taboos they have discovered from this exercise and will be asked to consider what conversational taboos a person who isn't from their own cultural background might find themselves committing if the roles were reversed.
- This is important in allowing the students to recognize they may make cultural oversteps, but that it is a normal experience and not something that can be always anticipated. Most people understand and know that this is part of a never ending learning process.