

Script for Introducing Starting a Conversation
(optional PowerPoint)

"I'm often kind of shy, but I do like to have a conversation with people, especially strangers. I used to worry that if I started a conversation, they would think that I was bothering them or they wouldn't even answer me. Or they might think that I'm a strange or crazy person. Researchers say that that feeling is very common, and it is the reason why many people do not start conversations with others. They said that strangers will sit next to each other on a bus or train or park bench looking at their cell phones or will stand in line without smiling or saying, "Hello" to other people because they think other people are not interested in talking to them.

I read some interesting research about this. The researchers interviewed train passengers in Chicago. They asked them, "How many other passengers do you think would be willing to talk to you?" These passengers guessed that only about 40% of the other passengers would be willing to talk to them, and that 60% would not talk to them.

Then the researchers asked these passengers whom they had interviewed if they would be willing to volunteer to be in an experiment. They asked some of the passengers to talk to someone on the train whom they didn't know. At the end of the train ride, they talked to these volunteer passengers and found out that all the people that they had talked to were happy to talk to them. In other words, 100% of the strangers were willing to have a conversation. And they found that the volunteer passengers who started the conversation really enjoyed it.

The researchers did more experiments in waiting rooms. For example, these were rooms where people were waiting to get a haircut, or students waiting to talk to a counselor, or passengers waiting for an airplane, or at a doctor's office. Before someone entered the waiting room, the researchers asked them if they'd like to be part of an experiment. Then they asked some of them to start a conversation with other people who were strangers in the waiting room. Later, the researchers interviewed the people who started and participated in the conversation. And they found some very positive result: Both the person who started the conversation and the other person said that they enjoyed the experience of talking to the other person.

.In sum, few people start a conversation with a stranger, but most of them seem happy to talk to you if you do.

Now, we'll practice some techniques that you can use when you'd like to talk to someone while you are waiting for a class to start, or at a party, or on a bus, or in a waiting room, or even while standing in line."