

10 Tips for Conversing with Guests Learning English

By Jenna Lynne Roberts

Having international guests is an exciting part of being an Airbnb host. While many of your guests from abroad will be fluent in English, some might have very low English skills, or none at all. This brings a challenge when you need to share pertinent information, or want to attempt lighter conversations as you check in with how they are enjoying their stay.

A great way to approach this is to come from a place of gratitude for their effort to learn English, which helps express patience and curiosity as you listen. Here are some other tips that will help deepen interactions with your global visitors, and hopefully increase your reviews as they appreciate the respect you have shown them.

- Show positive and open non-verbals through your smile, body posture and tone. Breathe and become present so you can relax, as this adds to their sense of ease while conversing in a foreign language.
- Start with small talk to get an idea of the guests' language level. Keep in mind that some people can comprehend more than they speak, or speak well but only understand a little. It's good to set a natural pace of conversation before you move into relevant information.
- Imagine that someone is writing down what you are saying. Speak slowly and clearly without raising your volume any higher than normal. You can use a technique that I have coined 'Clause and Pause'. Say one idea, one portion of a sentence, and then pause a moment before you do the same with the next idea. Emphasize with tonal inflection any key points.
- Simplify and diversify your vocabulary. First, use the most common words, often the shortest. See if you can give synonyms for key words, or use words that might be derived from their language (Latin words for Spanish, French, and Italian speakers, etc.). Be sure to ask if they know the bigger vocabulary, and then define it in more basic language if they do not. Draw pictures when all else fails.
- Avoid idioms and slang. 'Get your ducks in a row' does not translate. Even the more obvious phrase of 'costs an arm and a leg' will stall the conversation as they try to make sense of the meaning while you continue speaking. Think before you use metaphors, colloquialisms, slang, idioms, or jargon.
- Stay focused on one idea at a time. English learners are trying to comprehend your main idea. If you go off on a tangent or complicate your key point, it will only confuse. Stay linear in your ideas.

- Walk them down the path of each topic you speak about. Start with an umbrella question to lead them into the conversation, rather than just diving into a new subject.
- Be casually animated. Demonstrate ideas with physical movements to help clarify and accentuate your key points. Obviously, keep it below the exuberance you might use with a child, as that could come across as condescending.
- To check in on comprehension, ask for specific information. If the answer is yes or no, you might just get a yes from people from any cultures who feel uncomfortable saying 'no'. Instead, ask more open-ended questions that require a unique answer. This is especially useful around safety concerns or house rules.
- Be sure to give guests ample time to think, as American response time is often fast. Smile and breathe as they formulate.

Other Fun Tips to Increase Global Exposure:

If you love having international guests, consider having your page translated into other languages. Another fun idea is to make a link to a simplified description that is written in very basic English with defining photos alongside each paragraph.

Of course, knowing how to interact on a social level goes much deeper than language. If you get a lot of guests from one culture, consider reading the *Culture Shock* series book from their country. Your guests will appreciate it, and you will increase your global knowledge in ways that will help you when you finally make the trip to explore the Airbnb's in their land.

If you are interested in a co-host who represents your home graciously to people from around the world, Jenna Roberts also acts a co-host in the Portland metro areas.

Or, if you would like to expand your own skills for interacting with internationals, Jenna regularly teaches an online course through Lern.org. Feel free to contact her directly to find out when the next class is happening at:

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Link to Co-host Page:

https://www.airbnb.com/co-hosting/profile/64693840?user_id=64693840&s=50

Writer's Bio: Jenna Lynne Roberts has been an Airbnb Superhost since 2016. She is an ESL educator who has designed and managed an immersion English Service

Learning program for international students to volunteer in the US. She has also lived abroad in Taiwan, Germany, and the UK, and knows what it's like to not know what the other person is talking about.

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