

# Conversational Behavioural Questionnaire

## Instructions:

Completing this questionnaire will be a useful way to get you thinking about your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to talking with people.

To get the most out of the questionnaire, try to avoid being too generous or too hard on yourself – try to be as accurate as you can about your general pattern of conversational behaviour.

On the following pages you will find 24 statements describing aspects of how you might behave in a conversation. Consider how often you think the description applies to you.

Award a score for each statement by putting a cross in the boxes numbered 1-5 at the bottom of each page.

The numbers correspond to the following statements:

- 1      Almost never
- 2      Not very often
- 3      Sometimes
- 4      Quite often
- 5      Almost always

## Note:

Base your scores on how you think you behave in ordinary, everyday conversations. Before you award a score, spend a few moments thinking about some recent real-life conversations you have had.

As you'll see, underneath each statement are two detailed descriptions. The first describes kinds of behaviour associated with relatively high scores. The second describes kinds of behaviour associated with relatively low scores.

Reading these fuller descriptions will help with your scoring.

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## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

### What am I like at dialogue?

The first four statements are concerned with my skills at engaging in dialogue. The best conversations are dialogues, where both people work with each other as partners, taking turns to talk and listen, sharing the topics being discussed and remaining open to each other's ideas.

Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Statement 4
I make an effort to have genuine, two-way conversations	I make sure my responses connect with what's just been said to me	I am open to being influenced by what people have to say	I do my part to make sure conversations accomplish something worthwhile, including having fun
<b>High scores</b> I do my best to make sure that conversations serve the interests of other people as well as my own. I ensure that we take turns at being heard and understood and share the air time. I provide other people with the room to get their points across and do not dominate the choice of topics.	<b>High scores</b> People find that conversations with me flow well and make progress because what I say is linked directly to what the other person has just said to me. It's clear that both of us are involved in the same overall conversation.	<b>High scores</b> I enter conversations with an open mind and am willing to take other people's views and wishes into account. I regard conversations as an opportunity to learn and develop new ideas.	<b>High scores</b> As a rule, the conversations I'm involved in lead to a satisfactory result for both sides, whether the outcome is an agreement, plan of action, a solution to a problem or just an enjoyable experience.
<b>Low scores</b> My conversations tend to be monologues where I am mainly concerned with what I have to say. I have a habit of hogging the air time and squeezing the other person out of the conversation.	<b>Low scores</b> Conversations with me tend to be disjointed because my responses don't connect with what the other person has just said. It feels as if two separate conversations are going on at the same time rather than two people sharing the same experience.	<b>Low scores</b> I go into conversations with my mind already made up, or at least very inflexible. People find this attitude frustrating because it means they are unable to influence me, even if they have something valid or important to say.	<b>Low scores</b> My conversations have a tendency not to go anywhere useful or produce a pleasurable experience. Some go around in circles and fail to reach a conclusion, while others simply never get off the ground.
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## How easy am I to understand?

The next seven statements are concerned with how easy I make it for people to understand me, whether I'm describing an experience, expressing a point of view or simply giving instructions.

Statement 5  I make it clear up front what I want to talk about	Statement 6  I make sure I attract people's attention right from the start	Statement 7  I make my main points stand out	Statement 8  I provide enough detail for people to get an accurate picture of what I'm talking about
<b>High scores</b> The people I talk to are generally clear about the kind of conversation we're having and why we're having it. I am willing to take the initiative and start a conversation off with a reasonably firm idea of what it's about.	<b>High scores</b> I am able to quickly engage the interest of other people so they can plug into the conversation right away. I realise that if I want somebody to pay attention to me it's helpful to give them a reason for listening.	<b>High scores</b> As a rule, I know what I want to say and do my best to make my main points clear by giving them particular emphasis. Rather than hinting or hoping people will correctly guess what I'm trying to say, I make my points explicit.	<b>High scores</b> When I talk I go beyond clichés and superficial descriptions. I try to provide the kind of details that keep my contributions engaging and support my main points. I realise that if I leave out essential details people are likely to misunderstand me.
<b>Low scores</b> People can find themselves confused and talking at cross purposes with me because I haven't given them a firm enough idea of what the conversation is about.	<b>Low scores</b> It can be hard for people to connect with me at the beginning of a conversation because I haven't stimulated their attention enough. I take people's interest in what I'm saying for granted, rather than working for it.	<b>Low scores</b> While people know I have something to say, they are not exactly sure what's at the heart of it. People may find me fuzzy and confusing.	<b>Low scores</b> I tend to be light on details, forcing the other person to make too many guesses and assumptions. My descriptions and explanations leave too many unanswered questions and require people to read my mind to fill in the gaps.
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Statement 9	Statement 10	Statement 11
<p><b>I talk in a way that makes my stories and views come to life and hold people's interest</b></p> <p><b>High scores</b> People enjoy conversations with me because I talk in a interesting, real way. I put my convictions and passions into my stories, messages and views without trying to overwhelm people. When I describe my experiences, I bring the events to life and if helpful, talk about my thoughts and feelings.</p>	<p><b>I am willing to share my personal thoughts and experiences when it's appropriate</b></p> <p><b>High scores</b> I draw on my personal experiences to add spice and clarity to my stories and points of view. At the same time I am careful not to make people uncomfortable by revealing too much about myself too quickly, or in the wrong circumstances.</p>	<p><b>I check to make sure people understand me</b></p> <p><b>High scores</b> I take steps to discover for myself whether people have understood me properly. I look for clues in other people's body language (a frown may indicate confusion, for instance) and by asking people to give me some kind of indication that they've understood my main points.</p>
<p><b>Low scores</b> I tend to lose other people's interest because the details I provide are flat and lacking in colour. They provide little insight into my thoughts and feelings.</p>	<p><b>Low scores</b> As a rule I do not illuminate my conversations with details from my experiences. My life tends to remain a closed book. As a result, other people may find it hard to get a feel for me and my ideas.</p>	<p><b>Low scores</b> I am not in the habit of checking to see if people have understood me. I am not alert to signals which indicate I'm failing to get through. At times I simply motor on without realising that I'm not being understood.</p>

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1 2 3 4 5

## How good am I at understanding?

The next seven statements are concerned with how well I understand other people, whether they are telling me a story of one kind or another, giving me some sort of message or explaining their particular point of view.

Statement 12 I show interest in what people are saying	Statement 13 I listen carefully	Statement 14 I listen with an open mind and don't distort what people are saying	Statement 15 I respond in a way that lets people know I am picking up their main points
<b>High scores</b> I encourage people to express themselves by making it clear that I'm interested in what they are saying. I signal my interest through my body language (by establishing eye contact, for example) and by making brief remarks that show I am tuned in.	<b>High scores</b> People value having conversations with me because I actively listen without getting distracted by other things. I concentrate on recognising people's important ideas and the feelings behind them.	<b>High scores</b> I take in what people are saying without twisting their meaning or adding my own interpretation. In other words, I generally receive the same information they are transmitting.	<b>High scores</b> I consistently let other people know that I am picking up their main points, often by feeding back their ideas to them. Overall my responses give some indication that I have captured what the other person is saying.
<b>Low scores</b> I give people the impression that I'm not interested in what they're saying. People may find it difficult to know if I'm switched on because my face tends to be expressionless and I remain silent as I listen.	<b>Low scores</b> Rather than focusing hard on what people are saying, and how they feel about things I tend to listen only partially or superficially. Even though I can sometimes repeat what people say (like a tape recorder), this doesn't convince them that I've been listening as well.	<b>Low scores</b> I tend to listen through filters (such as strongly held opinions and prejudices) and this distorts what I hear. I make too many snap assumptions rather than giving myself time to reflect on what other people are saying.	<b>Low scores</b> I fail to demonstrate that I'm on the other person's wavelength. I seldom mention the main ideas the other person is making. In general my responses contain little evidence I am absorbing what is being said.
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Statement 16	Statement 17	Statement 18
<p><b>My responses indicate that I pick up how people are feeling</b></p>	<p><b>I ask the kind of questions that help people express themselves</b></p>	<p><b>I concentrate on understanding people rather than criticising or offering instant advice</b></p>
<p><b>High scores</b> The way I respond takes into account how the other person is feeling. If appropriate, I make direct reference to people's feelings and mental states in general.</p>	<p><b>High scores</b> My questions provide people with the opportunity to express themselves clearly and fully. In the main they are straightforward requests for information rather than devices for putting people under pressure. I let people know when I'm confused so they can help me become clear in my mind.</p>	<p><b>High scores</b> Overall I put my effort into understanding people's points of view rather than on finding instant fault or telling people what they ought to do. I try to see things from the other person's perspective, rather than pushing my own opinion right away.</p>
<p><b>Low scores</b> As a rule my responses show little awareness of the feelings of others. I am not in the habit of referring to other people's feelings in a direct way. This may be because I fail to pay attention to this aspect of communication, or because I am poor at reading the signals.</p>	<p><b>Low scores</b> My questions tend to close conversations down. Some are really criticisms or judgements in disguise. I put people under pressure by asking too many questions in a row and conducting the conversation like an interrogation.</p>	<p><b>Low scores</b> I tend to be quick to judge and criticise. I readily offer people advice even though they haven't asked for it.</p>

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## How good am I at creating a positive conversational environment?

The next five statements (19-23) are concerned with the kind of environment I create and maintain in my conversations. A positive environment helps a conversation to grow and develop. It is dependent on the values and attitudes I bring to the conversation.

The final statement (24) is concerned with my skill at keeping conversations going when the going gets difficult.

Statement 19 I treat other people – and myself – with respect	Statement 20 I co-operate rather than compete in conversations	Statement 21 I do not force people to have conversations they don't want to have	Statement 22 I do not allow my negative feelings to get in the way of conversations
<b>High scores</b> I talk to the other person as equals. I am generally civil to people regardless of their background or relationship to me. As a rule people don't find me condescending.	<b>High scores</b> For me conversations are about co-operation where the aim is to work together as partners rather than try to win at the other person's expense. I do my best to ensure that my contributions add to the conversation's value rather than detract from it.	<b>High scores</b> I don't pressure people into having conversations about things they have a right not to discuss. I respect people's right to set limits on what they want to talk about.	<b>High scores</b> I am conscious of when I am experiencing strong emotions and make every effort not to let them ruin the conversation. I don't deny having negative feelings but try to express them in a way that slows the conversation to develop.
<b>Low scores</b> I have a tendency to talk down to people and devalue them in other ways, for example by dismissing what they say as unimportant. Or I may let other people do those things to me.	<b>Low scores</b> A conversation with me can feel like being in a competition, where I am more concerned with scoring points than getting my points across clearly. It's as if we were on opposite sides in a contest.	<b>Low scores</b> I can come across as heavy-handed, pushing people to talk about things they have a right to consider out of bounds.	<b>Low scores</b> I tend to over-react and let my emotions control me. When I give in to anger I tend to say hurtful things that can destroy the conversation.
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<p><b>Statement 23</b></p> <p>I pick the right time and place for conversations to happen</p>	<p><b>Statement 24</b></p> <p>When a conversation breaks down for some reason I persevere and try to make it work</p>
<p><b>High scores</b> I generally work out whether the circumstances are right for a conversation before I begin it. If necessary I check to see if people are busy with something else or short of time.</p>	<p><b>High scores</b> When a conversation is not going well because either I or both of us are making mistakes, I don't give up. Instead I try to correct my mistakes and help my partner do a better job in order to fix the conversation.</p>
<p><b>Low scores</b> I tend to rush into conversations without considering the other person's situation.</p>	<p><b>Low scores</b> When a conversation is not going well I tend to give up and blame myself or the other person. I do little to get things back on track.</p>
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## SCORE SUMMARY BOX

**Instructions** Transfer your scores onto this page and see if there are any particular patterns to your strengths and weaknesses. Where you have lower scores, select two you would most like to improve.

Statement	Heading	My score
	<b>What am I like at dialogue?</b>	
1	I make an effort to have genuine, two-way conversations	
2	I make sure my responses connect with what's just been said to me	
3	I am open to being influenced by what people have to say	
4	I do my part to make sure conversations accomplish something worthwhile, including having fun	
	<b>How easy am I to understand?</b>	
5	I make it clear up front what I want to talk about	
6	I make sure I attract people's attention right from the start	
7	I make my main points stand out	
8	I provide enough detail for people to get an accurate picture of what I'm talking about	
9	I talk in a way that makes my stories and views come to life and hold people's interest	
10	I am willing to share my personal thoughts and experiences when it's appropriate	
11	I check to make sure people understand me	
	<b>How good am I at understanding?</b>	
12	I show interest in what people are saying	
13	I listen carefully	
14	I listen with an open mind and don't distort what people are saying	
15	I respond in a way that lets people know I am picking up their main points	
16	My responses indicate that I pick up how people are feeling	
17	I ask the kind of questions that help people express themselves	
18	I concentrate on understanding people rather than criticising or offering instant advice	
	<b>How good am I at creating a positive conversational climate?</b>	
19	I treat other people – and myself – with respect	
20	I co-operate rather than compete in conversations	
21	I don't force people to have conversations they don't want to have	
22	I don't allow my negative feelings to get in the way of conversations	
23	I pick the right time and place for conversations to happen	
	<b>How good am I at keeping conversations going when it gets difficult?</b>	
24	When a conversation breaks down I persevere and try to make it work	

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## The characteristics of dialogue

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogue emphasised the power of discourse to increase understanding of multiple perspectives and create a myriad of possibilities.

The following is a checklist to capture some of the essential characteristics of dialogue:

- The participants in a dialogue *share the air time*
- *Both people* get the opportunity to make their points
- The conversation is *two-way*. If someone has a useful or important point to contribute, they are *encouraged to make it*
- In a dialogue people communicate *with each other*, rather than *at each other*. They connect and interact as people, rather than make speeches at one another.

When person A speaks, person B listens; considers what he or she is hearing and acknowledge the point that's been made.

- Dialogues are often spontaneous. They *cannot be rehearsed* like the lines of a play
- In a dialogue people take *full responsibility for being understood*.

Person A takes responsibility for making sure his/her points are fully understood by person B (and vice versa).

It is self-defeating to blame the other person for not understanding you

- In a dialogue you *check that you've been understood* rather than assume it. You recognise that the act of communication is completed at the receiving end, not at the transmitter

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## Reflections:

Key Questions	Response
1. What do your questionnaire results tell you about your communication strengths & development areas?	
2. What are your feelings and concerns when you face the prospect of a difficult conversation with a challenging person?	
Think of an encounter with a challenging person that you wish had gone better:	
3. When you recall this encounter, what were the main reasons for the conversation not going well?	
4. What were you thinking/feeling during the exchange? What do you think the other person was thinking/feeling?	
5. What in retrospect, could you have done before & during the exchange to change the outcome?	

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