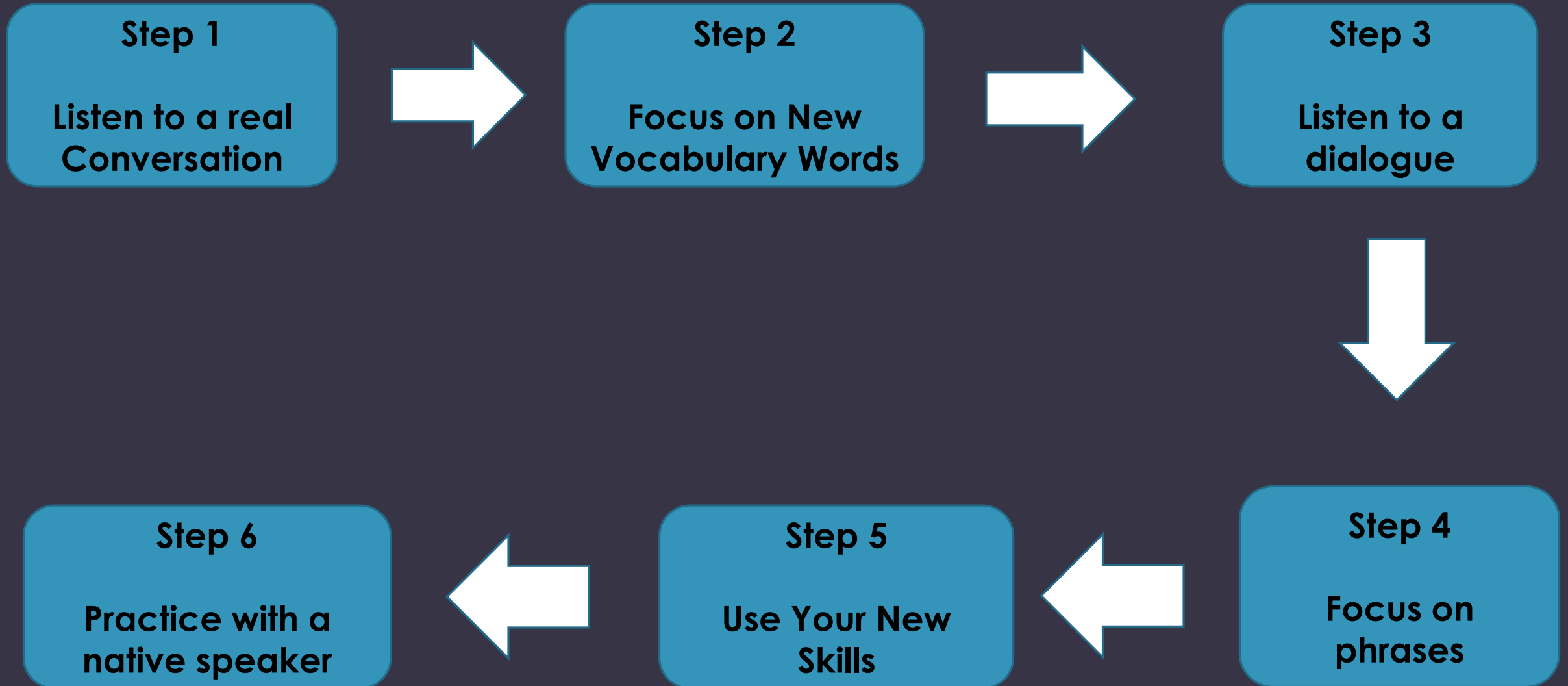




# Four Topics to Avoid During Small Talk with Americans

## A Vocabulary Lesson

# Our Method



# Step 1: Four Topics to Avoid During Small Talk with Americans



Please listen to Audio Step 1- Four Topics to Avoid During American Small Talk

When you meet new people in the United States, what topics should you avoid discussing and why?

Find out in this conversation!

Please view Transcript Step 1-Four Topics to Avoid During American Small Talk

## Step 2: Focus on New Vocabulary Words

**Sexual  
harassment**

**To draw the  
line**

**To cling**

**To keep  
something  
to oneself**

**To offend**

**To make  
assumptions**

**Heated**

**Like-minded**



# To offend

(verb)



Meaning: To cause someone to feel insulted, angry, embarrassed upset, or hurt

*My comment about animal rights offended the women at the party.*

# Sexual Harassment

(noun)



**Meaning:** Unwanted verbal or nonverbal sexual advances, especially from a person of higher authority toward a subordinate, often in the workplace

*It's better for a man not to make any comments about a woman's outfit at work because it might be misinterpreted as sexual harassment.*

# To make assumptions (expression)



**Meaning: To believe that something is true without validating your thoughts and ideas**

***Don't make any assumptions about people's political points of view at a cocktail party.***



# To draw the line (idiom)



Meaning: To set a limit, to decide when a specific limit has been reached

*We can discuss some political issues, but we draw the line at controversial issues.*



# Heated

(adjective)



Meaning: Something that is intense, that people feel strongly about

*The two friends got involved in a heated debate over abortion rights.*

# To cling

(verb)



**Meaning: To resist letting go of something (an idea, an opinion, a person)**

*People usually stop clinging to their views when they travel and see new ways of doing things.*

# Like-minded

(adjective)



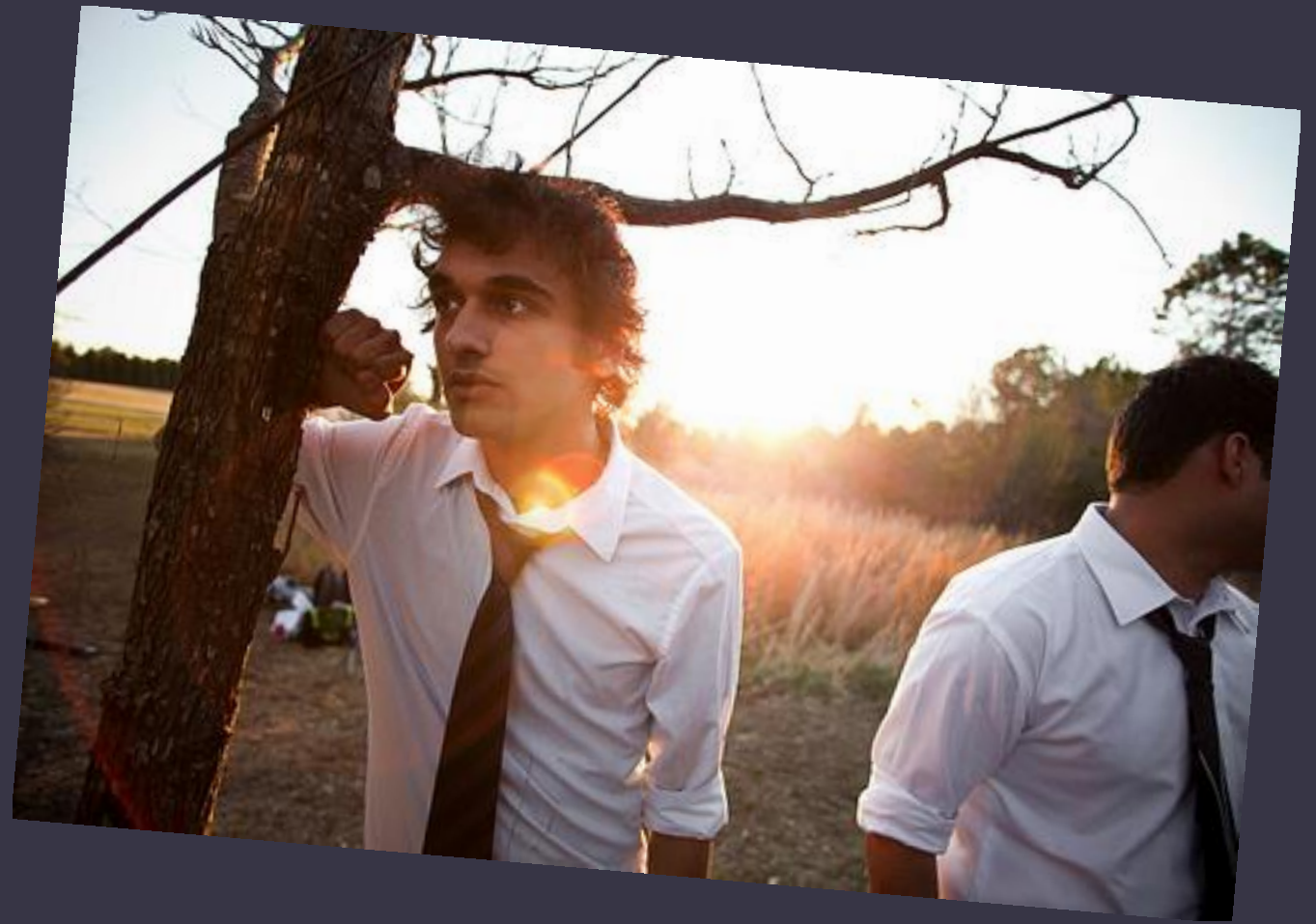
**Meaning:** To have the same or similar opinions or views

*Sometimes siblings tend to be like-minded when it comes to spending habits and money.*



To keep  
something to  
oneself

(adjective)



Meaning: To not tell anyone what is on your mind, to not share your point of view

*When are you around colleagues with very different perspectives, you should keep your opinions to yourself.*

## Step 3: Dinner with the Parents

In this conversation, listen to a friend talk about his experience at an important dinner party.

What mistakes did he make?

**Listen to Audio Steps 3 and 4-  
Dinner with the Parents**



## Step 4: Focus on the Vocabulary Phrases

Learn the new vocabulary in context!

Please open Transcript Steps 3 and 4 – Dinner with the Parents

1. "I hope you didn't offend them."
2. "I'm glad the conversation didn't veer toward sexual harassment in the workplace."
3. "You've got to learn when to draw the line."
4. "I made an assumption that we were all on the same page..."
5. "If you can't resist clinging to your own views..."
6. "Don't tell me you got into another one of your heated debates..."
7. "I should have kept my views to myself."
8. "I thought we were more like-minded than we actually are."



# Bonus! Say It Another Way!

Learn how to say the phrases in a different way!

**Click on the file “Say It Another Way”**

## Step 5: Use Your New Skills

**To offend**

**Sexual harassment**

**To make assumptions**

**To draw the line**

**Heated**

**To cling**

**Like-minded**

**To keep something to oneself**

1. If your opinion on same-sex marriage is different from everyone else's opinion at a cocktail party, you might want to \_\_\_\_\_. (not tell anyone)
2. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ (believe that something is true) about people's wealth based on their clothing and the size of their home.
3. People who \_\_\_\_\_ (hold on tightly) to their views should travel more often.
4. Where do you \_\_\_\_\_ (stop) when it comes to talking about religious views?
5. The issue of \_\_\_\_\_ (unwanted sexual advances) is a major problem in the corporate world.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ (intense) argument between the two candidates ended in a fist fight.
7. If you talk about your religious beliefs at a party, you might \_\_\_\_\_ (hurt, anger) someone.
8. I prefer to hang out with \_\_\_\_\_ (similar) friends with the same views on politics.



**To offend**

# Prepare Your Vocabulary Cards

**To cling**



**Like-minded**



**To make assumptions**

**Sexual harassment**



**To draw the line**

**Heated**



**To keep something to oneself**





# Step 6: Practice with a Native

○ Have you ever **offended** someone by making a comment related to one of the 4 topics (sex, religion, politics, or money)? Please describe the situation. Did you **make an assumption** that they would have similar views? How will you handle that situation differently if it happens again in the future?

○ **Bonus: Please use the phrases from Say It Another Way**

(A= friend, B= friend)

A: *(student)* So I went out for drinks with my roommate's parents last night.

B: Oh how was that?

A: *It started off just fine, but then I \_\_\_\_\_ them. (offended)*

B: Did you \_\_\_\_\_ (make an assumption) that they had the same views as you?

A: *Yeah, I think that was my big mistake.*

B: Oops. Oh well, don't be too hard on yourself.

# Step 6: Practice with a Native

- Is the topic of sex and sexuality avoided during small talk in your home country? Are there any laws against **sexual harassment** in the workplace? In your culture, If someone experiences sexual harassment in the workplace, should they **keep it to themselves** or should they take legal action?
- What additional topics and points of view (other than the 4 that we mentioned in this module) should you **keep to yourself** when you speak with someone you don't know well.

## Bonus: Please use the phrases from Say It Another Way

(A= colleague, B= new colleague)

A: *(student)* So today is your first day on the job?

B: Yes, I am very excited. By the way, at my last workplace there was a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ (sexual harassment) from the senior executives toward the interns. What is the procedure for reporting that here?

A: *If you have a problem, don't \_\_\_\_\_ (keep it to yourself). Be sure to let the HR department know.*

# Step 6: Practice with a Native

- Do you tend to **cling** to your political views or do you change your opinions often? Do you hang around with **like-minded** people or do your friends hold a variety of perspectives on politics? Do you like to engage in **heated** debates or do you avoid them? What political issues do you feel very strongly about?

**Bonus: Please use the phrases from Say It Another Way**

(B= prospective college student, A= college admissions counselor)

A: What kind of college environment are you looking for?

B: (student): I want to go to a school where people aren't afraid to discuss politics and where they don't \_\_\_\_\_(cling) to the political views that they learned growing up. College is the time to get into \_\_\_\_\_(heated) debates and reassess what you think.

A: In that case, I would recommend going to a school that attracts different people. If you discuss politics with \_\_\_\_\_(like-minded) people, you won't learn anything.



- In this module, you learned that topics like sex, religion, politics, and money should be avoided if you don't know someone well. Is the same true in your country? Are there any other topics that should be avoided? What small talk advice would you give to someone visiting your country?
- Do small talk norms differ between generations in your country? Please explain
- How do you think technology and social media are changing our attitudes toward discussing these “touchy” subjects?
- We have learned the topics to avoid, but what topics *are* acceptable to discuss during small talk with someone that you don't know (in the US)? (please brainstorm with your conversation partner)

# Credits

- Cover photo small talk: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dellphotos/>
- Offended: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/kafka4prez/>
- Make assumption cocktail party- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/9300002@N03/>
- To draw the line- stop sign: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/misteraitch/>
- Heated: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/foradoeixo/>
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- To keep something to yourself: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/basheertome/>
- Dinner with the parents: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sporkist/>

# Step 5 Quiz

- 1-keep it to yourself
- 2- make assumptions
- 3- cling
- 4- draw the line
- 5- sexual harassment
- 6-heated
- 7- offend
- 8-like-minded