

Arming Yourself for Table Topics  
by Sandy B., ATM-B (July 2002)

**Revisit Your Past**

Drag out your mental scrapbook.

**Restock Your Information Storehouse**

Gather information from a variety of sources (read, view media, eavesdrop, engage people in conversation, ask questions). Reflect on and clarify your own dreams, values, opinions, goals, frustrations.

**Be a People-Watcher (and Listener)**

Observe others and ask yourself questions about them: Who is that person over there? What is she doing? What is he thinking? Why are they behaving that way? What else might be the reason? What else?

**Cultivate Your Sense of Humor**

When you allow yourself to see humor in more things, you fear them less, become more curious, become more creative and spontaneous. Be willing to see humor in the fact that you have no idea what to say!

**Practice**

Pick a topic/event/character—every day out of the blue—and go for it. While you're in the car, standing in line, taking a break. What does it remind you of? What do you think about it? Ask yourself questions—then answer them as quickly as possible—without trying to edit, without pausing. Then edit, if you wish.

**Give Yourself Permission to Be Outrageous**

Find a place where no one will hear you. Talk louder. Move your body. Aim for a bit over the top. Pick a topic that is really obscure—so obscure that no one you know could relate to it (e.g., southeastern Patagonian basket-weaving). Make up false definitions (as in the Dictionary Game). Tell lies! Improvise. You can become more creative when you give your internal critic some time off. Telling a truth or your opinion about a topic is easy when you have one, it's lying that requires practice! Watch the improvisational TV comedy show "Whose Line Is It Anyway?"