



Conversation Ladder

Climb a three-step ladder of questions on one theme — from an easy opener to a more thoughtful one — so that a table of guests ends up in a real conversation.

Players 3–10 (best with 4–8)**Play time** 15–30 min**Materials** No materials**Movement** Seated

QUICK RULES

1. Choose a ladder — three questions on one theme, each a little deeper than the last.
2. Everyone answers the first rung in a sentence.
3. Climb to the second rung, then the third, with slightly longer answers.
4. Anyone may pass on any rung. The person with the last word picks the next ladder.

SET UP

1. Choose a ladder from the host view or a printed card. Each has a theme and three rungs.
2. Say the two ground rules aloud: anyone may pass, with no explanation; and what is said at the table is answered with interest, not advice.
3. Pick a starting player for the first rung. Starting with the host shows how short an answer can be.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The reader announces the theme and reads the first rung — a quick, factual question.
2. Going round the table, each player answers in a sentence or two. Anyone may say 'pass'.
3. When everyone has answered, the reader reads the second rung — a question about a preference or a small story. Start with a different player.
4. Answers on the second rung may run to a few sentences. Others may ask one short follow-up.
5. The reader reads the third rung — a more reflective question on the same theme.
6. On the third rung, players answer in any order, as they feel ready. Silence while people think is fine.
7. When the third rung is finished, the last person to speak chooses the next ladder, or declares the game finished.

HOW THE GAME ENDS

A ladder is finished when everyone has answered or passed on the third rung. Two ladders are plenty for one dinner — one between starter and main course, one with dessert. Stop while people still have things they want to say; the conversation will carry on without the game.

PLAYING SEATED

Played seated by default. It is designed for a table and never requires moving.

TIPS FOR THE HOST

- Be the first to pass at some point in the evening. It proves that passing really is allowed.
- Discourage advice-giving and topping one story with another on the third rung. A simple "thank you" between answers keeps the tone warm.
- Choose ladders to suit the room. With new acquaintances, use themes such as food, places and small pleasures.
- If a rung falls flat, move straight on to the next. Do not ask the table to analyse why.

VARIATIONS

Pairs first. On the second and third rungs, guests answer to a neighbour for two minutes before anyone speaks to the whole table. It suits quieter groups and makes longer tables workable.

Build your own ladder. One guest names a theme, and the three people to their left invent the rungs, each making the question a little more thoughtful than the one before. It works best after the group has climbed one prepared ladder.

STARTER IDEAS: LADDERS

- Meals: What did you eat for breakfast as a child? → What dish can you make without a recipe, and who taught you? → What meal would you like to share again, and with whom?
- Places: Where is the furthest you have been from here? → What place felt like home sooner than you expected? → Where would you like to take everyone at this table?
- Work: What was your first paid job? → What is the best thing a colleague or teacher ever did for you? → What kind of work makes you lose track of time?
- Small pleasures: What is your favourite hot drink? → What ordinary thing reliably improves your day? → What small pleasure have you only learned to notice recently?
- Learning: What was your favourite subject at school? → What have you taught yourself as an adult? → What would you still like to learn, and what is stopping you?
- Seasons: Which season do you like best? → What is a seasonal ritual you never miss? → Which time of year makes you most thoughtful, and why?
- Home: How many homes have you lived in? → Which room of a past home do you remember best? → What makes a place feel like yours?
- Friendship: How did you meet your oldest friend? → What is a small thing a friend did that you still remember? → What have you learned about being a good friend?
- Music: What was the first music you bought or chose? → What song takes you back to a particular moment? → What music would you play to explain yourself to a stranger?
- Celebrations: What is your favourite kind of cake? → What is a celebration you remember from childhood? → What do you think makes a gathering feel special?
- Time: Are you usually early or late? → When did an hour last pass without you noticing? → What would you do with one extra day each month?
- Journeys: Car, train, bicycle or on foot? → What is a journey you remember more than the destination? → What is a road you did not take that you still wonder about?

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