

Interacting with strangers can be **daunting**, but it's a rewarding way to explore the world of people you don't know. These **expeditions** provide a structure and a **contrivance** to help you **hone** your social skills and solve mechanical problems. Each gives you a reason to talk to a stranger. You can do them alone or with a partner. They can be done in one day or spread out over months.

The guiding principle of these expeditions is respect for others, and every explorer should pay careful attention to their own **conduct**. The expeditions are presented in order of increasing challenge, starting with a warm-up to help you slow down your pace and sharpen your awareness.

The first expedition is called "Watch and Learn." Spend an hour in a public place, ideally where you won't encounter people you know. Sit still, turn off your devices, and observe people. Describe the **setting**, the most interesting features, and the people. Take note of their appearance, what they do, and how they interact with others. Invent backstories for people if you like, but make sure your assumptions are based on details you've observed.

The second expedition is "Say Hello." Take a walk in a **populous** place and define a territory for yourself. Say hello to every person you pass by and try to look them in the eye. Don't worry if they don't hear you or ignore you. On the second round, mix in **phatic** observations, like "Cute dog," "I like your hat," or "Cold out today!" Keep a keen awareness of the dynamics of each micro-interaction. How do people respond? Are they uncomfortable? Do they smile or laugh?

The third expedition is "Get Lost." Ask someone for directions and continue to ask for increasingly complex instructions, like finding a specific restaurant or shop. With each request, take note of the person's response, their willingness to help, and how they engage with you. Keep your smartphone **tucked away** and rely on your memory and note-taking skills.

The fourth expedition is "Compliment and Question." Approach a stranger and give them a genuine compliment. Then ask them a question related to the compliment or something they're wearing or doing. Keep the conversation going for a few minutes and take note of how they respond. Are they open to the interaction? Do they seem **guarded** or uncomfortable?

The fifth and final expedition is "Share a Meal." Go to a restaurant or cafe and sit at the **communal** table. **Strike up** a conversation with the person next to you and see if they're interested in sharing a meal. Take note of their response, their willingness to engage, and how the conversation develops.

Remember to be respectful and pay attention to cultural differences in expectations of eye contact and street behavior. These expeditions may not all make sense in the place where you are. It's important to keep context in mind and be aware of your own conduct.