

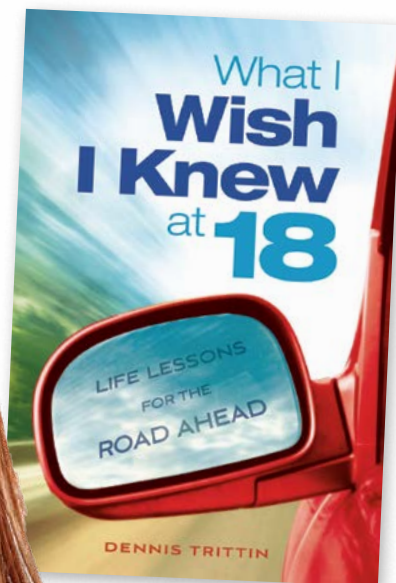
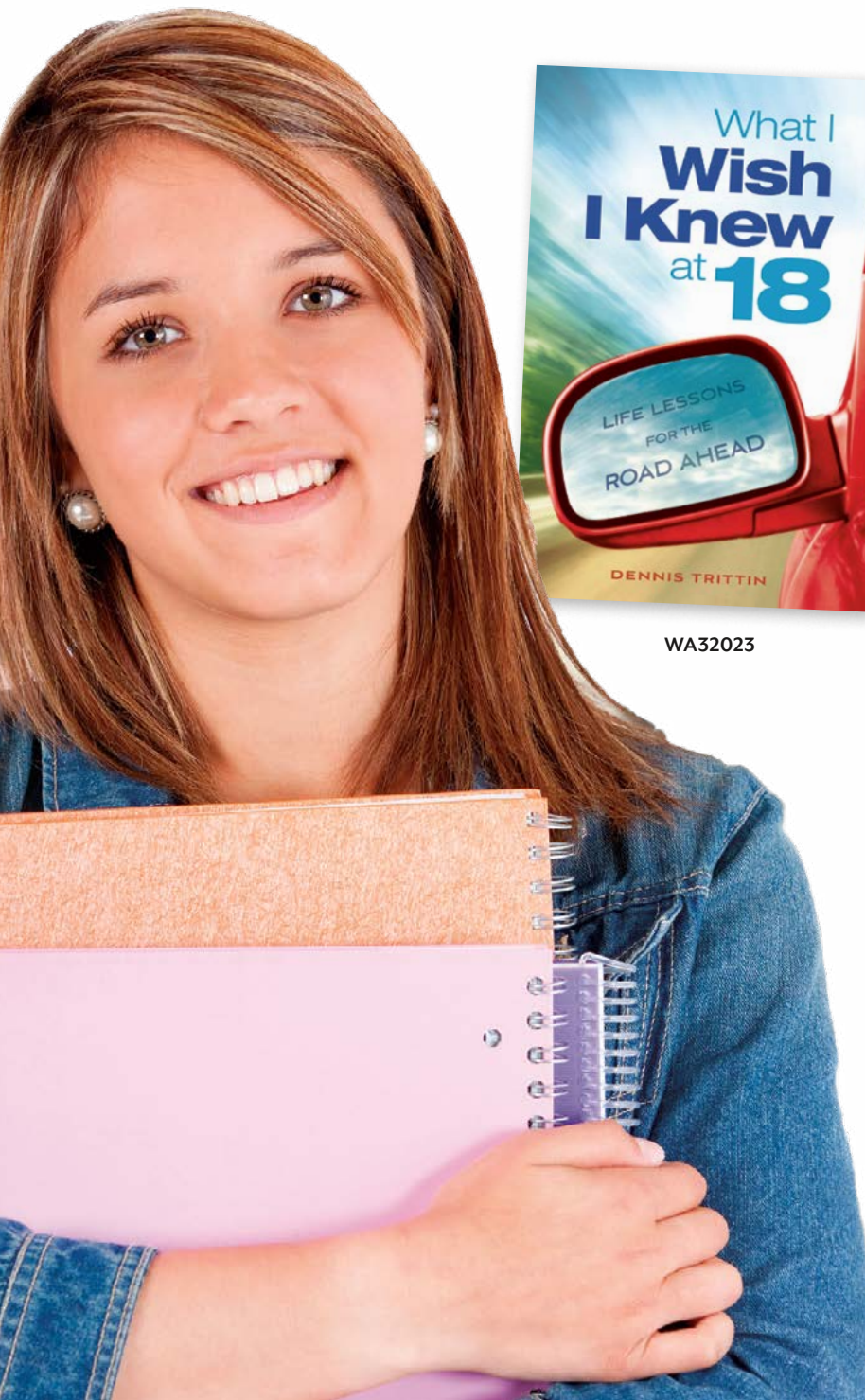


Developed with Arlyn Lawrence and Dennis Trittin, from the  
*What I Wish I Knew at 18* Leadership and Life Skills Program, LifeSmart Publishing

# Making a great first impression

Volume 54 | Gr. 9–12

Time: 55–75 minutes



WA32023

## Standards

### NASAFACS

- 13.1.1 Analyze processes for building and maintaining interpersonal relationships
- 13.2.1 Analyze the effects of personal characteristics on relationships
- 13.2.5 Explain the effects of personal standards and behaviors on interpersonal relationships
- 1.2.2 Demonstrate job-seeking and job-keeping skills
- 1.2.3 Apply communication skills in school, community, and workplace settings
- 1.2.6 Demonstrate leadership skills and abilities in school, workplace, and community settings

### Corresponding FCCLA Star Event categories:

- Interpersonal Communications
- Career Investigation

## Materials list:

- *What I Wish I Knew at 18: Life Lessons for the Road Ahead* book (**WA32023**)
- Student guide for *What I Wish I Knew at 18: Life Lessons for the Road Ahead* (**WA32024**)
- Sample lessons (download from [dennistrittin.com/resources/Curriculum\\_Sample.pdf](http://dennistrittin.com/resources/Curriculum_Sample.pdf))
- “Role play scenarios” student handout (included)
- “Elevator speech” student handout (included)

## Objectives

*Students will...*

- Learn the importance of and techniques for making a great first impression in a personal or professional setting
- Demonstrate an enthusiastic mindset when meeting new people and be able to confidently initiate and carry a conversation
- Be observant of how others react to them

## Introduction (10–15 minutes)

Have you ever considered what might be at stake when you meet someone for the first time? After all, they could become a new friend, future spouse, future in-law, potential employment reference, employer, manager, industry contact, mentor, or client. The fact is, life is a series of chance moments with others, and you never know what might become of the people you meet. Ultimately, they could prove to be instrumental in your life — but at the time you meet them, you don't know that. That's why making a great first impression is so important. The way you come across to other people — whether you are aware of it or not — has the potential to impact every sphere of your life, personally AND professionally.

Most employment recruiters say that the first 30 seconds of an interview will make or break an applicant's chances at the job. Yes, that's 30 seconds! Unfortunately, all too many people lack the confidence and social skills to make a great first impression. Even very confident people can err on the side of coming across as too confident and end up making a negative impression. It's important to just relax, be yourself, and behave with a balance of confidence and restraint.

**In the large group:** Ask the students to identify the qualities of a good first impression. How might they differ in a social or professional context? Write these on the white board for reference later in the lesson.

Next, go around to students individually and have them introduce themselves (while offering constructive feedback). Encourage students to remember the acronym **FRESH** when greeting someone:

- F** – Friendly (smile)
- R** – Respectful
- E** – Engaged (eye contact)
- S** – Self-confident
- H** – Handshake (firm)



## Activity 1 (20–25 minutes)

**Set it up** – Sometimes it helps to make a mental list of “conversation starters” when you meet someone new. You can ask things like:

- “How did you get connected/involved with \_\_\_\_\_?” (insert current situation)
- “How do you like to spend your free time?”
- “What are your favorite subjects?” (if student) or “What kind of work are you involved in?”
- “What are your plans for this summer?”
- “Are you from this area? Where are you from originally?”

Once the conversation gets started, the follow-up questions take over. Before you know it, you're on a roll!

**Try it** – Allow several minutes for students to write down questions they might ask their partner to “break the ice” and get to know them. Then divide the class into pairs, preferably matching students with other students they don't know well. Allow 10 minutes for students to practice their icebreakers and follow-up questions with one another. Afterward, partners should evaluate one another based on the following criteria (on a scale of 1–10):

- Demonstrated through words and body language that they are happy to meet another person
- Made and maintained eye contact
- Smiled
- Was positive and enthusiastic
- Showed an interest in partner and in what they had to say
- Focused more on listening than talking
- Remained engaged in the conversation and avoided distractions like calls and texts

## Activity 2 (20–25 minutes)

**Set it up** – To make a great first impression, you also need to be aware of how you're coming across to others. That means knowing how to read body language. Learn to watch for verbal and nonverbal cues about how others are responding to you. What are the clues people give when they're feeling bored? Defensive? Annoyed? Amused? Engaged? Here are some self-evaluation questions to help you communicate in the best way:

- What's my tone of voice? (loud, soft, urgent, steady, aggressive, whiny)
- What's my facial expression? (angry, uncertain, bored, confident, friendly)
- What's my body language? (intimidating, compassionate, welcoming, disinterested, defensive, confident)

**Try it** – (Role-play activities) Partner students up for the first role-playing exercise and put them in groups of 3 for the second exercise on the handout on p. 3. Students should take note of how they are coming across to the others and how the others are reacting to them.

## Conclusion (5–10 minutes)

- Ask students to self-evaluate: How confident and friendly are you when meeting new people? What type of impression do you think you make on others during an introduction? Can you read their body language and responses to gauge how they are reacting to you?
- Ask students about the differences between a social introduction with a peer versus meeting a potential employer. How did they adapt to these two different scenarios?
- Point out that our first impressions better be good – every time. You never know what role that person may play in your life!
- Review their answers on the white board: What are key components of making a great first impression? Are there any new qualities they would add now after completing this lesson?

## Optional extension activities

- Be a “people watcher.” Observe other people in conversations. Can you see how they are reacting to each other? Watch facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. What are people saying without using words? What kind of impression are they making? What can you learn that you can apply to your own interactions?
- This one is more specific and personal: Observe people you know personally who are unusually good at making new friends. What do they do particularly well that you might be able to include in your own repertoire?
- Have students write their own elevator speech and be prepared to give it with the appropriate twist at an unexpected time. Use the elevator speech handout on p. 4 as a guide. This can be used as an additional class activity or as a homework assignment.

# Role-play scenarios

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Role-play scenario #1 (workplace setting):

A job applicant is being introduced to a store manager or business leader. One person is the applicant; one person is the manager/leader. Since the manager is in a position of authority, the applicant's tone and demeanor should be more formal and polished. Role-play the first few minutes of a job interview, including the following:

1. Each person introduces themselves (doesn't matter who goes first).
2. The managers question the applicants, find out their skills/experience/interests, and encourage them to tell a little about themselves.
3. Applicants respond.
4. Afterward, those who played the role of manager offer feedback to the applicants about what kind of impression they made. The feedback can include: How did the applicant present themselves overall? How was the body language and tone of voice? Would the manager be inclined to hire this person based on how they conducted themselves?
5. If time allows, take turns and reverse roles so everyone gets the chance to play both parts.

## Role-play scenario #2 (social setting):

A student arrives at a social gathering where they don't know anyone. The person who brought them has disappeared momentarily, and they are left standing alone. There are two friends nearby who know each other well and seem to know everyone else, too.

1. The newcomer takes the initiative and says hello. (For a twist, have the two friends initiate and say hello first). Make an effort to "break the ice" (start a conversation).
2. The newcomer asks the two friends about themselves, what they like to do, etc.
3. The friends ask questions of the newcomer to get a feel for who they are.
4. Give one another feedback on how each person presented themselves and communicated. The feedback can include: How did the person come across? How was the body language and tone of voice (nervous, confident, overconfident, etc.)? What did you like about how the person communicated? What could use improvement?  
**Note:** Any criticism should be constructive and positively presented.
5. If time allows, take turns and reverse roles so everyone gets the chance to play both parts.

## Variation:

For each scenario above, role-play how NOT to do it. How might we come across as unfriendly, unenthusiastic, under-confident, disinterested, disengaged, ill-mannered, or self-centered?



# Elevator speech

An “elevator speech” is a brief summary that you use to quickly describe yourself when you meet someone who could potentially become an important person in your life (a new friend, future employer, mentor, employment reference, etc.). The name of the speech comes from the idea that you should be able to deliver your summary in the time it takes for an elevator ride – not less than 30 seconds and not more than 2 minutes.

Everyone should have an “elevator speech” ready to deliver. What do you say when someone asks you what you do or what you plan to do? What are your passions? You should have your sales pitch ready. This could happen anywhere at an event when a community member, school board member, school administrator, potential employer, or scholarship provider are in attendance. Be prepared to share a brief story about yourself and what you do or aspire to do. Remember, this is a 30-second type of speech. You want to develop something that makes an impact and gives them something they will remember.

## Here are some examples:

### **John, a high school senior, is asked at a sandwich shop by the owner what his future holds.**

*“I really like working with people. I’ve gained confidence in the football program at high school and have learned how important it is to be a team player to get things accomplished. I want to provide health care and help people, but I’m not exactly sure how. I have applied to the technical school to start with and am thinking I want to be a nurse.”*

### **Mary, a high school junior, is asked by her mom’s coworker what she has been up to.**

*“I have great classes at school and am trying to decide if I want to go to State of Northwestern for college. My real passion is singing. I’m looking forward to the musical. I have a great role and am learning so much with it, including how to manage my time.”*

### **Adam, a high school junior, meets an opposing school coach at the health club. He asks Adam what his greatest asset is.**

*“That’s easy! It’s the hard work ethic I learned from my dad. Always give more than expected, work hard, and do the right thing. It doesn’t matter if I’m playing football, studying for a test, or preparing for the show ring at the county fair, I give it my best.”*

### **Anne, a salesperson, describes her job in the elevator at a trade show.**

*“I develop new products, source existing products from other companies, prepare a catalog, and travel to trade shows to market those products. I love what I do and am dedicated to my customers.”*

**Write your elevator speech and be prepared to give it with the appropriate twist at an unexpected time.**