

When people 'click' they respond faster to each other

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When two people are on the same page in a conversation, sometimes their minds just "click." A Dartmouth study demonstrates that clicking isn't just a figure of speech but is predicted by "response times" in a conversation or the amount of time between when one person stops talking and the other person starts. The findings are published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

"We've all had the experience of clicking with some people but not others. We wanted to see if something in people's conversations reveals when they click," says first author Emma Templeton, Guarini '23, a [graduate student](#) in psychological and brain sciences at Dartmouth. "Our results show that the faster people respond to each other, the more connected they feel."

The research consisted of three studies. The first study examined response time and social connection between strangers. Sixty-six participants took part in 10 conversations—each with a different conversation partner of the same gender. They could discuss any topic of their choosing and their conversation was videotaped. After the conversation was over, participants watched the [video playback](#) and rated how connected they felt moment by moment, throughout the dialog. Conversations with faster response times correlated with feelings of greater social connection.

To determine if this result also applied to close friends, members of the first study and their close friends were invited to have conversations in a second study. Although close friends rated their conversations more favorably overall than strangers, the [response time](#) data were similar—faster response times in friend conversations also predicted moments of greater social connection.

Do outside observers also use response times to infer when two people "click?" To test this, respondents from Amazon's Mechanical Turk listened to audio clips of conversations for which the response times had been manipulated to be faster, slower or the original speed (control condition). Consistent with the results from the earlier two studies, outside observers thought two speakers were more connected when their conversations contained faster rather than slower response times. Because these conversation clips were identical except for response times, this study demonstrates that response times alone are a powerful

signal of social connection.

"It's well-established that, on average, there's about a quarter of a second gap between turns during a [conversation](#). Our study is the first to look at how meaningful that gap is, in terms of connection," says senior author Thalia Wheatley, a professor of psychological and [brain sciences](#) at Dartmouth, and principal investigator of the Dartmouth Social Systems Laboratory. "When people feel like they can almost finish each other's sentences, they close that 250-millisecond gap, and that's when two [people](#) are clicking."

More information: Emma M. Templeton et al, Fast response times signal social connection in conversation, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2022). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2116915119](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2116915119)

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