

Let them finish

A short book about interrupting people, and the belief that
it shows you're keen

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

Contents

1. Before you start
2. "I know, I know"
3. Why the jump seems right
4. "It shows I'm engaged"
5. "I already know what they're going to say"
6. "It saves time"
7. "If I don't say it now I'll lose it"
8. "That's just how my family talks"
9. "I'm just excited"
10. "I was only agreeing"
11. "They ramble, someone has to move it on"
12. "It's a conversation, not a speech"
13. "I only do it with people I'm close to"
14. "But they interrupt me too"
15. "They'd say if it bothered them"
16. "In my job, if you wait, you never get in"
17. "A pause would be awkward"
18. What the jump costs you
19. What it costs them
20. Hearing the finish
21. The hand-back

22. Meetings and groups

23. The decision

24. Monologuists, fast families, video calls, being interrupted,
ADHD and children

25. When you've talked over someone again

26. "Go on"

27. Notes

Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit. Someone is talking, and before they've finished, you're talking too. You finish their sentence for them, or you answer the question they were about to ask, or you say the thing their story reminded you of while the story is still going. It feels like being quick and engaged. It feels like keenness. And somebody has said to you, more than once, "let me finish".

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the habit makes sense from the inside. You are keen, you usually have guessed right about where they were going, and conversation is built to be fast. The second is that a jump isn't a fast reply. It's an early one, and everyone who hears it can tell the difference. The part of a sentence that you cut off is usually the part that carried the point, and the person who was cut off rarely goes back for it. What feels like enthusiasm from where you're standing reads as being overrun from where they are. The third is practical. You let them finish, and when you've jumped in, you stop mid-sentence and hand it back. Chapters 19 to 22 cover how.

This book doesn't ask you to talk less, be quieter, or stop being enthusiastic. It asks you to move the start of your reply by about a second, to the point where their sentence ends.

One caution. If jumping in is one part of a wider pattern, if you've always been very talkative and restless and easily distracted, since childhood and across every part of life, the NHS lists "being very talkative or interrupting conversations" among the signs of ADHD

in adults, and says to see a GP if the symptoms are affecting your work or relationships. This book may still help, but a habit that's part of something larger deserves a proper look.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

"I know, I know"

It's dinner and your partner is telling you about the car park. They got back to the car and there was a note on the windscreen, and they started to say what the note said, and you said, "Was it that woman from number twelve again? I told you she'd", and your partner stopped, and looked at their plate, and said, "No. Anyway." And the story ended there, and you never found out what the note said, and you didn't notice that you hadn't.

At the Tuesday meeting, Priya is presenting the figures for the north region and gets to the part where the numbers dip, and you know why the numbers dip, and you say it. She waits. Then she says, "As I was saying," and carries on, a little flatter than before, and everyone in the room registers something that nobody names. At lunch, a friend rings, and they're telling you about their mother, and you say, "Oh, my mum did exactly that, she", and there's a pause on the line, and then they say, "Right. Yeah." Later you'll think the call was a good one, because you talked for twenty minutes. They'll remember that they didn't get to say the thing about their mother.

These are invented, but I'd guess you recognised at least one. Notice what they have in common. In each case you were listening. You weren't bored or distracted. You were following closely enough to guess where the sentence was going, and the guess arrived before the sentence did, and out it came. You'd say you were engaged, and you were. It's just that the other person didn't get to the end.

Some words, so we can talk about this plainly. I'll call the moment of coming in before the other person has finished **the jump**. The end of their turn, the point where they'd have stopped if you'd let them, is **the finish**. The part of their sentence that the jump cuts off, I'll call **the tail**. The thing you thought they were about to say is **the guess**. When you both talk at once, that's **the overlap**. The thing you're waiting to say while they talk is **the held thought**. What you do when you catch yourself mid-jump and give the turn back, I'll call **the hand-back**. And the small pause after the finish before you speak is **the half-second**, which is roughly what it should be and roughly what most people leave.

Before you read on, do one thing. Tomorrow, keep a tally. Every time your voice starts while someone else's is still going, make a mark. If you can manage it, make a second mark when your guess about what they were going to say turned out to be right, meaning they got to say it, or said it after you'd stopped, and it was what you'd thought. Don't change anything yet. Most people who do this find the first column longer than they expected. The second column is the interesting one, and I'll come back to it in chapter 4.

Why the jump seems right

I don't want to argue against the habit before I've been fair to it, because it's a habit of lively people, and it has real things going for it.

It feels like keenness, and it is. You jump because you're interested. Bored people don't interrupt. They wait, or drift, or look at their phone. Jumping in is what interest does when it's not held back, and you'd rather be interested than polite.

It feels engaged. You're tracking the story so closely that you can see the ending, and saying the ending out loud feels like proof that you were listening. In your experience, the people who let you finish every sentence are often the ones who weren't really there.

It feels quick. You've understood. Why sit through the rest? You and the other person both know where this is going, and getting there faster is a kindness to everyone.

It saves time, or seems to. Meetings run long. People take a while to get to the point. Someone who moves things along is doing the group a service.

You'll lose the thought. The thing you want to say is sitting there, and if you wait for the finish it'll be gone, or the moment for it will have passed. Better out than lost.

You're excited. The story reminded you of something, or you've spotted the answer, and excitement doesn't queue.

It's how you were raised. In some families everyone talks at once and nobody minds. Overlapping is warmth. A table where people wait their turn is a cold table.

And silence feels like failure. A gap in conversation feels, to you, like a dropped ball. Filling it fast is what keeps things going.

All of that is true or nearly true, and none of it is a character flaw. What I want to show you is that the jump doesn't do most of these jobs. It looks like a fast reply and isn't one. It feels like understanding and skips the part that would have tested it. It seems to save time and spends more later. And it feels like keenness from inside and reads as something quite different from outside. That's the next chapters.

"It shows I'm engaged"

Start with the belief that seems strongest, because there's good evidence for half of it.

Emma Templeton and colleagues, in 2022, had pairs of friends and pairs of strangers talk, and asked them afterwards how connected they'd felt. The thing that predicted it, in both friends and strangers, was speed of response. Conversations with faster responses felt more connected. Within a conversation, the moments that felt most connected were the moments with the fastest responses. And it was the partner's speed that mattered. People felt connected in proportion to how quickly the other person came back to them, not how quickly they came back to the other person. The timescale was under a quarter of a second, which is too fast for conscious control, and the researchers argued that this is what makes it an honest signal. Outsiders listening to the recordings used the same cue. Faster conversations sounded more connected to them too.

So you're right that speed signals engagement, and right that people feel it. What I'd ask you to look at is what "fast" meant in that study. It meant a short gap after the other person finished. A quarter of a second, a fifth, less. Not a reply that started before the finish. A jump is a different thing, and I think the difference is the whole of this book.

Tanya Stivers and ten colleagues, in 2009, measured turn-taking in ten languages, from large world languages to small indigenous ones, and found the same pattern everywhere. People avoid

overlapping talk and they minimise silence between turns. Every language did both. The average gap between turns varied a little from one language to another, but within a quarter of a second of the overall mean, and nowhere was overlap the norm. The system, in every culture they looked at, is one person speaks, then a very short gap, then the next.

Put the two studies together and you get the distinction I want you to hold. Fast is after the finish. Fast is the quarter-second gap that Templeton's participants felt as connection. A jump isn't fast. It's early. It happens before the finish, in overlap, in the one place that every language avoids. And I'd suggest, though this is my reading and not a finding, that the signal it sends is close to the opposite of the one you mean. A quick reply says "I was with you to the end". A jump says "I'd stopped needing you to get there".

You're engaged. I believe you. The question is whether the other person can tell, and the evidence says they read engagement from the gap, and a jump has no gap.

There's a practical consequence that I think is good news. If you're a jumper, you're already fast. The reply is ready before the finish. All that has to change is that it waits a second and then arrives in the gap, and in the gap it does everything you wanted the jump to do. It says you were with them. It says you're quick. The engagement you feel finally gets delivered, to the one place the other person can receive it.

"I already know what they're going to say"

The second belief is about the guess, and here too there's something right in it.

Stephen Levinson and Francisco Torreira, in 2015, laid out a puzzle about conversation. The gap between turns is about a fifth of a second. But producing even a short utterance takes more than half a second of planning. So the only way people can reply as fast as they do is by predicting where the current turn will end and preparing the reply in advance, while the other person is still talking. Everyone does this. It isn't a habit of interrupters. It's how conversation works at all, and you can't switch it off.

So yes, you know what they're going to say. So does everyone. The prediction is running in every listener at every moment, and it's usually right, in the sense that it gets the shape. You can tell that the sentence is a complaint, or a question, or a story heading for its ending. What the prediction is much worse at is the tail. The last few words. The qualification. The "but" that turns the sentence round. "I got back to the car and there was a note on the windscreen, and I thought it was going to be another one from number twelve, but". You knew the shape. You didn't know the but.

A train announcement is a fair comparison for two sentences. You know from the first three words that it's going to tell you which platform, and that's exactly the part you can't guess.

There's a study of what happens to sentences that get cut off, and it's from medicine, where the stakes make people measure things. Marvel, Epstein, Flowers and Beckman recorded two hundred and sixty-four consultations with family doctors in the United States and Canada, in 1999, and looked at what happened when patients started to say why they'd come. Patients got to finish their opening statement in twenty-eight per cent of the visits. In the rest, the doctor redirected them, after an average of twenty-three seconds. And here is the finding that matters for this chapter. Once redirected, the patients rarely completed what they'd started to say. The tail didn't come later. It was gone. And concerns that surfaced late in the visit, the "oh, and one more thing" at the door, were more common when the doctor hadn't let the patient set out the whole list at the start.

Those were doctors, not dinner tables, and the extension is mine. But the mechanism doesn't seem specific to medicine. A person who is cut off, and then gets the turn back, doesn't go back to where they were. They pick up from where you left them, or they drop it. The tail is the part you couldn't guess, and it's the part that doesn't survive the jump.

Some readers will say at this point that they're simply quicker than most people. Their mind runs ahead, the ending is obvious to them long before it's said, and waiting for it is like waiting for a slow reader to finish a page you've already read. That may be true. It's also beside the point, because the speed of the guess doesn't improve the guess. A fast thinker gets to the shape faster. Nobody gets to the tail faster, because the tail is the part that can't be guessed at any speed. So the quick mind that jumps is quickest at

being wrong about the ending, and the quick mind that waits has both the shape and the tail, for the cost of under a second. If you're quick, you're the reader who most needs the pad in chapter 19, because your held thoughts arrive earliest and press hardest.

Go back to the tally from chapter 1. The second column, guesses that turned out right, is your own data on this. If you're like most people, it's shorter than the first column, and even where the guess was right about the shape, you'll notice you don't know what the tail was, because nobody got to say it.

"It saves time"

The third belief is that the jump is efficient. The story was heading somewhere, you got there first, and everyone was spared the last twenty seconds.

The same medical studies let us check that. Marvel and colleagues found that patients who were allowed to finish their opening statement took, on average, six seconds longer than patients who were cut off. Six seconds. That's the whole saving. Naykky Singh Ospina and colleagues, in 2019, looked at a hundred and twelve recorded consultations and found that where clinicians did ask patients what they'd come for, they interrupted two-thirds of them, after a median of eleven seconds. The patients who weren't interrupted took a median of six seconds to say what they wanted. Six. The doctors were jumping in at eleven seconds to save time on a statement that, uninterrupted, would have been over at six.

I'd put it this way. The fear behind the jump is that if you let people finish, they'll go on for ever. The evidence, in the one setting where someone's timed it, is that they don't. They stop, and quickly, and the interrupter was usually the one who made the exchange longer, because now there's a redirected patient, a lost tail, and a concern that comes back at the door.

The door is where the real cost lives. Marvel's late-arising concerns were the things patients hadn't managed to say at the start, coming out at the end when there was no time for them. At dinner, that's the thing your partner mentions three days later, sharply, that you didn't know was a thing. In the meeting, it's the objection that Priya

didn't get to make on Tuesday and makes by email on Thursday, to everyone, by which time the decision is half-implemented. You saved twenty seconds and spent an afternoon.

There's a domestic version of the saving, and it's "just get to the point". Said to a partner or a child mid-story, it's a jump with an instruction in it, and the point it demands is the shape without the tail. The child learns to give you the shape. Two years later you'll wonder why they never tell you anything, and the answer is that you asked them not to.

So when you say the jump saves time, I'd ask, for whom, and over what period. In the moment, for you, a few seconds. Over the week, for everyone, the reverse. Efficiency in conversation is letting the tail arrive when it's cheap, which is at the finish, instead of paying for it later when it's dear.

"If I don't say it now I'll lose it"

Now the held thought, because it's the thing that actually pushes the jump out of your mouth.

Someone is talking and something occurs to you. A connection, a correction, the answer. It's a good thought and it's sitting in your mouth, and you know from experience that if you wait it'll be gone, or the conversation will have moved and there'll be no place for it. The pressure of a held thought is real. I'm not going to tell you it isn't. Anyone who's had a name on the tip of their tongue knows that holding a thing in mind while attending to something else is work.

Two observations, though. The first is that a thought which can't survive twenty seconds wasn't much of a thought. If it's a real point, it'll still be a point at the finish. If it's gone by then, it was a reflex, and the conversation has lost nothing. Most held thoughts, if you watch them, are one of the two. Either they're still there after the finish and you say them, a little later than you'd have liked and to a person who can now hear them. Or they've dissolved, and you find you've nothing to add, and that's worth knowing.

The second is that holding the thought is what makes you deaf to the tail. You can't attend fully to the end of their sentence while guarding a sentence of your own. So the jump isn't just early. It's coming from a person who's stopped listening a few seconds before, in order to hold the thing they're about to say. The tail was lost before you spoke.

A practical answer, which I'll come back to in chapter 19. One word on a pad. Not the sentence, the word. "Twelve", for the woman at number twelve. "Dip", for the north region. The word holds the thought so your attention doesn't have to, and the thought is there at the finish if it's still wanted.

There's a version of the held thought that's a correction. They've got a fact wrong and you know it. I'd only say that a correction delivered at the finish is a correction, and one delivered in overlap is a fight. The fact is the same. Where you put it decides which one it is.

"That's just how my family talks"

Some readers will have a ready answer, which is that in their family everyone talks over everyone, and always has, and it's warm, and nobody's harmed.

I think that's partly true, and I want to separate the two things inside it.

There's a kind of overlap that doesn't take the turn. "Yes, yes, exactly." Laughing before the punchline. Saying the last word along with the speaker. Two people finishing a shared story at once. In that kind, the first speaker keeps talking, or finishes, and the overlap is a sort of accompaniment. Many families and many friendships run at this tempo and it's a pleasure to be in. Stivers's ten languages differed in their average gap by up to a quarter of a second, and that's enough, the researchers thought, for one culture to feel another as rudely fast or painfully slow. A fast family is a real thing.

Then there's the overlap that takes the turn. You start, they stop. The story ends with your version. That's the jump, and the test for which kind you're doing is simple. Who's talking afterwards? If they're still going, it was accompaniment. If it's you, it was a jump, however warm it felt.

Most people who grew up in a fast family do both and can't tell them apart from the inside, because both feel like joining in. The tally will tell you. Count only the ones where you ended up with the turn.

The other thing to say about the family style is that it doesn't travel. At your parents' table, the jump might land as warmth, because everyone there is doing it and the turn comes back round. With your partner, who grew up with gaps, it lands as being cut off. With Priya, it lands as being overruled. The style isn't wrong. It's local. And most of your conversations aren't at that table.

"I'm just excited"

This is the belief I most want to be gentle with, because it's the truest of them. You jump because something in you leapt. The story reminded you, or you saw the answer, and the excitement went straight to your mouth.

The trouble is that excitement doesn't arrive at the other end as excitement. It arrives as an interruption, and interruptions are read in a particular way.

Jeff Youngquist, in 2009, had people listen to recorded dialogues into which six intrusive interruptions had been placed, and after each pair of interruptions asked them to rate the interrupter. As the interruptions accumulated, the interrupter was seen as more and more dominant. The word the study used was interpersonal dominance, which means roughly what you'd think, a person who takes control of the exchange. There were some findings about which gender combinations were rated most dominant, and I'm leaving those out, because the point for this chapter is simpler. Listeners hearing someone interrupt didn't hear excitement. They heard someone taking over.

That's the mismatch. Inside, you feel keen. Outside, they experience being overrun. And it's a mismatch that doesn't correct itself, because you never see the outside. You see your own enthusiasm, and you see the other person go quiet or say "anyway", and you read the quiet as the story having been finished, when it was the story having been taken.

It's worth knowing what keenness looks like from outside when it's delivered at the finish, because it's not muted. It's the same energy, the same leaning forward, the same "oh, that's exactly", and it lands as what it is, because the other person has reached the end and has room for it. Youngquist's listeners weren't rating enthusiasm as dominance. They were rating interruptions as dominance. Move the enthusiasm one second later and it stops being an interruption, and the rating changes with it.

I'm not asking you to be less excited. I'm asking you to notice that the excitement isn't what arrives. If you want it to arrive, it has to be delivered after the finish, when it's a reply and not a seizure of the turn. "Oh, I love that, that's exactly what happened to us" at the finish is excitement received. The same words two seconds earlier are an interruption, and Youngquist's listeners tell you what they'll be taken for.

"I was only agreeing"

There's a jump that doesn't feel like one, and it's probably the commonest kind in kind people. It's the agreeing jump. "Yes, exactly, that's what I've been saying." "Oh, completely, we had the same thing with." "No, you're right, and the thing is." It comes in with warmth, it takes their side, and it takes the turn.

I'd like you to look at it with the test from chapter 7. Who's talking afterwards? If the answer is you, it was a jump, and the fact that it agreed with them doesn't give the turn back. From where they stand, they were three words from the tail and a friendly voice arrived and the tail went. The friendliness makes it harder to object to, which is why the agreeing jump gets the least complaint and does exactly the same damage. Nobody says "let me finish" to someone who's agreeing with them. They say "yes" and stop, and go home with the point unsaid.

The matching story is the agreeing jump's big brother. They're telling you about their mother, and it reminds you of yours, and the reminder arrives as "oh, mine did that", and now the conversation is about your mother. You meant it as connection. This is what your story reminded me of, so we're alike. What arrived was a change of subject, and the change happened before they'd reached the end of theirs. The phone call in chapter 1 was this. The friend rang about their mother and got yours, and it wasn't unkind, and it was still a jump.

The fix isn't to stop agreeing or stop matching. It's the same fix as everywhere. Agree at the finish. "Yes, exactly" after the drop and the half-second is agreement received as agreement. Two seconds earlier it's a person being talked over by an ally, and being talked over by an ally is a strange, lonely thing, because there's no one to be annoyed with. The matching story goes on the pad, as one word, and gets told after theirs is finished, and told to a person who's now free to hear it. In my experience the matching story is better received that way by a wide margin, because it's now an answer to their story instead of a replacement for it.

One more thing about the agreeing jump. It's often a way of showing that you'd understood before they'd finished, and chapter 4 is about why that understanding is mostly of the shape and not the tail. "Exactly" delivered mid-sentence is a claim to have got there first. Sometimes you had. Often the tail was about to say something the "exactly" didn't cover, and now it never will.

"They ramble, someone has to move it on"

Here's the objection from the practical end. Some people go on. If you don't cut in, they'll take the meeting into next week, and someone has to be the one who moves things along.

Two things. First, the timing evidence again. In the medical studies, the fear that patients would go on for ever turned out to be wrong by a wide margin. Six seconds to say what they came for, when nobody stopped them. Marvel's patients who were allowed to finish used six seconds more than the ones who were cut off. The doctors were interrupting people who were about to stop anyway. I'd expect the same at most tables and in most meetings. The person you think is rambling is usually a sentence or two from the finish, and the jump arrives just before they'd have got there.

Second, and this is my reasoning and not a finding, jumping in trains the thing you're complaining about. A person who expects to be cut off learns to talk faster, to front-load, to pad the start so that the point is protected, and to keep going through the gaps because a gap is where they get taken. If you've been jumping on someone for years, some of their rambling is a defence you built. Let them finish for a month and see if it changes. In my experience it does, and quickly, because most people would rather say the point once at a normal speed than say it three times fast.

There are real monologuists, and there's a proper way to interrupt one, which is at a finish, by name, with a question. That's chapter 23. But be honest about how many of the people you jump on are that, and how many were just about to stop.

"It's a conversation, not a speech"

There's a belief that runs underneath a lot of the others, and it's that conversation is by nature an exchange, so taking your turn is what you're supposed to do. Nobody gets to make a speech. Jumping in is just turn-taking done with energy.

Turn-taking is the right word for what conversation is. But the turn is taken at the finish. That's what Stivers's ten languages showed. The system everyone runs is that you speak, you stop, the other person starts. A turn taken by force, in overlap, isn't turn-taking done with energy. It's the system being overridden, and everyone in the room knows it, because everyone in the room runs the same system.

Think about what a turn is for. It's the space in which one person gets to think out loud to the end. Guy Itzchakov and colleagues, in 2018, ran five experiments on what happens to speakers when they're listened to well, meaning attentively and without judgement, and found that good listening lowered the speaker's social anxiety and gave them more clarity about their own view. Not more certainty that they were right, but a clearer sense of what they actually thought, and more willingness to say it. Being allowed to get to the end is how people find out what they think. When you jump, you don't just take the turn. You take the last stretch of thinking, the part where the view was about to become clear.

A conversation where one person is always the one who finishes and the other is always the one who gets finished isn't an exchange. It's a speech with an audience that keeps trying to speak. And the audience, over time, stops trying.

There's a related habit worth a paragraph, which is talking more than you listen. Interrupters usually do. If you've jumped on someone's story, you now have the turn, and you'll usually keep it for a while. Over an evening the division of talking time tilts, and you go home feeling that it was a great conversation, because you did most of it. The person who went home with you has a different account. I won't develop that here, but the tally from chapter 1 will show it if you also mark roughly who had the turn after each jump.

"I only do it with people I'm close to"

Some readers will say they don't do this at work, or with strangers. They know how to behave. It's only with a partner, or a sibling, or an old friend, where the guard's down and the jump comes out.

That's true of many people, and it's the reverse of comforting. It means that the people closest to you get the most of it. Your partner is the person who most often doesn't get to the end of a sentence. Your children learn to talk fast because that's how you get to the point before the jump. The friend who's known you for twenty years is the one who's stopped bothering with the tail.

"You never let me finish" is a sentence that gets said in homes, not offices, and it's worth hearing what it means. It doesn't mean "you interrupted me just now". It means "over years, I've stopped expecting to reach the end of what I say to you". Someone who says that has been keeping count for a long time before they said it, and the count is high.

The partner who stopped telling stories is the quiet version. There was a time when they came home and told you things, with the tail in, and somewhere along the way the tails started getting cut, and the stories got shorter, and now they say "fine" and "nothing much" and you think they've got less interesting. They haven't. They've got a listener who finishes their sentences, and a person with that listener stops starting sentences worth finishing.

I'd turn the belief round. If the jump only happens with the people you're close to, then the people you're close to are the ones with the reason to read this book, and you owe them the change first. Start at dinner, not at the meeting.

"But they interrupt me too"

In some households everyone jumps. You cut them off, they cut you off, and it evens out, and neither of you could say who started it.

The evening-out is an illusion, and I'd like to say why. Two people who jump on each other aren't having two conversations that cancel. They're having one conversation in which nobody reaches a finish. Both tails get lost. Both people go to bed with things unsaid. The fact that it's mutual doesn't halve the cost. It doubles it.

Someone has to stop first, and it doesn't have to be the person who started it. It has to be the person who's noticed, and the person who's noticed is the one reading this. Let them finish for a fortnight and say nothing about it. Two things tend to happen, in my experience. The first is that they don't notice at first, and then they do, and then they slow down, because a person who's being allowed to finish stops racing. The second is that they start letting you finish too, not because you've asked, but because the tempo of the conversation has changed and they've fallen in with it.

Don't keep a scorecard. "I let you finish, so you should let me" turns a habit into a negotiation, and negotiations about who talks are the least pleasant conversations there are. Just let them finish. The rest usually follows, and if it doesn't, you've still got your tails back.

A fortnight is enough to see it. Pick the person you most jump on and who most jumps on you, and for two weeks let every one of their sentences finish, with the hand-back when you slip. Don't

announce it. At the end of the fortnight, notice two things. How many of their tails you've heard that you'd have missed, and whether they've started leaving you gaps. In my experience the first is always more than expected and the second happens more often than not, and neither required a word about interrupting.

If there's a child at that table, there's one more reason to be the one who stops. A child in a house where both adults jump learns that this is what talking is, and takes it to school and later to their own kitchen. A child who watches one adult start letting the other finish learns that the tempo of a room can change, and who changes it. The second lesson is worth having, and only one person has to teach it.

"They'd say if it bothered them"

Here's a comfort a lot of readers hold. If the jump were a problem, people would say so. Nobody says so. Your partner doesn't complain, your colleagues don't complain, your friends ring back. Whatever this book claims, the evidence in your life is that nobody minds.

I'd ask you to look at what "saying so" would involve. Someone would have to stop, in the middle of an ordinary exchange, and say "you interrupted me". That's a confrontation, over something that lasted a second, with a person who meant well. Almost nobody does that. What they do instead is what your partner did with the car park story. They say "no, anyway", and drop it. What Priya did was say "as I was saying". What the friend did was say "right, yeah". Those were the complaints. They were made in the only form that ordinary politeness allows, and you read them as the conversation moving on.

There's a reason the complaint never becomes explicit, and Templeton's study points at it. The signal of connection she measured ran at under a quarter of a second, which is below the level at which people know what they're responding to. Her participants felt more or less connected, and could say so afterwards, but they couldn't have told you it was about response timing. The same is true, I'd suggest, of the people you jump on. They feel something after a conversation with you, a flatness, a sense of not having been quite heard, and they can't say why, because the thing that caused it was a second long and happened

in the middle of a sentence. They can't complain about what they can't name. So they don't complain. They just feel it, and over time they bring you less.

The people who did say it, the ones who've actually said "let me finish", said it after years. It's not a sentence anyone reaches for on the first jump, or the hundredth. It's the sentence that comes out when the count has got high enough to overrule politeness, and it's usually said sharply, because it's been held so long. If you've heard it even once, you've heard the end of a very long silence.

Asking directly won't get you a straight answer either. "Do I interrupt you?" gets "sometimes, but it's fine", because the question is asked by the interrupter and the answer is being given to their face. The tally is the honest instrument, and after the tally, the thing to watch is what happens after a jump. Does the story resume, from where it was, with the tail intact? Or does it end with "anyway"? The second is the complaint. Count how often you hear it.

"In my job, if you wait, you never get in"

Some readers work in rooms where the half-second doesn't exist. The meeting is a scramble, the turn goes to whoever's talking loudest, and anyone who waits for a finish is still waiting when the meeting ends. In that room, you'd say, the jump isn't a habit. It's how anyone gets a word in.

I'll concede the room. They exist, and they're miserable, and a person who's spent years in one has learned the jump as a survival skill. But look at what the skill buys you there. It gets your voice into the room. It doesn't get your point taken. Youngquist's listeners rated the interrupter as dominant, and a room full of people jumping on each other is a room in which every point arrives labelled as a bid for the floor. The points that get acted on in those rooms, in my experience, are the ones made by the person who somehow wasn't scrambling, and the reason they weren't is that they'd learned to take the turn at a finish.

There are finishes, even in a fast room. They're short and they're contested, but every speaker breathes, and every sentence drops. The technique is the one from chapter 23 for monologists, and it works on a room. Wait for a drop. Use a name. "Can I come in on that, Mark." Then say the thing. That's not a jump. It's a turn taken at a finish, with a name on it, and it reads as someone who was listening and now has something. In a room of interrupters, that's rare enough to be noticed.

If there's a chair, use them. "I'd like to come in after Mark." A chair who's given that will usually give you the floor, and the floor from the chair is worth three floors seized.

And if the room truly has no finishes, if it's a wall of overlap from start to end, then the problem is the meeting and not your patience, and the fix is a word with whoever runs it, not a faster jump. A meeting where nobody reaches a finish is a meeting where nobody's tail gets heard, and the tails are where the objections live, and the objections come back at the door, as Marvel's patients' did, at a cost the meeting was supposed to avoid.

The pad matters most in these rooms. Three words in a fast meeting, and at the first drop you pick the one that's still worth it. You'll speak less often than the jumpers and be heard more, and after a few weeks you may find that one or two of them have started leaving you a gap, because it's become clear that you say something when you get one.

"A pause would be awkward"

The last belief is about the gap. If you wait for the finish and then leave a pause, it'll feel awkward, and awkward is worse than a jump.

Levinson and Torreira's figure was that the gap between turns is about a fifth of a second. Stivers's ten languages varied from that by up to a quarter of a second in either direction. So a normal gap runs from nothing to about half a second, and a full second is at the slow end of normal. That's the whole scale. The pause you're afraid of, the one that feels like a silence, is under a second long, and it reads to the other person as thought. Templeton's participants felt connected at fast responses, but fast meant a gap, not a jump, and the difference between a quarter-second and a half-second is not the difference between connection and awkwardness. It's the difference between a quick reply and a considered one.

Nobody has ever complained that you paused half a second. Think about that. You have been told "let me finish". You have not been told "you left a slight gap before answering". The half-second isn't a risk. It's the thing that turns a jump into a reply, and it's shorter than a breath.

If the half-second still feels long, there's a sound that fills it. A quiet "right", or a nod. That's not a jump. It's a signal that you're at the finish with them, and it buys you the time to make sure the tail has

arrived before you speak. People who are good at this do it without knowing, and the people they talk to feel listened to without knowing why.

It's worth asking where the fear of the gap came from, because it isn't universal. Some people were raised at tables where a gap meant the conversation had died and it was your fault. Others were raised where a gap was where thinking happened. If you're the first kind, the half-second will feel like a small failure for a week or two, and then it'll feel like nothing, because nothing is what it is to the person opposite.

What the jump costs you

I've argued mechanism. This chapter and the next are the bill, and this one is your share.

The tail. Every jump loses the part of the sentence you couldn't guess, which is the part with the information in it. The note on the windscreen. The reason the north region dipped, which wasn't the reason you said. Over a day, that's dozens of small facts you didn't get, and you didn't get them from the people who had them, while they were offering.

Being wrong. The guess is right about the shape and wrong about the tail, and when you say the guess out loud, you've committed to it. A fair number of jumps are confident statements of something that turns out to be not quite what the other person meant, and you don't find out, because they said "anyway" instead of correcting you. You go through the week slightly wrong about a number of things, and the people who could have put you right have stopped trying.

The reputation. Youngquist's listeners rated the interrupter as dominant, and that word follows you. In meetings it means your points get discounted, because a point from someone who takes the floor by force is heard as a bid for the floor and not as a point. You may have noticed that ideas you raised in overlap went nowhere, and the same idea raised by someone else, at a finish, got taken up. That's the cost of the reputation, paid in the currency you care about.

People who tell you less. Chapter 12's partner who stopped telling stories, and the friend who goes quiet on the phone. Over years, the interrupter ends up with the least information of anyone in their circle, because everyone around them has learned that the second half of a sentence isn't safe.

The answers you never got. Some of the sentences you jumped on were questions, and you answered the question you guessed, and they never asked the one they had.

And the effort. Holding a thought while pretending to listen is tiring. Guarding the held thought, watching for the gap, launching into it. A conversation run that way is work, and the people who let others finish have a lighter evening than you do, because they're only doing one thing at a time.

None of this shows up on the day. It shows up as a vague sense that people are a bit flat with you, that meetings don't go your way, that your partner doesn't say much. Each of those has a jump somewhere upstream of it.

What it costs them

Then there's the other person, and the jump makes it hard to see them, because the jump is the moment you stopped looking.

The unfinished sentence stays unfinished. Marvel's redirected patients rarely completed what they'd started. I'd expect the same of anyone. The thing they were going to say doesn't get parked and picked up later. It gets dropped, and if it mattered, it comes back in a worse form, sharp and out of context, or it never comes back at all, and they carry it.

The lost thought. Itzchakov's finding was that being listened to well gives a speaker clarity about their own view. The reverse is that being cut off takes it away. The person who was three words from working out what they thought is left not knowing, and may not get another run at it.

Feeling overrun. Not insulted, exactly. Something quieter. The sense of having started to say something and found the space already occupied. Youngquist's listeners called it dominance. The person on the receiving end mostly calls it nothing, and just says "anyway".

The withdrawal. People don't fight a jump. They shorten. Sentences get front-loaded so the point is out before you arrive. Stories get skipped because they'd need a run-up. Over time the person becomes, in your company, less than they are, and you can't see it because they're always like that with you.

The child. Children raised by an interrupter learn two things. To talk fast, and that what they were going to say is less important than what the adult already knows. The second lesson is the expensive one. A child who's learned it stops bringing the tail, and the tail is where the thing they're worried about lives.

The colleague who prepares less. Priya spent two days on the north region figures and got to present half of them. Next quarter she'll spend one day, because the second day's work never gets heard. The jump made her worse at her job, in the specific way that matters to you.

And the friend on the phone. They rang to tell you about their mother, and what they got was your mother. They'll ring less. When they do, they'll keep it light, because light doesn't need a tail.

The partner who says "fine". I described them in chapter 12, and I'll add only that "fine" is what a person says when they've learned that the full answer won't be reached. It isn't sulking and it isn't a lack of interest in you. It's an accurate forecast of what happens to sentences at your table, and the forecast is what changes first when the sentences start getting through.

I said in the preface that the book doesn't ask you to talk less. It doesn't. All of this is the cost of one thing, the start of your reply landing before the finish, and the whole of it can be recovered by moving that start about a second.

Hearing the finish

The next three chapters are the method. This one is about not jumping, the next is about what to do when you have, and the third is about groups.

Know your jump signs. The jump has a run-up and you can learn to feel it. For most people it's a breath in, a lean forward, a hand starting to lift, or the "yeah, yeah" that comes out just before the voice does. Watch yourself for a day and find yours. Once you know the sign, you've got about a second between the sign and the voice, and a second is enough.

Make the tail the target. Instead of listening for the shape of the sentence, which you already know, listen for the end of it. The specific last words. Set yourself the job of being able to repeat the last thing they said, exactly. This does two things. It moves your attention from the guess to the finish, and it gives you something to do with the part of your mind that was drafting.

Listen for the drop. Most people's voices fall at the finish. Not always, and not in every accent, but often enough to be a cue. A rising tone means there's more. A level tone means there might be. A drop, and then a breath, is the finish. Wait for the drop.

Leave the half-second. When they've finished, count one, silently, before you speak. That's it. Chapter 16 said why this isn't awkward. It also gives the tail one more chance to arrive, because a fair number of finishes are followed, after half a second, by "and the thing is". If you're already talking, that never comes.

One word on the pad. For the held thought. Not the sentence. "Twelve." "Dip." "Mum." You'll find that half the words never get used, because by the finish they've stopped being worth saying, and the other half get said better for having waited.

One conversation a day. Don't try to do this everywhere at once. Pick one conversation, the same one each day for a fortnight. Dinner is the obvious one. In that conversation, and only that one, let every sentence finish. The rest of the day can be as it is. A fortnight of dinners builds the habit better than a week of trying everywhere and failing.

Expect to fail early. You'll jump. You'll notice halfway through the jump. That's not failure. That's the sign working, a little late, and the next chapter is for that moment.

The hand-back

You'll catch yourself mid-jump. Your voice has started, theirs has stopped, and you realise. This chapter is about the next two seconds, and it's the most useful thing in the book, because it's the part you'll use most.

Stop mid-sentence. Not at the end of your point. Now, where you are, even if it's mid-word. "Was it that woman from number tw," and stop. The stopping is the message. It says that you've noticed and that their turn matters more than your sentence.

Say "sorry, go on". Three words. Not "sorry, I interrupted, I do this, I'm trying to stop". A speech about your interrupting is another interruption. "Sorry, go on," and then be quiet.

Don't re-take. The temptation, once they've finished, is to say what you were going to say, now that it's your turn. Sometimes that's right. Often, if you wait, you'll find it's answered by the tail, or no longer worth it. Let their finish land before you decide.

Don't finish their sentence for them. Even as a way of handing back. "You were going to say it was number twelve?" isn't a hand-back. It's the jump in a question mark. Hand back the turn, not your guess about it.

If they've lost it, ask. People who've been cut off sometimes can't find the thread. "What were you going to say?" gets it back. "Sorry, you were saying about the note." Give them the place, not the content, and let them find the tail themselves.

Mean it. The hand-back only works if you then listen. A hand-back followed by the held thought at the first opportunity teaches the other person that "sorry, go on" means "hurry up". Hand it back and stay with them to the finish, and then the half-second, and then speak.

Expect it to feel odd. Stopping mid-word feels like a stumble. It isn't, to the other person. To them it's the first time in a while they've been given a sentence back, and most people are visibly pleased and then a little wary, waiting to see if it's real. Do it for a fortnight and the wariness goes.

Meetings and groups

Groups are harder, because the turn is contested and the finish is less clear, and because the jump in a meeting has an audience.

Wait for the finish, then say the thing. The rule doesn't change. If you have the point about the north region, you have it at Priya's finish, not at the dip. Write "dip" on the pad and wait. When she stops, count one, and then say it. It'll be the same point, heard by a room that watched you wait for it, and it'll carry more.

Note the thing. In a group the held thoughts pile up, and the pad is what stops them from coming out in overlap. One word per thought. At the finish, pick the one that's still worth it. Usually one of three.

Hand back in public. If you've jumped in a meeting, the hand-back is the same, and more valuable, because the room sees it. "Sorry, Priya, go on." Then let her. The room learns something about you from that, and it's the opposite of what it learned from the jump.

Use the chair. If someone is chairing, let them manage the turns. If you're chairing, your job is to protect the finishes, which means noticing the person who's been jumped on and saying "hang on, I don't think you'd finished". That's the best use of a chair there is, and it's rare.

Make room for the quiet ones. In every meeting there's someone who never gets to a finish, because they leave a proper gap and the gap gets taken. If you're a jumper, you've probably taken it. Once you're leaving the half-second, you'll notice them starting, and you

can leave a second half-second so they get in. Some of the best points in any meeting are the ones that have never been made, because the person with them waits for a gap that never comes.

Video calls. The lag on a call makes finishes harder to hear and overlaps more common, and everyone's a bit of an interrupter on video. Leave a full second instead of a half. If you've overlapped, the hand-back is "sorry, you go", and then mute yourself for the length of their answer, which is the only reliable way to not jump on a call.

The decision

You've got the argument and the method. What's left is to decide, and I'd like the decision to be one sentence.

I let them finish. When I've jumped in, I stop and hand it back.

Two parts, and both matter.

The first is the finish. The tail as the target, the drop, the half-second, the word on the pad. One conversation a day for a fortnight, then the rest.

The second is the hand-back. Stop mid-sentence. "Sorry, go on." Don't re-take, don't finish it for them, ask for the place if they've lost it, and mean it. This is the part that'll do most of the work, because you'll jump for a long time yet, and the hand-back turns each jump into something the other person can forgive and, in the end, something they stop noticing because it stopped happening.

There's a form of planning that helps with rules like this, and it's been tested many times. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of it in 2006. You decide in advance what you'll do and when, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that", and people who plan that way follow through much more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three.

When I feel the breath in and the lean, I'll write one word on the pad and look at their mouth until it stops.

When I hear my voice while theirs is still going, I'll stop mid-word and say "sorry, go on".

When they've finished, I'll count one before I speak.

What to expect. This is my expectation and not a finding. The first few days, you'll jump as often as ever and catch about half of them, and the hand-back will feel like stumbling. By the end of the first week the sign will start arriving before the voice, and you'll have a few clean finishes, and you'll notice the tails. Some of them will surprise you. Around the second week, someone will react. Your partner will tell a story to the end, and it'll be a longer story than you've heard from them in a while. A colleague will say something in a meeting they'd been sitting on. By the end of a month the tally will have dropped to a fraction of what it was and you'll have stopped keeping it. You'll still jump. Everyone does. But the jumps will be occasional and handed back, and the people around you will have started bringing the tail again.

Monologuists, fast families, video calls, being interrupted, ADHD and children

The rule holds everywhere. A few situations need a paragraph.

Real monologuists. Some people don't finish. Every apparent finish turns out to be a breath, and they can go for ten minutes. You don't have to be a captive, and there's a way to interrupt that isn't a jump. Wait for a finish, even a small one, a drop and a breath. Use their name. Ask a question about what they've just said. "Dave, can I ask, when you say the council wouldn't budge, what did they actually say?" That takes the turn at a finish, on their subject, and it's received as interest and not as seizure. If you need to change the subject, do it in the same shape. Name, finish, and then "can I take us back to the budget for a minute". Be honest, though, about how many of the people you jump on are this. Chapter 10's evidence is that most people stop within seconds when nobody jumps.

Fast families. At a table where everyone overlaps, the rule still applies to you, and it'll feel like you've gone quiet. You haven't. You're speaking at finishes, and there are finishes, even at that table. What you'll find is that your points land better because they're not competing, and that one or two of the quieter people at the table start getting to the end of things. That's not a small change for a family.

Video calls. Chapter 21 covered it. A full second, and mute.

Being the one interrupted. If you live or work with a jumper, the reading in chapter 8 is worth having. The jump reads as dominance and usually isn't meant as it. That doesn't make it pleasant. What helps is to stop, wait, and when they finish, say "I hadn't finished", pleasantly, and then finish. Most jumpers, told that once a day for a week, get the message without a conversation about it.

Hearing. If you jump because you genuinely can't tell when people have finished, especially in noisy places, and you find yourself asking people to repeat things, that's worth a hearing check. A GP can arrange one.

ADHD. The preface said it and I'll repeat it. The NHS lists being very talkative or interrupting conversations among the signs of ADHD in adults, alongside restlessness, being easily distracted, difficulty organising time and making quick decisions without thinking through the consequences. The symptoms usually start before the age of twelve. If that's a description of your whole life and not just of your dinner table, see a GP, who may refer you for an assessment. The method in this book still applies. It's just not the whole answer.

Children. If the interrupter in your house is a child, the rule for you is the same and matters more. Let them finish, every time, however long it takes. A child who's allowed to get to the end learns that the end is worth reaching. For teaching them not to jump, the hand-back is the model. "Hang on, your sister hadn't finished." Then let the sister finish. Then, "go on, what were you going to say?" They learn the shape by watching you run it.

Interrupting to help. Some jumps are rescues. The person is struggling for a word and you supply it. Once in a while, fine. As a habit, it teaches them that you'll do their sentences, and it's usually wrong, because the word they were reaching for wasn't yours. Leave the gap. They'll find it or they'll ask.

When you've talked over someone again

It'll happen after weeks of doing well. You'll be tired, or excited, or at your parents' table, and you'll jump, and only realise when you see the other person's face. Then the thought will come that you're back where you started.

You're not. One jump is one jump. The tally, if you were still keeping it, would show one mark on a day that used to have twenty. The habit that ran for decades will run again now and then, and the only question is what you do in the next two seconds.

The hand-back is the recovery. It's the same tool as always, and it works as well on the fortieth day as the first. Stop mid-word.

"Sorry, go on." Wait for the finish. Count one. What happened was a slip, and the hand-back turns a slip into a demonstration that the rule is real, which is worth more to the other person than a week of clean finishes they didn't notice.

Work out which sign you missed. Was it a topic you care about too much? A person you've always jumped on? A room where everyone was doing it? Each of those has an answer in chapters 19 to 21, and the answer is a small adjustment. Put a pad on the table for that person. Leave a full second in that room.

If the jump was a bad one, in front of people or on something that mattered to them, a later word helps. Not a speech, and not that evening's third apology. Just "I talked over you earlier about the

west region, I'm sorry, I'd like to hear the rest", and then hearing the rest. Most people, offered the tail back a few hours later, will give it, and giving it repairs more than the apology does.

No streaks. Don't count days without a jump. A streak makes the first slip feel like the end of something, and it isn't. Count finishes, if you count anything. The number of times this week you heard a tail you'd have missed. That number only goes up.

"Go on"

It's dinner, some weeks on. Your partner is telling you about the car park. They got back to the car and there was a note on the windscreen, and they thought it was going to be from the woman at number twelve, and you felt the breath go in and your hand start to lift, and you put the pen on the pad and wrote "twelve" and looked at their mouth. And they said, "but it wasn't, it was from a bloke who'd seen someone scrape the wing and left his number as a witness", and you hadn't known there was a scrape, and you hadn't known there was a witness, and the story was a different story from the one you'd have finished for them.

On Tuesday, Priya presents the north region and the numbers dip, and you write "dip" and wait, and she says why, and it isn't the reason you had, and she goes on to what she's done about it, which is the part you'd never heard because you'd always taken the turn at the dip. Afterwards she stays behind and says a thing about the west region that she'd been sitting on for two quarters.

The friend rings at lunch. They're telling you about their mother, and the thing about your mother arrives in your mouth, and you write "mum" and let them get to the end. It's a longer end than you expected and it has a question in it, which you answer. The call is shorter than it used to be, and you did less of it, and they say "thanks, that helped", which they haven't said for a while.

None of this is a transformation. You jumped twice on Wednesday and handed both back. At your parents' table on Sunday you were the quiet one, by that table's standards, and your father asked if

you were all right. The pad is on the kitchen table with a column of single words on it, half of them never used. But the tails are coming back. People are finishing their sentences to you, and the sentences are longer than they were, and they've got the point in them, and you're hearing it.

If you take one thing from this book, take this. Tonight, at dinner, when the breath goes in, write one word and look at their mouth until it stops, and then count one. That's the whole method. Everything else is detail.

Notes

This book gives general information about an everyday habit. It isn't medical or psychological advice, and it's no substitute for a GP or a specialist who knows you. The NHS guidance I mention is for England as I found it in September 2026.

I've kept sources out of the chapters where I could so they read easily. Here they are by chapter, with the limits I'm aware of. Unless I say otherwise, I read the published summary of each paper and not the full text. I checked each paper for a retraction or correction notice in September 2026 and found none. Where a chapter isn't listed, it rests on my own reasoning. That includes chapters 1, 2, 6, 9, 12, 13, 17, 19, 20, 21, 24 and 25. The dinner, the note on the windscreen, the Tuesday meeting, Priya and the friend on the phone are invented.

Before you start. The NHS page "ADHD in adults", for the list of symptoms and the advice to see a GP.

Chapter 3. Templeton, Chang, Reynolds, Cone LeBeaumont and Wheatley, "Fast response times signal social connection in conversation", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 119, 2022. Pairs of friends and strangers, with a round-robin design in six groups. The summary describes response times and doesn't say how overlapping responses were scored, so the distinction between a fast reply and an early one is my reading. Stivers and colleagues, "Universals and cultural variation in turn-taking in conversation", Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 106, 2009, pages 10587 to 10592. Ten languages, eleven authors.

Chapter 4. Levinson and Torreira, "Timing in turn-taking and its implications for processing models of language", *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, 2015, article 731. A review with new analyses. Marvel, Epstein, Flowers and Beckman, "Soliciting the patient's agenda: have we improved?", *Journal of the American Medical Association* 281, 1999, pages 283 to 287. Two hundred and sixty-four consultations with twenty-nine family doctors in the United States and Canada. The extension from consultations to conversation is mine.

Chapter 5. Marvel and colleagues as above. Singh Ospina, Phillips, Rodriguez-Gutierrez, Castaneda-Guarderas, Gionfriddo, Branda and Montori, "Eliciting the patient's agenda: secondary analysis of recorded clinical encounters", *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 34, 2019, pages 36 to 40. One hundred and twelve recorded consultations. The reading of late-arising concerns as the point coming back at the door, and the account of what that costs at dinner or in a meeting, are mine.

Chapter 7. Stivers and colleagues as above, for the tempo differences between languages. The distinction between accompanying overlap and turn-taking overlap, and the who's-talking-after test, are mine.

Chapter 8. Youngquist, "The effect of interruptions and dyad gender combination on perceptions of interpersonal dominance", *Communication Studies* 60, 2009, pages 147 to 163. Listeners rated recorded dialogues with six embedded intrusive interruptions. The study also reported differences by the gender pairing of the speakers, which I've left out, and I read only its summary. The account of the mismatch between inside and outside is mine.

Chapter 10. Singh Ospina and colleagues, and Marvel and colleagues, as above. The claim that jumping trains padding and speed is my reasoning and I know of no study of it.

Chapter 11. Stivers and colleagues as above. Itzchakov, DeMarree, Kluger and Turjeman-Levi, "The listener sets the tone: high-quality listening increases attitude clarity and behavior-intention consequences", Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 44, 2018, pages 762 to 778. Five experiments. The reverse, that being cut off takes clarity away, is my inference and wasn't tested.

Chapter 14. Templeton and colleagues as above, for the timescale of the signal. The reading of "anyway" as the complaint is mine.

Chapter 15. Youngquist as above. Marvel and colleagues as above, for late-arising concerns. The rest is mine.

Chapter 16. Levinson and Torreira, Stivers and colleagues, and Templeton and colleagues as above.

Chapter 18. Marvel and colleagues as above, for the unfinished statement. Itzchakov and colleagues as above. Youngquist as above. The rest is mine.

Chapter 22. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", Advances in Experimental Social Psychology 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. The rule hasn't been tested as a package, and what I say to expect is my expectation and not a finding.

Chapter 23. The NHS page "ADHD in adults" as above. The advice on hearing is general and a GP is the route.