

Making Small Talk

Let's Learn

Small talk refers to light conversation. It is an important aspect of socializing in English. In this lesson, you will learn useful expressions and suitable topics to use when making small talk. Let's begin!

Warm-Up

WEATHER

One of the most common subjects of small talk is weather. Turn to a classmate or two and *strike up* a conversation about today's weather.



Ways to Begin Small Talk

Listen to your teacher say these common phrases for beginning small talk. Then repeat them together as a class.

- Nice day, isn't it?
- Long time no see.
- How's it going?
- How are the kids?
- How's work?
- What's new?
- Did you watch the game last night?
- Still keeping busy?
- Have you been waiting long?
- Any big plans for the weekend?

Note:

To strike up means "to begin" (often suddenly). Here are some things we strike up:

- a conversation
- a friendship / relationship
- a song / the music

Reading

A. Subjects for Small Talk

There are certain subjects that are suitable for small talk.
There are also some subjects to avoid.

Dos		Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • weather • current events • celebrities • sports • food • family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pets • school • hobbies • holidays • hometown • work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • politics • religion • finances • pregnancy • weight • personal problems

B. The Purpose of Small Talk

The subject of small talk may be unimportant or light, but the purpose is important. Here are the three main reasons people make small talk:

1. to be friendly
2. to fill an uncomfortable silence or to make a situation feel more comfortable
3. to lead into a more serious matter or discussion

C. Situations for Small Talk

People often make small talk when they are waiting for something to happen. It is also common to make small talk when you first see or meet someone on a specific day. Here are some locations where small talk often takes place:

- at bus stops
- in line-ups
- in waiting rooms
- in staff rooms
- at conferences
- at parties or get-togethers
- in gyms or recreation centres

If you see the same person later in the day, it is not necessary to make small talk again. However, you can do one of the following:

- say "Hi!" again
- say "Bye."
- say "Nice chatting with you."
- smile or wave

Dialogues

Dialogue 1

Practise making small talk with the person sitting next to you on an airplane.

- A: Nice day, isn't it?
B: Sure is.
A: Is Paris home, or are you from Toronto?
B: I'm going to Paris for work. How about you?
A: I'm visiting family.
B: Nice. Let's hope the weather is like this in Paris.
A: It's supposed to be hot and sunny all week.
B: Good to know!

Dialogue 3

Now practise a dialogue and answer the questions.

Dialogue

- A: Good morning!
Did you catch the game last night?
B: Of course. What a game!
A: Sure was. You think we'll make it to the finals?
B: I sure hope so.
A: Me too. Any big plans for the weekend?
B: Just some yard work. You?
A: My in-laws are coming over.
B: Nice. Well, I guess we should get this meeting started.

Dialogue 2

Now practise making small talk with a neighbour that you know.

- A: Hey! Long time no see.
B: Hi there. How are things?
A: Pretty good. How are the kids?
B: Good. They're happy that school is almost out. Hey, did you get a new puppy?
A: Yes! He's a golden retriever.
B: Aw. He's so cute. What's his name?
A: Jack. He's cute, but he's a lot of work!

Questions

1. Do these people know each other?
2. What is the subject of the conversation?
3. Where do you think this conversation takes place?

Pronunciation Practice

STRESS

In English, we place more emphasis on important words in a sentence. This gives our language rhythm and helps us understand each other better.

A. Dialogue

Work with a partner.
Practise reading this conversation with the correct stress.

- A: Nice **day**, **isn't** it?
- B: **Sure** is.
- A: Is **Paris** home, or are you from **Toronto**?
- B: I'm going to Paris **for work**. How about **you**?
- A: I'm visiting **family**.
- B: **Nice**. Let's hope the **weather** is like this in **Paris**.
- A: It's supposed to be **hot** and **sunny all** week.
- B: **Good** to know!

B. Practice

What are the most important words in this conversation? Underline them.

- A: Hey! Long time no see.
- B: Hi there. How are things?
- A: Pretty good. How are the kids?
- B: Good. They're happy that school is almost out. Hey, did you get a new puppy?
- A: Yes! He's a golden retriever.
- B: Aw. He's so cute. What's his name?
- A: Jack. He's cute, but he's a lot of work!

Try this!

Try this with your partner:

1. First, read the conversation like a robot. Give each word equal stress.
2. Now read it out loud again. Emphasize the words you underlined. Does the conversation sound better?

Writing & Speaking Practice

A. Complete the Dialogue

Complete the dialogue, and practise with a partner.

A: Nice day, _____ ?
1.

B: Sure _____ .
2.

A: Any _____ for the weekend?
3.

B: I'm going golfing. _____ you?
4.

A: My in-laws are coming over.

B: Let's hope the _____ stays like this.
5.

A: Yes. I hear it's _____ to be sunny all weekend.
6.

B. Write a Dialogue

Work with a partner. Write a short dialogue between two neighbours making small talk. Perform it for your class.

A: _____

B: _____

A: _____

B: _____

A: _____

B: _____

C. Strike Up a Conversation

Imagine your classroom is a staff party. Your teacher will write one topic on the board. Make small talk with someone at the party.

When your teacher says "Switch!" find a new person to talk to. Look for the next prompt on the board. If your teacher writes a prompt that is not appropriate for small talk, stay silent!

Review

Task 1

READING COMPREHENSION

Share the information that you learned in this lesson.

1. What are the three main reasons people make small talk?

2. Identify three places you often go where people make small talk.

3. What are some good topics for small talk?

4. What are some topics to avoid when making small talk?

Review cont.

Task 2

COMPLETE THE DIALOGUE

Now complete the dialogue between two people at a bus stop and perform it with your teacher. Make sure to emphasize the important words.

A: _____ day, isn't it?
1.

B: Sure _____ !
2.

A: I see you're a Blue Jays fan. Did you watch the game last night?

B: Of course! What a _____ !
3.

A: Let's hope they keep winning in Toronto.

B: I sure hope so. I'm going to the game on Saturday.

A: Lucky you! It's _____ to be sunny and warm. Go Jays!
4.

Task 3

ROLE-PLAY




Work with a partner. Choose a situation where small talk often takes place. Choose one or more subjects. Perform a role-play for your class. Your teacher or classmates will answer the following questions:

1. Did the people know each other before today?
2. Where are the people making small talk?
3. What subject(s) do they discuss?

Role-Play Assessment Tool

Student / Group: _____

Date	CLB Level	Assessed By	Role-Play Scenario	Skill Competency
			Making Small Talk	I. Interacting with Others

Criteria	Achieved 	Achieved With Help 	Needs Improvement 
strikes up a conversation with an appropriate question or phrase			
chooses appropriate subjects for small talk			
makes small talk in an appropriate situation			
emphasizes important words in a sentence			
takes turns speaking			

Notes




Learner Reflection

MAKING SMALL TALK

Add check marks (✓) to show what you've learned in this lesson.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Can I...	Yes (very well) 	Yes (with help) 	Not yet 
strike up a conversation using small talk?			
choose light subjects for small talk?			
make small talk in a variety of appropriate situations?			
stress important words during a light conversation?			

My Notes