

3 Small talk

Get ready!

1 Before you read the passage, talk about these questions.

- 1 What do you talk about with someone you don't know well?
- 2 What do you do when a conversation is going poorly?



Small Talk

By Hugh Trenchard

It happens to everyone. Somebody introduces you to a friend and then walks away. Now you're standing with somebody you don't know. What do you talk about?

The **weather** is always a possibility. But there isn't always much to say. To make a conversation **flow**, it's better to ask questions. Ask the other person what they do for a **living**, and what their job **involves**. **Discussing** your own former jobs is a good option, too.

Other safe **topics** include your home town and your education. But **avoid** asking people about their **religion**, age and **marital status** until you know them better.



Reading

2 Read this extract from a blog, then complete the table using information from the passage.

When talking to someone you don't know ...	
talk about ...	1 _____
ask about ...	2 _____ what their job involves
discuss ...	jobs you did in the past 3 _____ 4 _____
don't talk about ...	religion 5 _____ marital status

Vocabulary

3 Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the word bank.

Word BANK

avoid discuss flow involves living

- 1 What does Heidi do for a living?
- 2 Graham's job involves buying supplies. Снабжать (запасы)
- 3 avoid personal topics with strangers.
- 4 Helen's conversation with Rick didn't flow.
- 5 Fiona chose not to discuss religion with clients.

4 Match the words (1-5) with the definitions (A-E).

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 <u>A</u> small talk | 4 <u>B</u> religion |
| 2 <u>C</u> weather | 5 <u>D</u> marital status |
| 3 <u>E</u> topic | |

- A a polite conversation about everyday things
 B a belief or worship of a god or gods
 C the temperature, rain, clouds and wind
 D the condition of either being married or single
 E a subject for conversation or study

5 Listen and read the blog extract again. What is the best way to make a conversation flow?

Listening

6 Listen to a conversation between a businessman and a colleague. Check (✓) the topics that are suggested to talk about.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1 <input type="checkbox"/> age | 4 <input type="checkbox"/> weather |
| 2 <input type="checkbox"/> work | 5 <input type="checkbox"/> marital status |
| 3 <input type="checkbox"/> religion | 6 <input type="checkbox"/> education |

7 Listen again and complete the conversation.

- Businessman:** Sarah, I have to take a phone call. Please make 1 _____ with Mr. Jensen until I'm free.
- Colleague:** But I don't know him! I have nothing to talk to him about.
- Businessman:** Just ask him what he does for a 2 _____.
- Colleague:** But I already know what his work 3 _____. After all, he's our consultant.
- Businessman:** Then why don't you 4 _____ the weather?
- Colleague:** It's not a very interesting 5 _____.
- Businessman:** Well, I'm sure you'll think of something. Just don't bring up his 6 _____.
- Colleague:** Good to know, thanks.

Speaking

8 With a partner, act out the roles below, based on the dialogue from Task 7. Then switch roles.

USE LANGUAGE SUCH AS:

- Can you make small talk with ...?*
Why don't you discuss ...?
Avoid talking about ...

Student A: You cannot meet with a client. Ask Student B to make small talk. Suggest:

- topics to discuss
- topics to avoid

Make up a name for your client and your employee.

Student B: Your boss wants you to make small talk with a client. Ask what to talk about.

Writing

9 Use the conversation from Task 8 and the blog extract to fill out the email.

Dear _____,

You said you are worried about making small talk in your new job. Here are some ideas.

Ask lots of questions because it makes a conversation flow.

Ask questions about weather, education, home town

You could also discuss what they do for living

Avoid talking about religion, marital status, age

At least until you know them better.

Hope this helps!