



# Making Small Talk

Enhancing your ability to make "small talk" or causal conversation with others can enhance your personal and professional relationships. Making small talk is an especially valuable skill to have in social situations where you are unfamiliar with the setting and people. The key is finding a connection and building a relationship with the other person.

## Tips for Making Effective Small Talk

### 1. Be Prepared

Do your homework! Find out as much information as you can before entering into an unfamiliar or new social situation. Find out background information about the people, places, and things. Being prepared will increase your confidence and give you potential conversational starters.

### 2. Find a Common Ground

A part of being prepared is to have some potential conversation starters. This can be anything that you might have in common with the person who you are communicating with. When in doubt use something general and widely applicable like, commenting about the weather.

### 3. Be Aware of Your Nonverbal Behaviors

The nonverbal cues that you send have a major impact on the quality of social interactions. In fact, approximately 93% of the emotional impact of a message comes from nonverbal cues. Some tips for being nonverbally approachable are: making eye contact, smiling, nodding your head while others are speaking, facing the person you are talking to. Throughout the conversation ask yourself: are my nonverbal behaviors inviting and welcoming? Avoid distractions, put away your cell phone!!

### 4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Once you have "broken the ice" by finding a common ground, take the pressure off of yourself of having to direct the topic of conversation by asking the listener open-ended questions. Most people love to talk about themselves so invite them to! An open-ended question is one that keeps the conversation going because it cannot be answered with one word. For example, *"what did you do while you were on vacation"* rather than the closed-ended *"did you have a nice vacation?"* Keep your responses general and open-ended. For example, *"I've never been there (or done that) before what is it like?"*

# Practice, Practice, Practice!!

Like most interpersonal skills, making small talk takes practice. Practice making small talk with others in your personal life before entering into an unfamiliar and high-stakes social situation. Making small talk is probably going to feel awkward when you first start. That's why it's important to make sure that the first time you make small talk is not in the high-stakes social situation. The following are examples of situations and people who you could practice making small talk with in your day-to-day routine.

- Clerk at a shopping center
- Server at a restaurant
- Person waiting in line
- Community center
- Person waiting at the bus stop
- At the "water cooler" at work
- A break room

## Make A Plan To Practice

Make a list of at least 5 potential situations or people that you can practice making small talk with over the next week:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Keep Track of Your Progress

Time, location, person I practiced with	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
Rate how effectively you were at making small talk in this situation	<b>1</b> Ineffective	<b>2</b> Fair	<b>3</b> It went okay	<b>4</b> It went well	<b>5</b> I nailed it!
No matter how effective this practice session was use the following space to reflect on how it went. What was effective? What could have been more effective?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				

## Practice Session # 2

Time, location, person I practiced with	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>										
Rate how effectively you were at making small talk in this situation.	<table><tr><td><b>1</b></td><td><b>2</b></td><td><b>3</b></td><td><b>4</b></td><td><b>5</b></td></tr><tr><td>Ineffective</td><td>Fair</td><td>It went okay</td><td>It went well</td><td>I nailed it!</td></tr></table>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	Ineffective	Fair	It went okay	It went well	I nailed it!
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>							
Ineffective	Fair	It went okay	It went well	I nailed it!							
No matter how effective this practice session was use the following space to reflect on how it went. What was effective? What could have been more effective?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>										

## Practice Session # 3

Time, location, person I practiced with	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>										
Rate how effectively you were at making small talk in this situation.	<table><tr><td><b>1</b></td><td><b>2</b></td><td><b>3</b></td><td><b>4</b></td><td><b>5</b></td></tr><tr><td>Ineffective</td><td>Fair</td><td>It went okay</td><td>It went well</td><td>I nailed it!</td></tr></table>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	Ineffective	Fair	It went okay	It went well	I nailed it!
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>							
Ineffective	Fair	It went okay	It went well	I nailed it!							
No matter how effective this practice session was use the following space to reflect on how it went. What was effective? What could have been more effective?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>										

### Practice Session # 4

Time, location, person I practiced with	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
Rate how effectively you were at making small talk in this situation.	<b>1</b> Ineffective	<b>2</b> Fair	<b>3</b> It went okay	<b>4</b> It went well	<b>5</b> I nailed it!
No matter how effective this practice session was use the following space to reflect on how it went. What was effective? What could have been more effective?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				

### Practice Session # 5

Time, location, person I practiced with	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
Rate how effectively you were at making small talk in this situation.	<b>1</b> Ineffective	<b>2</b> Fair	<b>3</b> It went okay	<b>4</b> It went well	<b>5</b> I nailed it!
No matter how effective this practice session was use the following space to reflect on how it went. What was effective? What could have been more effective?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				