**How are you?**

How are you? ‘Hello.’ ‘How are you?’ ‘Good morning.’ ‘Have you eaten yet?’ ‘Where are you going?’ These are greetings which people use in different languages when they meet each other. But what is a greeting?

A greeting is a way of being friendly to someone. It is a way of being polite. It is also a way of starting a conversation. In many languages a question is used as a greeting “’Where are you going?’ How’s everything with you?’ But questions like these are not real questions. They do not require a full answer or even a true one. In English, for example, the commonest greeting is a question about a person’s health; ‘How are you?’ But we do not expect the person to tell us about their health when they reply. We do not them to talk about their headache or their backache, if they have one. People reply to these questions with a fixed expression such as ‘I’m fine thanks’ or ‘I’m very well, thanks.’ In the same way, in countries where people greet each other with ‘Where are you going?’, a simple reply such as ‘just walking around’ is sufficient. It is not necessary to describe where you are actually going.

In most languages, a greeting is usually followed by ‘small talk’. Small talk means the little things we talk about at the start of a conversation. In English-speaking countries people often make small talk about the weather; ‘Nice day, isn’t it?’ ‘Terrible weather, isn’t it? But there is something special about small talk. It must be about something which both people agree on something. This makes meeting people easier and more comfortable. People usually agree about the weather, so it is a safe topic for small talk. But people often disagree about religion or politics so these are not suitable topics for small talk in English. The topics for small talk also depend on where the conversation is taking place. At football matches, people make small talk about the game they are watching; ‘Great game, isn’t it?’ At bus stops, people may comment about the transport system, ‘The buses are very slow these days, aren’t they?’

Greetings and small talk are an important part of conversation in any language. They way people greet each other and the things they talk about, however, may be different from one language to another. This shows that there is much more to learn when we learn a language than just the vocabulary and the grammar of the language. We also have to learn the social behavior of the people who speak it.

1. **Write TRUE or FALSE beside each sentence.**
2. People use greetings when they say goodbye to each other.
3. Greetings are often used to start a conversation.
4. The purpose of greetings is the same in all languages.
5. The main purpose of a greeting is to get true information from another person.
6. Some languages do not have greetings.
7. ‘Small talk’ means talk of great importance to speakers in the conversation.
8. English people often make small talk about the weather.
9. Learners of English should only learn grammar and vocabulary.

**II Find words in the passage to complete these sentences.**

1. ‘Dear Sir’ and ‘Dear Madam’ are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_which people use when they write letters.
2. I did not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_to get first prize in the competition, so I was very happy when I heard the news.
3. my sister is having a long\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_with her friend over the telephone.
4. I passed her in the street but she didn’t even \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_when I smiled.
5. Have we \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_food for ten people for dinner tonight?
6. For what \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_do you want to go to America? To study?
7. Have you any \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_to make about the reading passage?
8. Tom won a prize for good \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_at school.

**III Think about these questions and answer them in your own words.**

1. Do you know any greetings from other languages? Do you know the meanings of the greetings? Are they question about health, for instance?
2. what topics do people talk about when they make ‘small talk’ in your language? So they talk about the weather, for instance?

**Touchy Topics**

In North America when people meet each other for the first time, they talk about things like family, work, school, or sports. They ask questions like “Do you have any brothers and sisters?”. “Where do you work?”, “What school do you go to?” and “Do4 you like sports?” They also ask questions like “Where do you come from?” and “Where do you live?” These are polite questions. They are not personal or private.

But some things are personal or private, and questions about them are not polite. People don’t ask questions about a person’s salary. They don’t ask how much someone paid for something. It is OK to ask children how old they are, but it is not polite to ask older people their age. It is also not polite to ask people questions about religion unless you know them very well. People don’t ask unmarried people “why are you single?” and they don’t ask a married couple with no children “Why don’t you have any children?”.

**1. Pair Work Look at the following questions. Are they polite when you meet someone for the first time in North America?**

Polite Not Polite

a) What does your wife do? …….. ………….

b) Do you believe in God? …….. ………….

c) How much money do you earn? …….. ………….

d) How many children do you have? …….. …………..

e) Why aren’t you married? …….. …………..

f) Do you like baseball? ……… …………..

g) How old are you Mr. Lee? ……… …………..

h) Are you a Democrat or Republican? ……… …………..

i) How much was your watch? ……… …………..

2. Look at the questions again. Are they polite or not polite in your country?