

COMMUNICATION

# Moving beyond small talk

**LEVEL**

Intermediate (B1)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B1\_3051X

**LANGUAGE**

English



## Learning outcomes

- I can read a text on moving beyond small talk and summarise each technique.
- I can apply these techniques to a conversation on an everyday topic.





# Warm-up

1. **Look at** the topics below.
2. **Discuss:** Which do you enjoy talking about? Are there any you would avoid talking about?



Science  
Technology

Art & Literature  
Music & Entertainment

Food  
Travel

Politics  
Religion



# Pre-reading

1. **Read** the list of techniques below to improve a conversation.
2. **Read** the article on slides 5 and 6 and **make notes** on each technique as you read.

1



Employing active listening

2



Showing interest makes you interesting

3



Don't let the silence scare you!



# Reading

Read the article below.

## How to go from small talk to real talk

Nobody enjoys sticking to small talk. In fact, many of us find striking up a conver-

- 5 sation to be a pretty awkward experience to begin with. So, what are some ways to move beyond idle chit-chat and develop a
- 10 much deeper conversation?

When talking to someone, especially someone we don't know, many of us start thinking about what we want to say next while the other person is speaking.

However, focussing on what we should say *next* means we tend to miss crucial opportunities to follow up on talking points *within* the conversation.

These could be similarities between us and the person we've just met or conversation starters from a friend or colleague.

What's more, when we actively listen to someone, we show that we genuinely care about what they have



to say. They feel seen and heard by us. Listening more intently may also make it easier to come up with an engaging follow-up question to ask them!





# Reading

Read the article below.

## How to go from making small talk to real talk

5 A true conversationalist therefore lets other people shine. It's not about always being able to tell the most fascinating stories!

10 Most people also love to talk about themselves. In fact, researchers at Harvard discovered that talking about yourself triggers the same pleasure sensation in the brain as tucking into really delicious food. So ask an open-ended question about something interesting you've noticed

about the other person. Let them talk about themselves. Remember: you don't need to be the one doing all of the talking!

Your conversation doesn't always have to constantly flow either. A short interlude of quiet in a lively discussion doesn't mean it's game over entirely. Don't rush in to fill the silence. You'll almost always regret what you say if you're only mentioning something to prevent a little bit of silence.



A pause can actually give both of you a chance to take a break, refocus on another topic or to smoothly wrap up the conversation altogether.



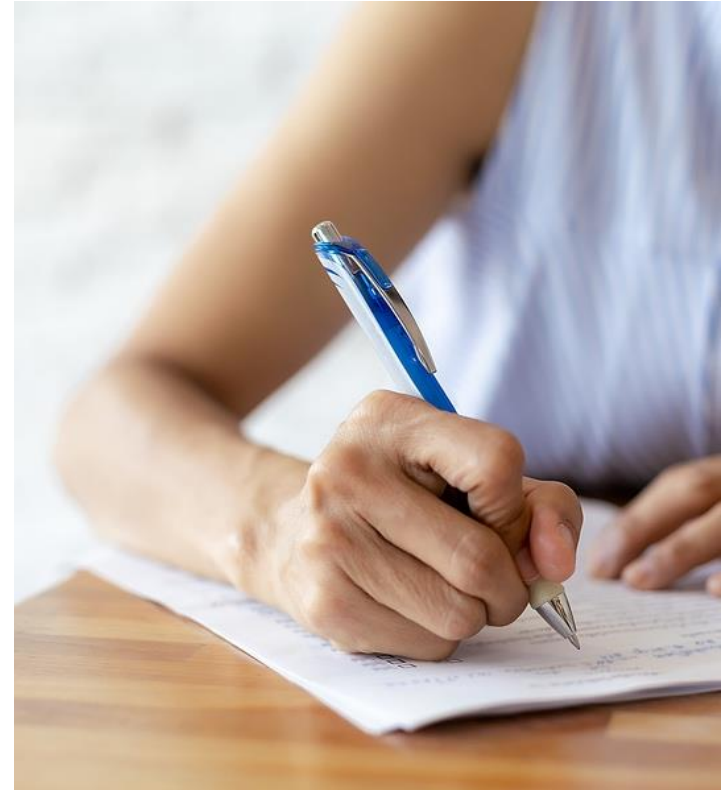
# Compare your notes

1. **Listen** carefully. Your teacher will now **give** you one technique (1, 2 or 3).
2. **Compare** your notes on your technique in breakout rooms or together as a class.
3. If in breakout rooms, **write** a short summary together.

1 Employing active listening

2 Showing interest makes you interesting

3 Don't let the silence scare you!



# Match with the definition

1 to mention something

2 open-ended questions

3 to flow

4 a follow-up question

5 to listen intently

a with strong interest and attention

b to write or speak about something without giving much information

c continuing something that has already started

d to develop in an easy, natural way

e cannot be answered by 'yes' or 'no'





## Discuss

Choose a question. **Ask** another student.

**How can we make a conversation flow more smoothly?**



**Would you consider yourself to be a good listener?**

**How can we show someone we're listening *intently*?**



# Phrases for active listening

Active listening means **fully focussing** on what someone is saying. We can show this verbally!

1. **Read** the phrases in the left column.
2. **Discuss** the function of each one. How does it show you are actively listening?

Phrases	Function
<i>Please tell me more / Go on!</i>	Expresses interest and encouragement
<i>I'm pretty sure I've heard about that. Could you explain a bit more?</i>	Asks the person to go into more detail
<i>Do you mean to say...?</i>	Checks understanding
<i>Let me see if I understood you correctly.</i>	Checks understanding
<i>What led you to that conclusion?</i>	Encourages the person to go deeper
<i>I see it differently, but I'm curious to know more about what you mean by that.</i>	Shows disagreement in a constructive way



# Phrases for active listening

**Match** the beginning of the sentence (1-5) with the correct ending (a-e).

**1** Do you...

**a** ...if I understood you correctly.

**2** Let me see...

**b** ...to that conclusion?

**3** I'm pretty sure I've heard...

**c** ...to know more about what you mean by that.

**4** What led you...

**d** ...mean to say?

**5** I see it differently, but I'm curious...

**e** about that. Could you explain a bit more?

# Forming open-ended questions

1. **Read** the grammar explanation below.
2. **Review** the examples of closed > open-ended questions.

Do you like listening to music?



**What** kinds of music are you into?

Are you friends with Jake?



**How** do you know Jake?

- An **open-ended question** is one we cannot answer with *yes* or *no*.
- Open-ended questions usually **start** with a **wh- question word**.
- What are some examples of wh-question words?

- Using open-ended questions when speaking helps **deepen** a conversation.
- Why? Because in order to answer them, you need to give more information!
- **What** or **how** are the most effective wh-question words to use in conversation.



**Why** are you friends  
with Jake?

Be careful with open-ended questions  
starting with **why**!

You're asking for a reason, so they may  
sound aggressive or demanding,  
especially to strangers!



# Forming open-ended questions

1. **Write** an open-ended version for each question.
2. **Use** *what* or *how* in your questions, if possible.
3. **Compare** your answers as a group.

1 Are you an architect?



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2 Have you had a nice evening?



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3 Do you enjoy travelling?



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4 Do you have any hobbies?



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5 Did you meet each other at university?



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# Let's talk!

1. In pairs, **have a conversation**. You can use the topics below or choose your own.
2. **Ask open-ended questions** and **employ active listening**, where possible.

The internet  
has ruined the  
world.

Modern art is  
not 'real art'.

*I'm pretty sure I've heard about that.  
Could you explain a bit more?*

Paris is an  
overrated  
destination.

Cars should be  
banned from  
cities.

*Do you mean to say?  
Let me see if I understood you correctly.*

*I see it differently, but I'm curious to know  
more about what you mean by that.*



# End of lesson

Idiom

***to be all ears***

**Meaning:** to be ready and eager to listen

**Example:** Tell me your story, Francesca! I'm all ears!



# Additional practice



# Unscramble

1

by that

curious

to

what

know

you

mean

I'm



2



me

understood

you

see

if

correctly

let

I



# Match the sentences

Fill the **gaps** and **match** these active listening phrases with their **functions**



1 What \_\_\_\_\_ you to that conclusion

2 I see it differently, but I'm curious to know what you \_\_\_\_\_ by that

3 Could you explain a bit \_\_\_\_\_?

4 Please \_\_\_\_\_ me more / Go on!

5 Do you \_\_\_\_\_ to say?

a Encourages the person to go deeper

b Asks person to go into more detail

c Shows disagreement

d Expresses interest and encouragement

e Checks understanding





# Discuss

Take turns **to talk briefly about each of the topics below**. When you are listening, use the phrases from the lesson to show you are **actively listening**. Try to make the conversation **flow**.



**Your hometown**



**Your hobbies**



**Your talents**



**Your last holiday**



**Your dream job**

*What led you to that \_\_\_\_\_?*

*Let me see if I \_\_\_\_\_ you correctly*



# Free practice

Your friend is away on holiday. **Write six or more open-ended questions** to ask them when they get back. You can use the pictures to help you.

1



4



2



5



3



6



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# Answer key

**P. 8:** 1b, 2e, 3d, 4c, 5a

**P. 11:** 1d, 2a, 3e, 4b, 5c

**P. 19:** 1. I'm curious to know what you mean by that, 2. Let me see if I understood you correctly

**P. 20:** 1. led, a, 2. mean, c, 3. more, b, 4. tell, d, 5. mean, e



# Summary

## From small talk to real talk

- Active listening shows that you are listening intently
- Active listeners express interest, check understanding, and ask for more detail
- You should ask open-ended questions to keep the conversation flowing

## Useful phrases for active listening

- *Please tell me more / go on!*
- *What led you to that conclusion?*
- *Let me see if I understood correctly*

## Open-ended questions

- Open-ended questions start with a *wh-* question word
- The most effective open-ended question words start with *what* or *how*
- When we answer them, we need **to give more detail**. This helps deepen the conversation.

## Examples of open-ended questions:

- *How do you know Jake?*
- *What brought you to Berlin?*
- *How did you hear about this job?*



# Vocabulary

follow-up question

open-ended question

to mention

to flow

intently

Please tell me more!

Go on!

I'm pretty sure I've heard about that.

Could you explain a bit more?

Do you mean to say?

Let me see if I understood you correctly.

What led you to that conclusion?

I see it differently, but I'm curious to know...

...more about what you mean by that.



## Notes

