

Entertaining business clients

COMMUNICATION

LEVEL

Upper-intermediate

NUMBER

EN_BE_3608X

LANGUAGE

English

lingoda






Goals

- Can understand strategies and typical phrases that are useful when making small talk in a business setting
- Can use new knowledge and vocabulary to make small talk with colleagues while being respectful of cultural differences





In business, **entertaining clients** and **socialising** are almost as important as making a deal.

The art of **small talk** and **making a connection** are extremely useful when trying to make **a good impression**.

Let's learn some useful phrases and vocabulary which can help us have fun and **set our colleagues and clients at ease**.



Warm up

**What might you talk
about when you
meet a stranger?**



Small talk

What do you know already about **small talk**? What is it used for?





The art of small talk

- **Small talk** is a skill which can help greatly in **forming** and **developing relationships** in your private and professional life. It should be used to **connect** with colleagues and clients and should avoid difficult topics.



Discussing common experiences and interests is a good way to start **small talk**.



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While working with clients and people in the industry and office it is inevitable that your communication will swing away from just business. **Making connections** with other people in the workplace can be made a lot easier with the use of **small talk**.





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The use of small talk can help us to connect with colleagues. That does not mean you need to be their best friend, but this skill can help you **make a good impression** and come across as a likeable, friendly and trustworthy person. It is all about making a strong first impression.



topics

Good topics for small talk will be light, easy and not too important. Try to avoid talking about anything which might offend or potentially inspire strong reactions or opinions. Other suitable topics might be found in your surroundings or the context of the discussion.



The weather is a frequent and easy topic of small talk.



Write

Write a list of some topics that you use regularly when making small talk.

A blank sheet of lined paper with a spiral binding on the left side, intended for writing a list of topics for small talk.





Suitable topics

Comment on the topics below regarding their suitability for small talk.



hobbies

personal
questions

political leaders

a person's
appearance

religion

good places to
eat



Use small talk

Use the images to come up with a related topic of small talk.
Then try to make small talk on the topics with your teacher.



Breaking the ice



Breaking the ice is a way to reduce shyness, awkwardness or unfamiliarity, or to initiate a conversation.



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Small talk is conversation about topics that do not really matter. Talking about harmless or unimportant topics can **help to fill time** and be polite in some situations. It can be very effective when used to **break the ice**, or as an excuse to start talking to someone new. It is also useful to **eliminate** any **awkwardness** when waiting for someone or something with others. It can also help you to connect with business clients, increasing trust, respect and **common ground**.





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One rule to keep in mind with small talk is to avoid difficult topics. Talking about religion, politics, anything personal or topics which can **inspire intense opinions** are not good choices for small talk. Anything that could **give offence** is best avoided, as is **interrogation**. The aim of small talk is to **build connection and closeness**. Talking about common experiences, asking where they are from, talking about school or other common interests are good starting points where people can relate and **find common ground** in what they talk about.





Useful vocabulary

to interrogate

It feels like you are trying to **interrogate** me.

**open-ended
question**

Conversation is always smoother with the use of **open-ended questions**.

anecdote

The clients loved your **anecdote** about your trip to Japan.

to converse

John was too shy to **converse** with anybody at the meeting.



Discuss other contexts for small talk

Using the pictures as prompts, discuss contexts where small talk might be necessary outside of the office.





Explain



Why are some topics considered **inappropriate** for small talk?

Explain to your teacher using an example.



Open-ended questions

Why might open-ended questions be more effective at stimulating conversation than closed ones?





Your ideas

Comment on how each of the communication strategies below can assist in building a connection with clients.

breaking the ice

listen actively

using body language

A spiral-bound notebook with lined pages, positioned to the right of the communication strategies. The notebook has a light gray cover and a blue spiral binding on the left side. The pages are white with horizontal lines, and there are several blank lines available for writing.

small talk across cultures

Appropriate topics of small talk can differ depending on the culture and country of the workplace. Discussion of earnings or politics is **looked down upon** in the UK for example, while talking about the weather is very common.

In some more **reserved** cultures, it may be more difficult to prompt small talk. Like most forms of communication, language use is subtly changed by the culture in which it operates. Italians may be more animated, while Australians may be more likely to smile than Germans. When using small talk in these circumstances, it is best to **observe the behaviour and language** of those around you.



Small talk is very common in most English speaking countries.



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Paying attention to how people feel is key when making small talk. Sometimes it is not appropriate, and the other person may not want to **engage in conversation**. For this reason, it is important to **listen actively** and keep track of the direction of the conversation. Paying attention to someone's body language can help to determine if small talk is appropriate. If someone looks uncomfortable, it is better to change the topic or break off the small talk.





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If the conversation is going well, the trick is to stay **engaged**. **Putting someone at ease** is a matter of active listening. If it is appropriate you can share an **anecdote** which relates to the topic. **Open-ended questions** are also a good method for maintaining a conversation. **Taking an interest** in what someone is saying makes them feel as if they have a connection with you, and listening actively shows that you are **paying attention** and helps to create a strong first impression.





Small talk techniques

Answer the questions below.



1

What aspects of small talk are you confident with?

2

What are some good topics to turn to when making small talk?

3

Do you enjoy making small talk? Explain your answer.



Role play

You've just bumped into Mike from the sales department. You don't really know him very well, but you are both waiting for the bus.

Make some small talk with Mike.





Read the discussion below

Steve: Looks like rain.

Jenny: Can you believe it, all this rain we've been having?

Steve: With our luck we'll get flooded in and be stuck in the office.

Jenny: I read in the paper that it's going to keep bucketing down all weekend.

Steve: At least my garden will get a good watering!

Jenny: Oh, you enjoy gardening?





Small talk

Identify three things that Jenny and Steve did well over the course of their discussion.





Small talk

Try to engage in small talk with the teacher for as long as possible. If you are stuck for a topic or how to continue, use some of the conversation starters below.

Try to ensure that the conversation flows.



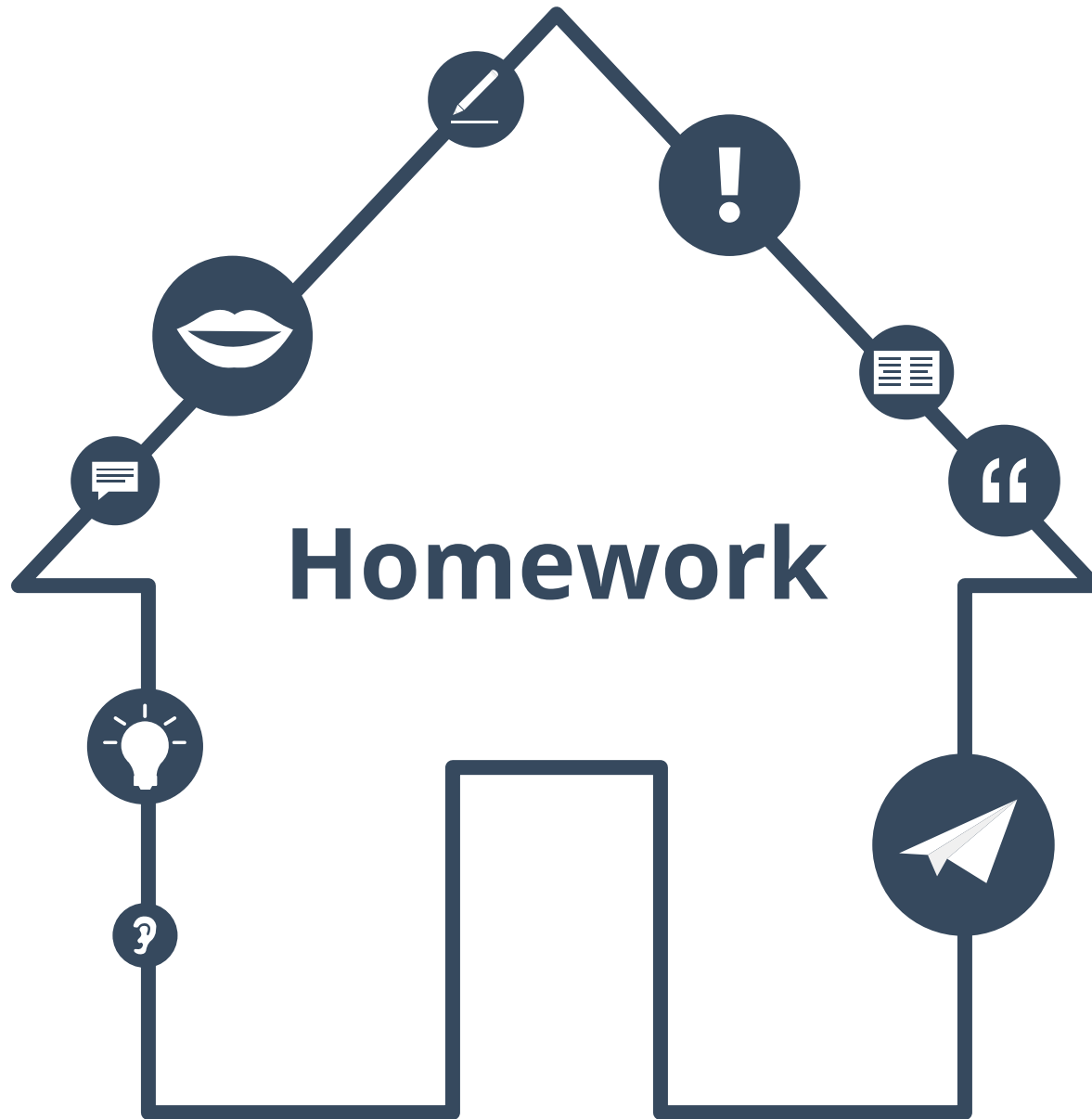


Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!





A 2x2 grid of torn paper scraps. The top-left scrap is light blue and labeled 'office work'. The top-right scrap is light yellow and labeled 'hobbies'. The bottom-left scrap is light yellow and labeled 'recent holiday'. The bottom-right scrap is light blue and labeled 'food'. The bottom-most scrap is light yellow and labeled 'the weather'. The right-most scrap is light blue and labeled 'current events'. The scraps are arranged in a grid with torn edges.

office work	hobbies
recent holiday	food
the weather	current events

This image shows a single sheet of white paper designed for writing. On the left side, there is a vertical blue line creating a narrow margin. Along this margin, there are eleven circular punch holes, evenly spaced from top to bottom. The main body of the page contains ten horizontal grey lines, also evenly spaced, providing a guide for handwriting. The paper is otherwise blank, with no text or other markings.



Write a dialogue

Write a conversation between two colleagues who have just bumped into each other while queuing at the shops. Try to use some of the phrases and topics from the previous activity.





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