

START A CONVERSATION WITH ANYONE

Have you ever felt stressed or anxious about starting a conversation in English? Don't worry, it's a common phenomenon, and it's something many native speakers also struggle with. This lesson will give you guidance to help you feel confident striking up conversations in a wide range of scenarios so you can unleash your conversational abilities on the world!

Keep It Simple!

If you are someone who typically feels uncomfortable making small talk, feel free to keep things simple. You don't need to come up with any out-of-the-box questions — just be yourself!

A great way to kick off any conversation is with a sincere greeting and introduction.

- ***Hi! I'm Lucy. It's a pleasure to meet you.***

It's simple yet effective. It's great for social events where you don't know many people.

At work, you could say-

- ***Hello, I'm Lucy. I just started in the marketing department. I just wanted to stop by and introduce myself.***

This is great for when you've started a new position and don't know many of your colleagues yet. It shows that you have a genuine interest in meeting the people you will be working with.

There are many simple questions you could ask to get a conversation going after you've introduced yourself, like-

- ***What do you do for work?***
- ***Have you read any good books lately?***
- ***What've you been up to today?***



- ***What's the last show you binged?***
- ***Do you have any travel plans coming up?***

It's important to be aware of the situation. Don't just randomly throw out these questions. Read the room and make sure you are listening to what other people are saying so that you can ask appropriate questions at the right time.

Give a Compliment

If you are ready to branch out from some of the more simple conversation starters, one of the best things you can do to instantly strike up a conversation is to give a compliment. Compliments help to make a person feel appreciated and seen. They are great for instantly making a good impression and building rapport. It doesn't need to be some over-the-top compliment or one that has the potential to make the other person feel awkward.

Just give a genuine compliment and flash a bright, cheerful smile. The beauty of this technique is that it works in basically any scenario, whether you are at a party or in a job interview.

At a party or other social gathering, you could say something like-

- ***I love how you've decorated your house! It feels so cosy.***
- ***I'm obsessed with your earrings!***
- ***Wow, your shoes are gorgeous! Where'd you get them?***

Asking a question at the end helps to keep the conversation flowing.

At the office, you could say something along the lines of-

- ***Your work always shows such attention to detail. How do you do it?***
- ***That was a great question you brought up in the meeting today.***

If you are at a conference or networking event, you could say-

- ***You have an excellent way with words; it was a pleasure to hear you speak.***

Practise giving compliments and see how many new friends you instantly make.



When In Doubt, Talk About Food

This one might seem odd, but if you have doubts about what to say in a social setting, just talk about food or drinks! Think about it, everyone has to eat and drink, so it is something common that we all share. And the beauty of this topic is that it works in all situations.

At a party:

- ***Where did you get that drink? It looks amazing!***
- ***You have to try the spinach dip. It's delicious – definitely my favourite so far.***
- ***Have you tried any of the appetisers? Any recommendations?***

I tend to hold strong opinions about food, so if someone were to ask me some of these, we'd talk all night!

Now, let's say you are in a more professional setting:

- ***Do you have a go-to spot to grab a coffee around here?***
- ***Hi! I'm Lucy! Today is my first day, and I was wondering if you have any recommendations of where to get a quick bite to eat.***

Here I introduced myself and brought up food: the perfect conversation starter! Now, you could even use this food idea on a first date. If there's a bit of a dull moment in the conversation, you could say something like-

- ***So, I'm a bit of a foodie; how about you? Do you have a favourite type of cuisine or any must-try restaurants in town?***

I know; I asked quite a few questions. But one of them is sure to get the conversation flowing again.

I also shared a little piece of personal information about myself here, which brings us to our next topic.



Make It Personal

If you want to connect with people, you need to speak from a place of authenticity. You can do this by sharing something interesting about yourself, telling a little anecdote, or even cracking a few jokes... maybe a few **self-deprecating** ones; a Brit's favourite weapon.

- ***Yikes! I can't believe how underdressed I am for this event!***

This kind of humour helps break the ice, but you don't have to go that route.

Anecdotes are also great. These personal stories or experiences can add depth and relatability to a conversation. Here are some examples of types of anecdotes you could share:

- ***Speaking of hiking, I went hiking near here last weekend. The views were incredible. Where do you usually go?***
- ***You mentioned you tried making Gordon Ramsey's scrambled eggs — me too! They came out terribly, but I'm eager to try them again. Do you have any tips?***

Notice that I am providing some personal insight, but I am also asking questions showing my conversation partner that I am actively listening to what they are saying.

You should also try to find common ground. What shared interests do you have? Do you work in the same field? One of the easiest ways to start a meaningful conversation is to talk about things you have in common, like-

In the office:

- ***I heard you've just been to Costa Rica. I actually lived there for 5 years! How was it?***

On a plane (if the person is willing to talk):

- ***I see you're reading Hemingway. He's my favourite author. Have you read any of his other books?***



A work event:

- ***What programmes do you recommend for continuing education in software engineering?***

These questions are quite specific and require strong observational skills, but with practice, you'll be having conversations everywhere.

Ask Questions

This brings us to our next topic: **asking questions**. If you haven't been able to tell by now, asking questions is quite important. By asking questions, you show the speaker that **you are genuinely interested in what they are saying**. It's important to **ask open questions** that can't be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' so that you can ask follow-up questions. This will ensure you have a natural conversation.

Here are some different questions for various scenarios:

Work:

- ***Are you working on any exciting projects right now?***
- ***Do you have any plans for the weekend?***
- ***What is the best part of your job?***
- ***Did you always want to work in this field?***
- ***How has AI been impacting your job?***

Dating:

- ***Do you come from a big family?***
- ***Have you always lived in this area?***
- ***What helps you relax after a long day?***
- ***What is your biggest pet peeve?***
- ***What is the craziest thing you've ever done?***

Networking/Business Conferences:

- ***Which presentations have you enjoyed so far?***
- ***Why did you sign up for this conference?***
- ***If you had to give a talk here, what would your topic be?***
- ***Have you attended any other workshops? Any that you recommend?***



All of these questions help you come off as being interested in the person you are conversing with, and they have the potential to spark some interesting conversations.

Sit Back and Listen

This brings us to my last tip of the day, which doesn't require much talking at all. One of the biggest misconceptions about conversing is that you need to do all the talking. Well, that's not entirely true. In fact, if you go on and on, you might end up seeming self-absorbed.

Starting a conversation with a stranger isn't always easy. I understand your worries about stumbling over words or dealing with those cringe-worthy awkward silences. But here's a neat trick to ease the pressure: **shift your focus to the other person!**

After breaking the ice, it's all about **asking follow-up questions** throughout the conversation. Trust me; this can lead to more engaging discussions than if you spent the whole time talking about yourself. **Show genuine interest and curiosity** in the other person. You can ask some of the questions I previously shared with you, but the key is to listen to the speaker.

These simple skills can work wonders, and soon enough, you'll be making meaningful connections with people. Plus, the more you practice, the better you'll get at it. So, give it a shot, and who knows, you might make some great new friends along the way!

Bonus Conversation Starters!

1. **Lovely weather we're having, isn't it?**
2. **How're you today?**
3. **Have you been up to anything interesting lately?**
4. **What's your favourite way to relax and unwind?**
5. **Do you have any travel destinations on your bucket list?**
6. **Have you tried any new restaurants recently?**
7. **What kind of hobbies do you enjoy doing?**
8. **Do you have a favourite film?**
9. **Tell me, do you follow any sports or specific teams, for that matter?**
10. **What's the most interesting place you've ever been to?**
11. **What's the last thing that made you laugh really hard?**
12. **Are you a morning person or a night owl?**
13. **If you could have any superpower, what would it be?**
14. **What is a motto that you live by?**
15. **What's your idea of a perfect day?**
16. **Tell me your best joke!**
17. **What animal do you think describes your personality?**
18. **What's the most interesting thing about you?**
19. **Would you say you're an introvert or an extrovert?**
20. **What is the number one thing I should do while I'm in town?**

QUIZ!

Choose the correct phrases from the Word Bank to complete the conversation.

The staff at Wealth Mergers Inc. decided to go out for drinks after a stressful week. Miguel found himself striking up a conversation with Jennifer, a colleague he had only heard about. "Hi! I'm Miguel," he introduced himself with a warm smile, extending his hand. (1) "_____."

Jennifer shook his hand, replying, "Nice to meet you too, Miguel. I've (2) _____. Are you (3) _____ right now?"

Miguel nodded, enthusiasm evident in his voice, "Yes, I'm actually involved in revamping our client database system. Quite the challenge, but I'm enjoying it. (4) _____?"

Jennifer leaned against the bar, sipping her drink, "Oh, just catching up on a few things after returning from holiday. By the way, (5) _____? It looks amazing!"

Miguel chuckled, "Oh, this? It's the pub's signature cocktail. You have to try it sometime. (6) _____?"

"Yeah, it is," Jennifer responded shyly. "I don't really get out much. I tend to focus all my attention on work and none on my social life."

Miguel took a moment to let a slightly awkward moment pass. "Oh, that reminds me! I've heard you're quite the expert in automation systems. Has (7) _____?"

Jennifer grinned, "Ah, yes. It's been a game-changer. Data analysis has become an absolute breeze. Seriously, automation has been a dream. But, enough about work; it's socialising time. (8) _____ this weekend?"

Miguel chuckled, "Well, this is slightly embarrassing, but my dog and I are competing in The National Dog Show on Saturday—weird, I know."

"What?! I absolutely adore dog shows!" Jennifer exclaimed. "That is bloody incredible; good luck."

Word Bank

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|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| (a) How about you | (e) automation been impacting your job |
| (b) What are you up to | (f) working on any exciting projects |
| (c) heard great things about your work | (g) It's a pleasure to meet you |
| (d) where did you get that drink | (h) Is this your first time here |

The End!

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