

Business English: Small Talk

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Arbeitsblätter

Diese Arbeitsblätter sind ergänzendes Begleitmaterial zum Video-Training
»Business English: Small Talk« auf <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/>.

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1. Small Talk Topics

the weather

your surroundings
(the building, venue,
town or city you're in)

food (keep comments
positive or neutral)

current events
(avoid controversial
political issues)

professional interests

hometowns

books, movies,
TV shows, and
podcasts

sports

work experience

travel

art

hobbies

2. Taboo Topics

death

politics

religion

sex

health/illness

personal
appearances

gossip

bodily functions

personal finances

offensive jokes

personal
relationships

age

3. Acknowledging Language Differences

At the beginning of the conversation:

"I'm from _____, so English isn't my first language."

"I want to warn you, English isn't my first language."

"Just to let you know, my first language is _____, not English."

then ...

"So, let me know if I say something that doesn't make any sense!"

"So, I apologize in advance for any mistakes."

"So, if you're lucky, I'll say something funny by mistake."

If you make a mistake during the conversation:

"I think I said something wrong. I apologize. English isn't my first language."

"I've obviously made a language mistake here. I'm sorry about that. My first language is _____, not English."

then ...

"Let me try that again."

If you don't understand someone:

"I'm sorry, but I don't think I completely understood what you meant there. English isn't my first language."

"I didn't quite catch that. English isn't my first language."

then ...

"Would you mind rephrasing that?"

"Would you mind repeating that?"

4. Breaking the Ice

If the person isn't near you:

- "Do you mind if I join you for a minute?"

Break the ice with a question that requires only a short answer:

- "It's such a nice day today. It's a shame this meeting isn't happening outside, don't you think?"
- "Isn't this a beautiful building?"
- "Did you enjoy that presentation?"
- "Is this your first time coming to one of these conferences?"
- "Are you from this area, or from farther away?"

Then, move on to more detailed questions.

If the opportunity presents itself, you can use a more unique icebreaker. For example:

- *While standing in a long line:* "When do you think humans first started waiting in line for things?"
- *When there is an interesting piece of art nearby:* "I've been staring at that painting for ten minutes trying to figure out what it's supposed to represent. What do you think it is?"
- *At a meal where an unusual dish is served:* "This is an interesting dish. What spices do you think they used in here?"

5. Active Listening

Pay attention.

Look at your conversation partner directly. Observe their body language. Focus completely on the conversation and try not to get distracted.

Show that you're listening.

Nod and smile. Say "I see", "yes", or "uh-huh" when appropriate to show that you're engaged and to encourage your conversation partner to continue. Keep your posture open and friendly.

Give feedback.

Paraphrase what your conversation partner says from time to time. Ask relevant questions. Use phrases like "Is this what you mean?" and "When you say this, do you mean?" to clarify points.

Don't interrupt.

Even if your conversation partner says something you disagree with, don't interrupt to offer your own opinion. Listen carefully to what they say and allow them to finish their point. Then explain your own opinion.

Respond appropriately.

Be honest, but always respectful. Use phrases like "I see what you mean", "I understand your point", "I can empathize with your concern" to respond to your conversation partner. Offer your opinions in a polite way and invite your conversation partner to respond.

6. Adapting and Managing the Conversation

- If your conversation partner seems particularly interested in one topic and keeps talking about it, adapt. Contribute where you can. If you don't know a lot about it, ask questions.

Example: Your conversation partner keeps talking about evolutionary biology. You could ask "Is there a book or documentary you'd recommend that covers the basics of evolutionary biology?"

- If you're talking about your own favorite topic but your conversation partner keeps trying to change the subject, go along with it! Don't try to move back to the topic, even if you really like it. Follow along with their new proposed topic or choose a new topic yourself.
- Change the subject by linking a new topic to the current one.

Example: The current subject is classical music. You could say "Do you think it's important for children to learn about classical music in school? Are music lessons a necessary part of education, in your opinion?" This way, you change the subject to education.

- Phrases for changing the subject when you've run out of things to talk about on the current subject: "Anyway, changing the subject entirely ..." "On a completely different note ..." or "Changing gears ..."

7. Body Language

Should you start a conversation?

- If the person is standing up straight and looking around the room, or smiling at you, they're likely interested in talking.
- If they're looking down, are standing away from everyone else, or are looking at a phone or computer, they may not welcome a conversation.

Is the other person interested in talking with you?

- If they stand up straighter, face you directly, and lean in or move closer to you, they're interested in the conversation.
- If they look away from you or at the floor, look at their watch or phone, angle themselves away from you, or take a step back, consider ending the conversation.

Body language signs the conversation is going well:

- smiling
- nodding
- leaning in
- making eye contact
- using hand gestures when talking

Signs the other person wants to end the conversation:

- crossing arms
- backing away slowly
- looking at the door, the floor, around the room, staring into space
- smiles that don't reach the eyes

A note on personal space:

Different countries have different concepts of personal space. If the other person is from a country with a bigger personal space bubble, backing up slightly may not indicate a wish to leave the conversation.

8. Ending the conversation

Step 1: If you're ending the conversation because the other person is clearly bored or ready to leave, finish your point or idea quickly. You can then say:

- I apologize, I got carried away there.
- Sorry for rambling.

Step 2: Thank the other person for the conversation:

- I really enjoyed talking with you.
- This has been a great chat, thank you!
- I appreciate the conversation.
- It was really nice to talk with you.

Step 3: Compliment the other person on something interesting they said, for example:

- I loved your story about the tour bus breaking down.
- Thanks for the TV show recommendations, I've been looking for something new to watch!
- It was really interesting to hear your perspective on Lebanese history.

Step 4: If you'd like to meet the person again, propose a plan to do so or offer to connect:

- I'd love to catch up at the next meeting!
- Would you be interested in having lunch next week?
- Are you on LinkedIn? Let's connect.
- Here's my card, I'd love to keep in touch.

Step 5: Thank the person again for the conversation.

If you're ending the conversation because the other person has lost interest, let them go:

- I know you have somewhere to be, so I'll let you go.
- I won't take up any more of your valuable time.
- I'll let you go now.

If you're ending the conversation because you've lost interest, make an excuse to leave:

- I have to go now. I have a train to catch.
- I have a meeting starting in a few minutes.
- I need to hurry if I'm going to avoid the worst of the traffic.
- I need to leave so I can make it home on time.
- My colleague is over there trying to get my attention. I'd better go see what he needs.

Step 6: Close the conversation politely.

- Have a nice evening.
- Enjoy the rest of the conference.
- Enjoy the next presentation.
- Hope to see you again soon.

You can also refer to a memorable part of the conversation as part of this closing:

- I hope you're not taking a tour bus to get home!
- I'm going to watch that show tonight when I get home.
- I'm going to find a book on Lebanese history at the library.

Wave goodbye and walk away.