

LESSON 2
WORKPLACE
SMALL TALK &
SOCIAL
CONVERSATIONS

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WHAT IS SMALL TALK?



Defining Small Talk

Small Talk = Light, casual conversation about non-controversial topics

Characteristics:

- Brief and informal (usually 2-5 minutes)
- Safe, neutral topics (weather, weekend, hobbies)
- Helps break the ice and build connections
- NOT deep or serious discussions

Examples of Small Talk:

"Nice weather we're having, isn't it?"

"How was your weekend?"

"Did you watch the game last night?"

NOT Small Talk:

Discussing politics, religion, or controversial issues

Complaining about work or colleagues

Sharing very personal problems

WHY SMALL TALK MATTERS



Small Talk is NOT small!

Benefits of Small Talk:

1. Builds Rapport & Trust
2. Opens Doors for Opportunities
3. Makes Work More Enjoyable
4. Improves Collaboration
5. Demonstrates Social Skills
6. Reduces Tension

Remember:

People do business with people they like. Small talk helps people like you!

COMMON SMALL TALK SITUATIONS



Situation	Example Opener	Duration
Morning at office	"Good morning! How are you?"	1-2 min
In elevator	"Busy day ahead?"	30 sec - 1 min
Coffee/break room	"Taking a break too?"	3-5 min
Before/after meetings	"How's your team?"	2-3 min
While waiting	"First time here?"	2-5 min
Networking events	"What brings you here?"	5-10 min
Traveling together	"Traffic isn't bad!"	10+ min

THE SMALL TALK FORMULA



STEP 1: GREETING + OBSERVATION

"Good morning! It's quite chilly today, isn't it?"

STEP 2: ASK AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION

"How was your weekend?"

STEP 3: LISTEN & RESPOND

"That sounds interesting! Tell me more about..."

SAFE SMALL TALK TOPICS



✓ SAFE & RECOMMENDED:

- Weather
- Weekend/Holiday Plans
- Hobbies & Interests
- Food & Restaurants
- Sports & Entertainment
- Work-related (Light)
- Positive Compliments

TOPICS TO AVOID



X AVOID THESE TOPICS:

- Politics
- Religion
- Money/Salary
- Age
- Personal Appearance/Weight
- Gossip/Rumors
- Complaints about work
- Very Personal Issues

READING THE ROOM



Positive Signs (Open to talk):

- Makes eye contact and smiles
- Faces toward you, open body language
- Responds with more than one-word answers
- Asks questions back

Negative Signs (Busy/not interested):

- Avoids eye contact
- Turned away, closed body language
- Very brief, one-word answers
- Looking at watch/phone

CONVERSATION FLOW MANAGEMENT



Smooth Transitions:

- "Speaking of travel, have you been anywhere interesting?"
- "That reminds me..." / "By the way..."
- "That sounds great! On a different note..."

Graceful Exits:

- "Well, I should let you get back to work."
- "It was great chatting! Let's catch up again soon."
- "I don't want to keep you. Have a great day!"

✗ Avoid:

Walking away mid-conversation / Making up obvious excuses

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN SMALL TALK



Small Talk Around the World

Culture/Region	Small Talk Characteristics
United States	Very common, casual, friendly with strangers
United Kingdom	Common, often starts with weather, more reserved
Japan	More formal, less common with strangers, hierarchy-conscious
Middle East	Building personal relationships before business is crucial
Thailand	Friendly and polite, avoid conflict, maintain harmony
Germany	Less small talk, more direct and task-focused

Key Takeaway:

When working with international colleagues, observe their communication style and adapt accordingly. When in doubt, err on the side of being more formal and reserved.

TIPS FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS



Helpful Strategies:

1. Prepare Common Phrases

Memorize openers, closers, and transition phrases

Examples:

"How was your weekend?"

"That's interesting! Tell me more."

"It was nice talking to you!"

2. It's OK to Ask for Clarification

"Sorry, could you repeat that?"

"I'm not sure I understand. Could you explain?"

3. Use Simple, Clear Language

You don't need fancy words - clear is better than complex

4. Focus on Listening

Good listening is more important than perfect speaking

5. Buy Time to Think

Use fillers: "Well..." "Let me think..." "That's a good question..."

6. Don't Apologize for Your English

Confidence matters more than perfection

Making Small Talk Easier in English

Common Challenges:

- Understanding fast speech or accents
- Finding the right words quickly
- Feeling nervous or less confident
- Missing cultural references or idioms

Remember:

Most native speakers admire people who speak multiple languages. They won't judge small mistakes!

HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS



When Small Talk Gets Awkward

Common Difficult Situations:

1. The Silent Person (gives one-word answers)

Solution:

Try 2-3 open questions. If still silent, accept it gracefully.

"I can see you're busy. I'll let you go. Have a good one!"

2. The Awkward Silence (conversation dies)

Solution:

Have backup topics ready: weather, weekend, recent news

"So, any exciting plans coming up?"

"By the way, did you hear about [neutral topic]?"

3. The Over-Sharer (shares too much personal info)

Solution:

Listen politely but redirect to lighter topics

"That sounds challenging. On a lighter note..."

4. The Controversial Topic (politics, religion come up)

Solution:

Politely deflect without being rude

"That's an interesting topic. I tend to avoid discussing politics at work, but..."

Key Principle:

It's okay if small talk doesn't always work perfectly. Stay polite, stay positive, and know when to exit gracefully.

REVIVING DEAD CONVERSATIONS



When You Run Out of Things to Say

Emergency Conversation Starters:

1. Ask About Their Work/Projects

"What are you working on these days?"

"How's (project they mentioned before) going?"

2. Use Your Surroundings

"This coffee is good! Do you have a favorite drink here?"

"I love this building. Have you been here long?"

3. Ask for Recommendations

"I'm looking for a good Thai restaurant. Any suggestions?"

"Do you know any good podcasts about (topic)?"

4. Follow Up on Previous Topics

"Last time you mentioned (X). How did that turn out?"

5. Share Something Light About Yourself

"I just started learning (hobby). Do you have any hobbies?"

SMALL TALK ON THE PHONE (1)



Phone Call Small Talk Structure

Phone Call Flow:

1. Opening + Check-in

"Hi (Name), this is (Your Name) from (Company). How are you?"

"Good morning! Is this a good time to talk?"

2. Brief Small Talk (15-30 seconds) "How's everything going?"

"How was your weekend?" (if Monday)

⚠ **Keep it shorter than face-to-face!**

3. Transition to Business

"Great! So, the reason I'm calling is..."

"I wanted to touch base about..."

SMALL TALK ON THE PHONE (2)



Phone-Specific Tips:

- Always ask if it's a good time

People may be busy - give them an out

- Smile while talking

They can hear it in your voice!

- Speak clearly and slightly slower

No body language to help understanding

- Don't overdo small talk

Phone small talk should be briefer than in-person

SMALL TALK IN EMAILS



Email Opening & Closing Lines

Professional Email Small Talk:

Opening Lines (after greeting):

- "I hope this email finds you well."
- "I hope you're having a great week!"
- "I hope you had a nice weekend." (Monday)
- "Thank you for your quick response on (topic)."
- "It was great meeting you at (event)."

Closing Lines (before signature):

- "Looking forward to hearing from you."
- "Have a great rest of your week!"
- "Wishing you a wonderful weekend!" (Friday)
- "Thanks again for your time and assistance."

SMALL TALK IN EMAILS (2)



Email Small Talk Rules:

1. Keep it to **ONE** sentence

Email small talk should be very brief

2. Match the tone of previous emails

If they're formal, be formal. If friendly, be friendly.

3. Don't overuse

In a long email thread, drop the small talk after 2-3 exchanges

PROFESSIONAL YET FRIENDLY



Finding the Right Balance

Situation	Too Formal	Just Right	Too Casual
Greeting	"Good morning, Mr. Johnson"	"Good morning, John! How are you?"	"Hey dude! What's up?"
Weekend question	"Did you have a pleasant weekend?"	"How was your weekend?"	"Party hard this weekend?"
Response about weekend	"It was adequate, thank you"	"It was great! I went hiking. How about yours?"	"OMG it was AMAZING! I got so drunk!"
Closing	"Thank you for your time. Goodbye."	"Great talking to you! Have a good one!"	"Later! See ya!"

Guidelines:

- Start more formal, adjust based on response
- Mirror the other person's level of formality
- Consider: hierarchy, culture, context
- When in doubt → Be more professional

REAL-WORLD APPLICATION (1)



Taking Small Talk Skills to the Real World

Where to Practice:

- **At University**

Before/after class, cafeteria, library, student events

- **At Internships/Part-time Jobs**

With supervisors, coworkers, during breaks

- **Professional Events**

Career fairs, networking events, conferences, workshops

- **Daily Life**

Coffee shops, elevators, waiting rooms, public transport

30-Day Challenge:

1. **Week 1:**

Practice greetings + one small talk question per day

2. **Week 2:**

Have 3 small talk conversations (2-3 minutes each)

3. **Week 3:**

Practice joining and exiting conversations naturally

4. **Week 4:**

Attend one networking event or social gathering

REAL-WORLD APPLICATION (2)



Success Metrics:

- You feel more confident starting conversations
- People respond positively to your small talk
- You've made new connections or strengthened existing ones
- Small talk feels more natural and less forced

THANK YOU

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