

# 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



| <b>Situation</b>      | <b>Example Opener</b>        | <b>Duration</b> |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 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                            |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Greeting</b>               | "Good morning, Mr. Johnson"         | "Good morning, John! How are you?"              | "Hey dude! What's up?"                |
| <b>Weekend question</b>       | "Did you have a pleasant weekend?"  | "How was your weekend?"                         | "Party hard this weekend?"            |
| <b>Response about weekend</b> | "It was adequate, thank you"        | "It was great! I went hiking. How about yours?" | "OMG it was AMAZING! I got so drunk!" |
| <b>Closing</b>                | "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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