




Small Talk


World of Work

- Teacher's Insights -

At a Glance

-  60 minutes
-  B1, **B2**, C1
-  business English, speaking, confidence

Preparation

-  0-5 minutes
- Print one worksheet for each student.
- Print the Teacher's Insights or keep them at hand as they contain the answers to the exercises.

Exercise Summary

Kick Off: Define "small talk".

Speaking I: Discuss the questions as a group.

Speaking II: Discuss which topics are appropriate for small talk.

Expressions: Learn simple expressions to start up a conversation with anybody.

Role Play: Simple and fun role-play activity in different scenarios.

Kick Off: Read the two definitions and decide which one is correct.

🕒 This activity introduces the topic of "small talk" if students are not already familiar with it. You can read the definitions yourself or ask one student to read each sentence out loud. They should then discuss which is the correct definition (A) and why.

Option A: "Small talk" refers to informal, easygoing conversations about non-controversial topics which do not require an in-depth discussion. It is used to create a social connection, and in business, to build rapport and make a positive impression.

Option B: "Small talk" is about long, intense discussions on complex, controversial issues. Its purpose is to persuade others or solve big problems. It often involves shouting and arguments, and it requires detailed knowledge of the topic.

Speaking I: Discuss the questions as a group.

🕒 Continue the conversation by asking the students to discuss the following questions. If you have a small group, ask each question to one student. If you have many students, you can split them into smaller groups for this speaking activity.

1. Have you ever attended a networking event?
2. Do you often have online meetings with people you don't know?
3. What are your favourite topics to talk about with people you have just met?
4. Do you think that "small talk" is an art which can be mastered?



Small Talk

World of Work

Speaking II: Which six of the following are appropriate small talk topics?

① This task explores what makes a topic appropriate for small talk. Guide a class discussion on each topic's suitability for small talk. Encourage students to justify their choices for critical thinking skills. The inappropriate options are crossed out below; the appropriate ones are highlighted in bold.

the weather	illegal activities	music	food and drink	hobbies	personal finances
weight and appearance	politics	current events	religion	films and series	gossip

Extra: Can you think of one good question to ask someone else for each of the appropriate topics?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Expressions: Read the following paragraph and take notes.

① This section provides valuable tips on starting a conversation by finding common ground. The key here is that you don't need to know anything about the other person to start the conversations. Have students read the expressions and match them to the four categories. As an **extra activity**, you can ask them to write an extra sentence for each category.

In the previous exercise, we identified appropriate small talk topics. However, if it is your very first time talking to the other person, it might be difficult to start the conversation in the first place. So, what is the best way to start up a conversation? There's one simple question which can help you...

"What do I have in common with the other person?"

Finding common ground is an easy and natural way to start a conversation. Below, you will see sentences which are grouped by categories (in the box above). Match the sentences with the categories:

(exercise on following page)

Small Talk

World of Work

Both are in the same location.

Both travelled.

Both are in an online meeting.

Both work at the same company.

Same Location

- I really like this building. It's so modern. Have you been here before?
- This room has a great view, doesn't it?
- What do you think of the building? I think it's great.

Online Meeting

- Can you see and hear me okay? Great, I can see and hear you fine, too!
- I love your virtual background. Where is it?
- I really like your name. Can you tell me how to pronounce it?

Both Travelled

- How did you get here today?
- Have you found it easy to make your way around the city?
- How was your trip here? Did you enjoy the flight?

Same Company

- I don't believe we've met before. Do you also work at [company name]?
- I believe we work for the same company. Which department do you work in?
- You don't happen to be [name], do you?

Role Play: Follow the instructions to put your new skills to use.

📌 This activity ties everything together, allowing students to apply their small talk skills in a role-play scenario. Split the class into small groups for the role-play. Give feedback, guide corrections, and encourage the use of their new phrases.

1. Split your group into smaller groups of two or three people.
2. Roll a die to determine the location of the small talk:



1: modern meeting room



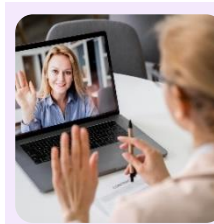
2: pub or restaurant



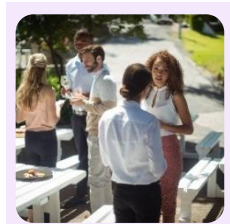
3: hotel lobby (in another city)



4: networking event



5: online conference



6: outdoor event

3. Have a 60-second conversation with another student, imagining that you just met them.
4. Give feedback on your conversation. Was it natural? Was it appropriate?
5. Mix up the groups and repeat.

📌 There is a complementary extra Wordwall activity which you can do with your students if you wish: <https://wordwall.net/resource/61062126>. Have fun!