

Chinwag session, Tuesday 4 June 2024

Topic: Small Talk

What is small talk?

Small talk is light, informal conversation people use when talking to other people they don't know very well.

Other words that describe small talk

- Chit chat
- Chatter
- Chinwag
- Banter

Where is small talk used?

- At places where people are waiting for something
- In people's homes
- In queues at the supermarket and other shops
- At bus stops and train stations
- At sporting events (maybe watching your child compete in their sport)
- At parties (adult as well as children's parties)
- When travelling in a car with someone you don't know very well
- At child care centres and schools
- At a neighbourhood BBQ
- Lots of other places where people gather!

Tips to making good small talk

- Ask open ended questions like "what was the best thing you did on the weekend?"
Don't ask questions that can be answered by one word (Yes or No).
For example "Did you have a good weekend?"
- The best way to make great small talk is to follow up simple questions with open ended ones.
For example: "Where are you from?" followed by "What is your home town like?" and "What did you like about it?"
- Good topics include weather, shopping, television programs, holidays, sport, movies, food and cooking, hobbies, your neighbourhood or suburb, what activities you have been doing.

- Topics that possibly should not be used depend on who you are talking to. These include questions about age, how much someone earns, how much rent they pay, personal health issues, political views and religious activities.

Perhaps when talking with someone for the first time, keep away from asking about marriage, children and employment. As you get to know the person better, these topics may well be raised.

Practice active listening

Making the most of small talk involves active listening. Active listening means carefully listening to what the other person is saying. Active listening includes:

- Making eye contact
- Not interrupting someone who is talking
- Being curious and asking questions
- Not offering unasked advice
- Putting away your mobile phone!
- Using body language to express your interest in talking with someone
- If you do not understand what someone is saying to you, ask them to speak more slowly, or explain what they mean.

Small talk is good for you!

In some cultures small talk is seen as unnecessary conversation. However in Australia, small talk between people is a friendly thing to do and helps build good relationships.

Over time, casual conversations (small talk) can help you develop deeper connections with people you come in contact with in your everyday life.

If you are learning English, conversations with strangers, however brief, are very important. Practice small talk whenever you can!

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Small Talk Question Cards

You meet a neighbour outside their house mowing their nature strip.

What would be a good way to start some small talk?

You are at a school event and see a group of parents you have not yet met, but you know their children are in the same class as your child.

What's a good way to start some small talk?

You are enjoying a BBQ in a local park and see a person that lives in your street.

What could you say to them to start a conversation?

You are at a children's party and see someone you recently saw at your child's school.

How could you introduce yourself to say hello?

You are on the train to Lilydale and see someone who lives near your house.

What could you say to start some small talk?

You are on a bus stop and are standing next to a stranger. How do you ask them when the next bus will be arriving?

What could you say to continue the conversation?

You are at a football match and see a Swinburne teacher in the crowd.

What would you say to them?

You are at a family gathering and see someone you have not yet met.

Would you compliment them on an item of their clothing to start a conversation?

You are at the Woolworths checkout and the checkout person asks “How is your day going?”

What would you say in reply?

You are in Bunnings looking to buy a shovel, and see a neighbour buying some vegetable seedlings.

What would be a good greeting from you that could start a friendly conversation?