



Small Talk

> What is small talk?

Small talk is light, informal conversation people use when talking to other people they may not know very well. Other words that describe small talk include chit chat, chatter and chinwag.

> Where is small talk used?

- At places where people are waiting for something, e.g. at bus stops and train stations
- At barbeques
- In queues at supermarkets
- At sporting events - maybe watching your child compete in a sport
- At parties (adult and children's)
- At child care centres, schools and church
- Lots of other places where people gather!

> Successful small talk

- Don't ask questions that can just be answered with a 'Yes' or a 'No'. For example 'Did you have a good weekend?'
- Ask open-ended questions like 'What was the best thing you did on the weekend?'
- A good way to make 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?'

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- Good topics include your family, the weather, shopping, television programs, holidays, sport, movies, food and cooking, hobbies, your neighbourhood or suburb, what activities you have been doing.
- The topics that probably are best avoided depend on who you are talking to. These would include questions about age, salaries and cost of rent or mortgages.
Other topics which may cause problems are personal health and relationship issues and political and religious views.
- When talking with someone for the first time, stay away from asking about marriage, children and employment. If you get to know the person better, these topics may well be raised.

> Active listening

Making small talk involves active listening. Active listening means carefully listening to what the other person is saying. Active listening actions include:

- Make eye contact
- Be curious and ask questions
- Don't interrupt someone who is talking
- Don't offer unasked-for advice
- Use body language to express your interest in connecting with someone
- Put away your mobile phone!
- If you do not understand what someone is saying to you, ask them to speak more slowly, or to explain to you 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!

> Conversation topic cards

Select an orange card on the table and talk about that topic. If you don't like the topic you select, put the card back on the table (face-down) and choose another one.

If you want to practise some small talk, choose a blue card to be involved in a roleplay where you can participate in a made-up conversation with another student.

> Chinwag notes for 2024 and 2025 can be downloaded from:

<https://chinwag.ajeffrey.net> (Word format)

<https://chinwagpdf.ajeffrey.net> (PDF format)

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