

Small Talk

CONVERSATION TOPICS



Use the following conversation topics to practice small talk with a friend, stranger, teacher or tutor.

If you're practicing with a teacher/tutor/classmate, try going through the conversation topics one-by-one and having a short conversation about each "small talk" topic. Challenge yourself to keep the conversation going for as long as possible.

1. NOTICE YOUR SURROUNDINGS.

The best way to strike up a new conversation with a stranger (or even a friend or acquaintance) is by pointing out something in your environment and asking a question about it. Even basic topics like the weather can be good ice-breakers. Try the following.

1. Notice something in the environment:
 1. It's so busy/quiet here. Is it always like this?
 - Follow-up questions: Have you been here before? Do you have any recommendations?
 2. This room is so well-decorated/colorful/modern. What do you think about the design?
 - Follow-up questions: What do you think about that window/wallpaper/seating arrangement?
2. Notice the weather:
 1. It's so cloudy/windy. Do you think it's going to rain later?
 - Follow-up questions: It's raining less and less every year, don't you think?
 2. Is it always this hot this time of year?
 - Follow-up questions: When do you think we'll start getting fall weather?
3. Notice an object:
 1. What kind of laptop/camera/backpack is that?
 - Follow-up questions: It looks cool/useful. Do you like it?
 2. Is that your dog/friend/brother/teacher?
 - Follow-up questions: What's his/her name?

2. ASK FOR ADVICE.

People (even strangers) love to give advice. Here's how to ask someone for advice.

1. Ask where to go: *Think of something you need, and ask others where you can go to get or do that thing.*
 1. I want to take up golfing/swimming/dancing. Do you have any idea where I can go to practice golfing/swimming/dancing?
 - Follow-up questions: Do you know how much it costs? How can I get there?
 2. I need a new hairdresser/barber/massage place/nail salon? Do you have any recommendations?
 - Follow-up questions: How can I make a reservation there?
 3. I'm looking for _____ (*Anything! : a fun place to go on the weekend, a new restaurant, a really spicy salsa, a cheap sofa, cardboard boxes, etc.*). Any clue where I can go for something like that?
 - Follow-up questions: How do I get there? Did they have a lot in stock? Do you remember how much it costs?
2. Ask about recent purchases:
 1. I just bought _____. (*Anything! : A new plant, a new TV, a motorbike, a hat, etc.*) What do you think about it?
 - Follow-up questions: (*This will depend a lot on what you bought.*) Where should I put it? Does it go with this shirt? Do you think I made the right choice?
3. Ask for advice on a small problem:
 1. I've been having trouble with my hair/landlord/commute/motivation to cook/time management/cell phone service. *Explain the problem.* What do you think I should do?
 - Follow-up questions: *Ask for more details on the person's advice.*

3. TALK ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS.

The news can be a great source of small talk. Just be sure to steer clear of touchy subjects like politics or possibly depressing topics like local tragedies.

1. Mention local events:
 1. Did you hear there's going to be a concert/festival/meeting/talk/event in town?
 - Follow-up questions: Are you going?
 2. Can you believe what happened? *Mention the specific event or situation that unfolded recently.*
 - Follow-up questions: Do you know anybody that saw it? Do you think something like that could happen again?
2. Ask about world events:
 1. Have you been following _____? (*Examples : the Olympics, the situation in Florida, what happened with that scientist, etc.*)
 - Follow-up questions: What did you hear about it?
 2. I heard a crazy news story the other day. *Give a short summary of the news story.* Did you hear about that?
3. Talk about sports:
 1. Are you watching the World Cup/the fight on Saturday/the Super Bowl? (*In this case you can use the present continuous "are you watching...?" to refer to something that is ongoing or upcoming.*)
 - Follow-up questions: Who has the best chance of winning? Are you a big _____ fan?

4. ASK ABOUT THE RECENT PAST AND NEAR FUTURE.

People love talking about fun things they've done or are going to do. Asking about the weekend or holidays never gets old.

1. Ask about last weekend:
 1. What did you do over the weekend?
 1. *Grammar note! This question refers to the weekend that has just passed. This is a good question for a Monday or a Tuesday.*
2. Ask about this weekend:
 1. What are you doing this weekend?
 1. *Grammar note! This question refers to this **current** weekend which you are experiencing right now **OR** the **upcoming** weekend, so we would typically use this question on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday.*
 2. *Grammar note continued! Many English language learners will say "next" weekend to refer to the upcoming weekend, but "next weekend" can mean the weekend after that, which can cause confusion. It's better to use "this weekend" to refer to the upcoming weekend.*
3. Ask about holidays:
 1. What did you do on vacation/over the long weekend/over Christmas/New Year's?
 2. What are you going to do on vacation/over the long weekend/etc.?
4. Ask about meals:
 1. Have you eaten breakfast/lunch/dinner?
 - Follow-up questions: What did you have? What are you going to have?

5. DISCUSS MEDIA: BOOKS / TV SHOWS / MUSIC / MOVIES / VIDEO GAMES.

Media can be a great source for small talk.

1. Talk about TV shows:
 1. Have you seen _____? Is anyone watching _____?
 - Follow-up questions: What did you think?
 2. Does anyone have any recommendations for Netflix shows/stand-up comedy/Korean dramas?
 - Follow-up questions: What's it about?
2. Talk about movies:
 1. Have you seen _____?
 - Follow-up questions: What did you think? Would you recommend it?
 2. Does anyone have any recommendations for rom-coms/something to see in theaters/animated movies/thrillers?
3. Talk about books, music, and video games: *These are trickier. You can usually only ask questions about these topics for people you know a bit better, such as a friend that you know likes video games, because while people tend to watch the same TV shows and movies, people have very specific tastes when it comes to books, music, and games.*
 1. *If there's a recent "phenomenon" like "Hogwarts Legacy" or a new Beyonce album, you can try asking about it because more people are likely to have heard about it.*