

Mastering the Art of Small Talk

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. **small talk** Noun /smɔ:l tɔ:k/ polite conversation about unimportant or uncontroversial matters
Example: While waiting for the meeting to start, the colleagues engaged in a bit of small talk about their morning commute.
2. **polite** Adjective /pə'laɪt/ having or showing behavior that is respectful and considerate of other people
Example: It is important to be polite when meeting someone for the first time to make a good impression.
3. **boring** Adjective /'bɔ:.rɪŋ/ not interesting; tedious
Example: Some people find long speeches boring, especially if they don't understand the topic.
4. **hobby** Noun /'hɒb.i/ an activity done regularly in one's leisure time for pleasure
Example: Her favorite hobby is photography, and she spends most weekends taking pictures in the park.
5. **holiday** Noun /'hɒl.ə.deɪ/ a period of leisure and recreation, especially one spent away from home
Example: They are planning to go to Japan for their summer holiday this year.
6. **politics** Noun /'pɒl.ə.tɪks/ the activities associated with the governance of a country or area
Example: Many experts suggest avoiding politics during a first date because it can lead to strong disagreements.



What do you think about "small talk"? This term refers to the act of having a polite conversation about things that aren't very important. While some people dislike small talk because they think it's boring, it can actually be a very useful tool, especially if you're learning a new language.

Because it involves simple topics, it allows you to get some easy speaking practice in a low-pressure environment.

The British Council suggests that there are five excellent topics we can use to initiate small talk. The first and most common one is the weather. This is a "safe" subject because anyone can talk about it, regardless of who they are. You can mention how cold or hot it is, or perhaps express your desire for the rain to finally stop!

Another great way to connect with others is to ask about their weekend. You can inquire about what they did over the past weekend or what they plan to do during the upcoming one. Similarly, you can talk to someone about their travel plans. For instance, asking if someone is going on a holiday soon is a friendly way to learn more about their interests and lifestyle.

The British Council also highlights hobbies as a fantastic conversation starter. Generally, people enjoy talking about the activities they love to do in their free time! Another effective idea is to discuss TV shows or movies. You can ask someone for their opinion on a new show you've seen; even if they haven't watched it yet, you can describe the plot and why you enjoyed it.

While many topics are welcome, there are some you should avoid. For example, you should not talk about things like politics during casual small talk. These subjects can be sensitive and might lead to uncomfortable arguments rather than a light, friendly chat. By sticking to neutral topics, you can ensure that your social interactions remain pleasant and productive.

Ultimately, the more you practice small talk, the more confident you will become in social situations. Whether you are at a networking event or just waiting for a bus, these small interactions can lead to meaningful social connections. As your language skills improve, you'll find that "boring" small talk is actually a vital bridge to much deeper conversations.

DISCUSSION

1. Do you find small talk difficult or easy in your native language?
2. In your country, is it common to talk to strangers about the weather?
3. Why do you think some people find small talk "boring" or "fake"?
4. What is the best TV show or movie you have seen recently?
5. If a stranger started a conversation with you on a train, would you feel happy or annoyed?
6. Do you think social media has made us better or worse at having real-life conversations?
7. Are there any other "taboo" topics in your culture that you should never use for small talk?