

Small Talk

Objectives

- Apply vocabulary words related to small-talk topics
- Apply the past simple and past continuous tenses
- Listen for main ideas and details in monologues and conversations
- Speak clearly about daily life and personal opinions

Discuss

Discuss the following questions with a partner.



1. What do you think “small talk” means?
2. When do you think people engage in small talk?
3. How do you think small talk differs from culture to culture? What are some “small talk” phrases used in your culture?

What's up?

“Small talk” refers to polite or informal conversation that typically revolves around light and non-controversial topics such as the weather or current events.

It is usually important in English-speaking countries to engage in small talk in order to build rapport with your acquaintances or colleagues. Additionally, it serves as a way to establish trust before moving on to deeper topics. Most importantly, it helps with awkward silences!

Listen



Read about the definition of “small talk” above and discuss the underlined vocabulary words/phrases with your teacher.

Listen to some advice about small talk and answer the questions below.

Link: [Small Talk Can Make You Happier. Here's How to Master it.](#)

1. What are a few worries people may have about talking to strangers?

2. What does recent research say about talking to strangers?

3. What is the “liking” gap?

4. What were the tips given on how to talk to strangers? Give examples where possible.

5. What are some benefits of engaging in small talk?

Vocabulary



Some common small talk topics include:

the weather
weekend plans
hobbies
work

travel
food
family
pets

Discuss with a partner about the small-talk questions you can ask about each topic above. Learn the definitions of the various expressions below from your teacher.

Plans

To wing it: to do something without preparing for it

To take it one step at a time: to do something slowly and carefully

To have a plan B: to have a second plan in case the first one fails

To stick to the plan: to do exactly as intended or planned

To play it by ear: to decide your plans based on what happens in the current moment instead of planning in advance

To cross that bridge when (you) get to it: to deal with a situation only when it occurs (instead of thinking about it now)

Adapted from Accelerate English - Common English Phrasal Verbs

Travel

To set off: to start a trip or journey

To take off: to become airborne (on planes) to begin a trip

To touch down: to land, especially in reference to planes

To drop in on: to make a visit that someone does not expect

To hold up: to delay

To take a shortcut: to take a quicker or more direct route to a particular destination

To settle in: to become comfortable in a new place after arriving

To catch a ride: to find a vehicle to travel in

To head out: to leave for a destination

Adapted from macarronsf - Travel Idioms and Phrasal Verbs

Work

To put something off: to delay doing something

To be a people person: to be extroverted

To have a lot on your plate: to have a lot of work and duties at the moment

Learning curve: the time it takes to learn an activity or system

To know off the top of one's head: to know something immediately without needing to look it up elsewhere

Adapted from Espresso English - Idiomatic Expressions to Use at Work

Vocabulary

Respond to each of the small-talk questions below with the expressions that were taught.

1. Do you like making plans ahead of time? Why?

2. What are you planning to do this weekend?

3. Where do you wish to travel to next? What kind of plans will you make for this trip?

4. What do you do for work? What has your experience at your job been like so far?

Grammar

Learn about the past simple and past continuous tenses.



Past simple

Used when speaking about:

- actions or situations that finished
- events that happened one after another

Regular verbs: base form + -ed

Verbs ending with "e": base form + -d

Verbs ending with a consonant and "y": change "y" to "i" + -ed

Irregular verb: varies e.g. ate, bought, etc.

"To be" verb: was (singular) / were (plural)

Verbs following the consonant-vowel-consonant rule: double the final consonant and add -ed (*unless it's a two-syllable verb where first syllable is stressed e.g. enter - entered)

	+	-
		(did not + base verb OR was not / were not)
I You We They He She It	I travelled to Osaka by train.	We didn't take the shortcut.

Plus-verbenses

Useful verbs speaking about:

- actions in situations that were happening at a specific time in the past, including the previous situation
- ongoing actions interrupted by another shorter action / past simple is used to describe the shorter action
- actions happening at the same time in the past
- a repeated action in the past

Verb forms

	+	+
I was talking to him at the time	I was talking to him when she called	I wasn't talking when she called
They were talking	They were talking when she called	They weren't talking in the past when she was talking about George



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Exercice

- I was making plans for my next vacation when my mom was wanting to speak to me.
- Joshua was having an accident while he was sailing across the lake.
- While they were waiting for directions, I looked it up on my phone.
- She called many cities across Missouri when she first met her husband.
- We were just arriving when the crash was happening.
- When the cruise ship was crossing the sea, we saw some sea turtles.
- She explored the jungle when a guide led her.

Exercice

Write the verbs using the correct form of the given verb.

- Over the weekend, _____ (fall down) while I was _____ (climb up) the stairs.
- When he was a teenager, he _____ (do) his homework _____ (often / get off).
- _____ (fall) you a people person back in university?
- She _____ (stop) to buy a drink when I _____ (take) a picture of her.



Grammar

Present	Past	Example sentences
Je suis		
Il est		
Elle est		
Il était		
Elle était		
Il avait		
Elle avait		
Il a		
Elle a		
Il avait		
Elle avait		

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Lesson



Il était absent de la classe hier. Il n'était pas en classe. Il était à la maison. Il était malade. Il était en vacances. Il était en retard.

Elle était absente de la classe hier. Elle n'était pas en classe. Elle était à la maison. Elle était malade. Elle était en vacances. Elle était en retard.

Il avait absent de la classe hier. Il n'avait pas en classe. Il avait à la maison. Il avait malade. Il avait en vacances. Il avait en retard.

Discuss

Discuss the following questions with a partner.

1. Do you agree with Martin from The Office about how we need to save time when speaking? Why or why not?
2. Do you think email is useful in your everyday life? Why or why not?
3. What are your go-to email-call topics? Why are these topics your favorites?



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