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annhillen.esl@gmail.com

Welcome to American Social Skills

For English Language Learners

San Jose Public Library
ELL Virtual Classroom
Ann Hillen, Facilitator

American Social Skills

Hello Everyone!

Today's topic is "Small Talk."

- Why is it important?
- What is expected of you?
- How do you start and end a small talk conversation?

Activities:

1. Review: the role of small talk in American culture
2. Practice: sample dialogue using small talk in common social situations
3. Wrap-up: Questions and Comments



What is Small Talk?

What?

Conversation we make with people we do not know well.

Who?

- Strangers
- Acquaintances (neighbors, co-workers, classmates, waiter, etc.)

Where/When?

Bus/train/plane, park, shops, classes, parties, work, anywhere!



Why is Small Talk Important?

- It shows politeness to acknowledge someone in a friendly way.
- It may seem trivial, or even rude but it's a way Americans like to connect to people.
- Smiling and saying hello to strangers and acquaintances will make you a more likable and approachable person in American society.
- To Americans, silence between people can be uncomfortable. Small talk fills in the silence and makes us feel good.



Small Talk – Know the rules!



What is expected of you?

Do:

- Be friendly
- Be positive
- Be brief
- Choose simple topics that everyone can relate to

Don't:

- Be unpleasant
- Be negative
- Talk too much
- Choose personal and controversial topics

A photograph of a handwritten sign on a piece of paper. The sign reads "Always 😊 BE POSITIVE!" with "BE POSITIVE!" underlined in pink and green. The sign is placed over the bottom right corner of the image of the two women.

Always 😊
BE POSITIVE!

Small Talk – Common Scenarios

#1: Complete strangers

- sitting next to someone on a bus/train/plane
- standing in line with other people
- Cashier at the check out in a store
- waiter in a restaurant



#2: Acquaintances (someone you know slightly)

- neighbor
- co-worker
- Your child's teacher
- classmate
- friend of a friend



FRIEND
VERSUS
ACQUAINTANCE

Friend is a person with whom you share a strong bond	Acquaintance is someone who is known but who is not a close friend
Know intimate details of each other	Know each other slightly
Often hang out with each other	Do not interact often
Help each other	Are not obliged to help

We use small talk with strangers and acquaintances

NEVER with family and friends

How to start and end a small talk conversation?

Strangers

Acquaintances

1. Start conversation:

Hello

Good Morning

Nice day

Hi. How are you?

Hello. How are you doing?

Hi. How's it going?

2. Conversation topic:

Keep it simple, positive and friendly

3. End conversation:

No need to for a formal ending. Simply look or walk away.

Need to formally end the conversation:

Nice to see you

Good talking to you

Have a nice day

Good bye

See you later

Small Talk **Appropriate** Conversation Topics

Keep it simple, positive and friendly

- The weather – *Nice day today!*
- Travel – *Do you have travel plans this year?*
- Location you are in - *this is a lovely park*
- Sports – *are you going to watch the Super Bowl?*
- Movies – *have you seen any good movies lately?*
- Hobbies – *do you have any hobbies?*
- Your work – *what do you do?*
- Compliments: *I like your jacket. Where did you get it?*



Small Talk Inappropriate Conversation Topics

Topics to avoid:

- Religion – *Are you a Christian (Jew, Buddhist, etc.)?*
- Money – *How much money do you make?*
- Politics - *Who did you vote for?*
- Appearance (weight, physical disability, etc.) – *Did you gain weight?*
- Personal questions: *Are you married? Do you have children?*
- Serious subjects: *war, disease, death*
- Controversial topics - *abortion, gun control, immigration*
- Your personal problems – *money, health, spouse, gambling addiction*



Small Talk sample dialogue scripts

Stranger

Waiting for a bus

Stranger 1 **starts conversation**: *Good morning*

Stranger 2 responds: *Hello.*

Stranger 1: *Looks like it will rain again soon.*

Stranger 2 **ends conversation**: *That's great. We need it!*

Acquaintance

Encountering a neighbor you do not know well

Neighbor 1 **starts conversation**: *Hi. How is it going?*

Neighbor 2 responds: *Good. How have you been?*

Neighbor 1: *Very well. How is the family?*

Neighbor 2: *We are all fine. Looking forward to the summer.*

Neighbor 1: *Me too. Do you have any vacation plans?*

Neighbor 2: *Yes. We are going to Yosemite in June.*

Neighbor 1: *That sounds wonderful. Have you been there before?*

Neighbor 2: *No, this will be our first time.*

Neighbor 1: *We have been a couple of times. You will love it!*

Neighbor 2: *We are definitely looking forward to it.*

Neighbor 1: **ends conversation**: *Well, nice seeing you.*

Neighbor 2: *You too.*

Neighbor 1: *bye*

Neighbor 2: *Good bye.*

Small Talk sample dialogue scripts

Complete strangers

Standing in line at the bus stop

Stranger 1: **starts conversation:** *Hello.*

Stranger 2: responds: *Hello.*

Stranger 1: *Nice day.*

Stranger 2 **ends conversation:** *It sure is!*



At the check out in a store



Cashier: **starts conversation:** *Hi. How are you doing?*

Customer: *Fine thanks. How are you?*

Cashier: *I'm good. How has your day been going?*

Customer: *It's flying by. I can't believe it's noon already!*

Cashier: *I know. I'm ready for lunch.*

Customer: **ends conversation:** *Well, have a great day.*

Cashier: *Thanks. You too!*

Sample Small Talk sample dialogue scripts

Acquaintances

Encountering a co worker you only slightly know, in the breakroom on a Monday morning.

Worker 1 **starts conversation:** *Hi. How are you doing?*

Worker 2 responds: *Good. And you?*

Worker 1: *Great.*

Worker 2: *How was your weekend?*

Worker 1: *It was nice.*

Worker 2: *Did you do anything special?*

Worker 1: *No not really. Just relaxed and hung out with the kids. How about you?*

Worker 2: *We went to the new James Bond movie.*

Worker 1: *Did you like it?*

Worker 2: *It was great. I highly recommend seeing it.*

Worker 1: *Thanks. I'll have to check it out.*

Worker 2 **ends conversation:** *Well, nice seeing you.*

Worker 1: *You too.*

Worker 2: *bye*

Worker 1: *Good bye.*



Small talk –some tips

It's reciprocal!
You need to respond back to the person.



Don't forget body language. Make eye contact and nod head.

What if I'm just not ready, or too nervous to respond?
Just say in a friendly way, *"I'm sorry I don't understand English very well."*

Challenge yourself! Practice, Practice Practice!
Go out and try it this week.

Small Talk

Breakout Room Practice

Scenario #1: The Uber or Lyft Ride

Person 1 is the Uber/Lyft Driver
Person 2 is the customer

Driver: starts conversation: _____
Customer: responds _____
Carry on conversation _____
End conversation _____

Scenario #2: Julie encounters her landlord while shopping at Target.

Person 1 is Julie
Person 2 is the landlord

Julie: starts conversation _____
Landlord: responds _____
Carry on conversation _____
End conversation _____