



Making Small Talk

Small talk is casual conversation about such topics as the weather or sports or entertainment. It's also sometimes called chitchat. We make small talk when we are waiting for a guest to arrive, or when we are socializing with friends and acquaintances. With the holiday season, you may be invited to attend parties and dinners and other celebrations, and you'll be meeting many new people. What will you say to them?



Practice making small talk with your conversation partner. Do a role-play where you are the guest and your partner is the host or hostess, then switch roles. Or pretend you and your conversation partner are both guests at a party, waiting for the guest of honor to arrive. This exercise will help you to feel more comfortable having conversations with people you have just met.

Here are some hints to get you started:

Introduce yourself.

- Smile, look your partner in the eye, and hold out your hand to show that you are ready to shake hands, and say: "Hi, I'm Lin. I'm a friend of Natasha's" (name your host or hostess here) or "I work with Natasha at English in Action."
- The response might be: "It's a pleasure to meet you, Lin. I'm Jean Paul."
- Then you might say, "How do you know Natasha?"
- The response might be "Natasha is my sister's friend" or "Natasha and I are in the same book club."
- Please note that you can be very informal when making small talk!

After you have introduced yourselves, there are many topics you can talk about, such as:

- Commenting on the weather: "That was quite a big snowstorm we had last week!"
- Asking about a recent sports event: "Did you watch the football game last Sunday?"
- Talking about a movie: "Have you seen the movie 'Arrival'?"
- When it's time to move on, just say, "Please excuse me. I have to find my wife/husband/cousin/friend. It was very nice to meet you." Then walk away. (You could also shake hands again when you leave.)

Remember that small talk is just that: small talk. It's for passing the time and feeling comfortable. You don't need to give an in-depth opinion about world affairs or engage in a deep discussion about the economy. You don't have to make a plan to meet again—unless you want to. Then you might say, "I really enjoyed talking to you. I hope we'll run into each other again sometime." Then you might offer the other person your card so that they can contact you, if they wish.

Culture Corner

Saying Thank You

This is a season of holidays: Chanukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa. It's customary to exchange gifts or cards with family and close friends and sometimes with co-workers, too. The gifts don't have to be expensive; **it's the thought that counts.***

Here are some ways of saying “**thank you**” when someone gives you a gift or a card:

“Thank you.”

“Thank you, you didn't have to do that.”

“This is a very kind gesture. Thank you.”

“That was very sweet of you, thank you.”

“Thank you. I appreciate it.”

When someone thanks you for a gift, you should respond “**you're welcome.**”

Here are some ways:

“You're welcome!”

“Any time!”

“My pleasure!”

“The pleasure was mine!”

“I was happy to do it.”



Practice with your conversation partner. How would you respond in the following situations?

- Someone gives you flowers for Christmas.
- You completed a project, and your boss thanks you with a gift card from Starbucks.
- You buy a cup of coffee for your friend, and he says, “That was thoughtful of you.”
- Your sister says “You shouldn't have!” for giving her a sweater for Chanukah.

Can you think of any other situations where you would say “thank you” to someone?

- **it's the thought that counts** — This is used to indicate that it's the kindness and thoughtfulness behind an act that's important, however imperfect or insignificant the act may be.



Conversation Practice

New Year's Eve in the U.S. is observed on December 31st, the last day of the year. At the stroke of midnight, you'll hear horns blowing and shouts of “Happy New Year!” as everyone makes a **champagne toast.***

That's usually followed by a round of “Auld Lang Syne,” the song we like to sing to **ring in the New Year***. In many places, there are fireworks at midnight, too.

Other cultures may observe the new year on another date, following a different calendar. Talk to your conversation partner about New Year traditions. Are there special foods or drinks that are associated with this holiday in other countries? Do you know how to prepare them? Is there a special song to celebrate the New Year? What are your **New Year's resolutions***?

Some New Year's Idioms

- * **a champagne toast**—a ritual in which champagne is drunk as an expression of honor or goodwill. Toast can also refer to the verbal expression accompanying the drink.
- * **ring in the New Year**—commemorate the new year with joyful celebration.
- * **New Year's resolution**— a promise to do an act of self-improvement or something nice, starting at the beginning of the new year.



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