

# MANAGEMENT ENGLISH

## 13 SMALL TALK

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## Basic Daily Conversation

### Formal greetings

- Good morning!, Good afternoon! and Good evening!  
("good night" means that you are saying goodbye.)

### Introductions

- My name is ..... What is your name?
- I am very sorry, I don't remember your name. You name is...?
- Please meet (name)
- Nice to meet you (name)!
- Pleased to meet you (name)!

### Ask how someone is

- (Name) How are you?
- (Name) How are you doing?
- (Name) How's it going? / How are things? (more informal)
- I'm well thanks (name), how are you?
- I am doing well (name), how are you doing?
- It's going really well, thank you. How are you doing (name)?

### Open Questions to Create Conversation

- How is work going?
- How was your journey to the office?
- How is your day going?

## Getting Clarification

- I am sorry, I don't understand (name). Please could you explain that?
- I'm sorry, I didn't understand you. Sorry but please could you please repeat that?
- Would you care to elaborate further? (formal)
- (Name) please could you say that again, I missed what you said?
- I'm sorry (name), I didn't catch that. Please could you please repeat?
- (Name) I'm sorry, I didn't hear that. Please could you say that again please?
- Pardon, I did not understand, what did you say?
- So, does that mean that...?
- (Name) do you mean...?
- If I understand right (name), ...
- I'm not sure I understand this, does that mean...?

## Expressions to use in checking someone has understood you

- Do you know what I mean?
- (Name) I hope that's clear.
- Did I make myself clear.

## Expressions to use in saying something another way

- In other words, ...
- (Name) what I mean is...
- What I am trying to say is...
- (Name) what I'm getting at is...
- How shall I put it?

## Expressions to use when you want to add something

- (Name) I would like to make another point.
- I'd also like to say...
- Sorry I don't understand (name), ...
- (Name) I'm not sure I understand what you mean.
- What does the word ... mean?

## Apologizing

- Sorry, I'm late.
- I apologize for being late.
- I'm afraid I've forgotten my workbook.

## What to say when... asking for other people's opinion

- What is your opinion (name)?
- (Name) do you agree?
- What do you think about that?
- (Name) I would like to hear your thoughts on that...
- Tell me, how do you feel about that?
- (Name) I am interested to hear your opinion about this...
- Team, would you like to add anything on this?

## Interrupting Others

- Sorry but can I interrupt?
- Excuse me but I need to interrupt and explain/ask ..... (more polite)
- (Name) please can I jump in here?
- Sorry but I need to add that?
- Sorry to interrupt you (name) but...
- Sorry everyone, may I interrupt for a moment to explain .....?

## Getting back to the main topic

- So anyway (name), getting back to my main point ...
- Where was I? Ah yes I think .....
- As I was saying...

## Changing the Topic

- Oh, by the way (name) ...
- (Name), while I remember...
- That reminds me...
- Speaking about that, I wanted to share that ...
- Sorry before I forget, we should...
- Sorry I appreciate this is completely changing the topic but...

## Double-checking

- Did you mean.....
- (Name) So what you're asking is...
- So, what they want to do is...
- In other words, what he is saying is...
- Excuse me, can I just confirm that/what you said...

## Agreeing

- (Name) I couldn't agree more
- I completely agree with you!
- We couldn't possibly agree more. We have been suggesting this for several weeks.

## Disagreeing

- (Name) I understand what you are saying but
- I see what you mean but...I would like to suggest that ...
- (Name) on this topic, I do not feel the same way as you
- I can see where you're coming from but sorry it is my view that ...
- I agree with you up to a point (name), however...
- I'm afraid I don't agree with you on that / about that
- Respectfully (name), I have to disagree on this issue (more formal)
- (Name) I think we should accept we will have to agree to disagree on this then.

## Controversy

- I realise that not everyone agrees with me... (but this is what I think)
- (Name) we know this is a contentious issue but ...
- I am aware we don't see eye to eye on this problem, but I think
- It is not a popular opinion but I believe...

## What to say when... you want to end a conversation

- Well, I'd best be off! It's been great chatting.
- I am glad I ran into you, it has been really helpful to catch up, but I must go now.
- It's time for me to go (name) I look forward to our next meeting...
- Sorry, I have to run (name), please can we continue this discussion later?

## Why Small Talk is Necessary

- It demonstrates your willingness to engage with them and conveys friendliness, facilitating the discovery of shared interests. The majority of individuals favor engaging in social connection over complete isolation. It is a low-risk approach to express an interest in initially becoming acquainted with them briefly. The majority of individuals are comfortable with this minimal degree of commitment and interaction.
- When you take the initiative it helps the other person, since you have assumed all the risk in seeking common ground and mutual interests, they are more likely to engage and be grateful that you made the effort. In most cultures the senior member of staff would be expected to initiate small talk.
- Casual conversation can assist professionals in alleviating anxiety and fostering connections when accompanied with proficient listening. Small talk functions similarly to engine oil in a machine; it facilitates more challenging conversations and enhances team efficiency. Managers who use small talk effectively are more likely to generate trust, collaboration and become approachable. It can also create an environment of psychological safety that can be particularly valuable in more demanding or stressful situations.
- Establishing relationships and trust requires time; casual discussion facilitates this by allowing for safe and positive interactions, hence creating opportunities for more substantive dialogue later. Most individuals need 7+ hours of direct interaction 1-1 with a manager to develop real trust.
- Engaging in small conversation is in a manager's self-interest by facilitating the formation of relationships, enhancing value, and fostering success. Managers that exhibit confidence and proficiency in small conversation are frequently perceived as superior leaders, fostering enhanced workplace relationships and more content teams. It necessitates an investment of time and energy without instant gratification; it is akin to farming rather than hunting. Managers can enhance their Emotional Intelligence by consistently engaging in small conversation and cultivating their capacity to forge better, advantageous relationships.
- Managers who exhibit real curiosity, endeavoring to acquire new knowledge by effective open-ended inquiries, actively listening, and posing pertinent follow-up questions, achieve favorable outcomes.

## Work Small Talk

There are small talk topics to avoid and some topics that should be avoided to keep the conversation light, positive and enjoyable. Topics such as politics, religion, personal financial, health or relationship matters are best avoided. It is better to select topics that everyone can connect with, do not cause any discomfort and create a pleasant connection such as travel, hobbies, food and daily issues.

### For company colleagues:

- “How are things going?”
- “(Name) what are you working on at the moment?”
- “I am interested, what is changing and how are you adapting?”
- “What challenges do you face?”
- “(Name)I know you are very experienced on [subject X], please could you tell me why you think that [event, announcement, major change] happened?”
- “(Name) please explain, what is working for you currently?”
- “Which blogs and websites are you reading to stay up-to date on [topic]?”
- “What new skills are you learning?”
- “I remember you [did X, achieved Y], please talk me through this again as I would like to learn from it.”
- “Which parts of your job do you enjoy? Plus, which parts are not so good?”
- “What are your customers/suppliers/users talking about?”
- “Tell me about the team you are in / working with?”

### For existing customers (once softer opening small talk completed and the right atmosphere exists:

- “How are things going?”
- “Last time you spoke about (project X), what progress have you made?”
- “How has business changed since we last spoke?”
- “What’s new in your business?”
- “What reactions are you getting to your products/services?”
- “What do you see happening in our industry now?”
- “What is changing in your company currently?”

- “I’m curious to know your story, please tell me about your background.”
- “What’s the main priority of your company currently? How does this impact on you?”
- “What’s no longer a priority for your business?”
- “What’s the most important measure of success for your business now (quality, turnover, profit, speed)?”
- “What can we do to help you achieve success?”

#### For potential customers:

- “How are things going (Name)?”
- “What is new?”
- “What is working?”
- “How has business changed since we talked last?”
- “Which industry events are you planning on attending?”

#### For networking with contacts in your industry:

- “How is it going (Name)?”
- “What is exciting you in the industry currently?”
- “What’s new?”
- “(Name) please tell me, what is working for you?”
- “Which blogs, channels and websites are you reading to stay up-to date?”
- “I remember you [did X, achieved Y], please talk me through this again as I would like to learn from it.”
- “What new services / products are you seeing coming to market?”
- “How are you seeing technology changing our market?”

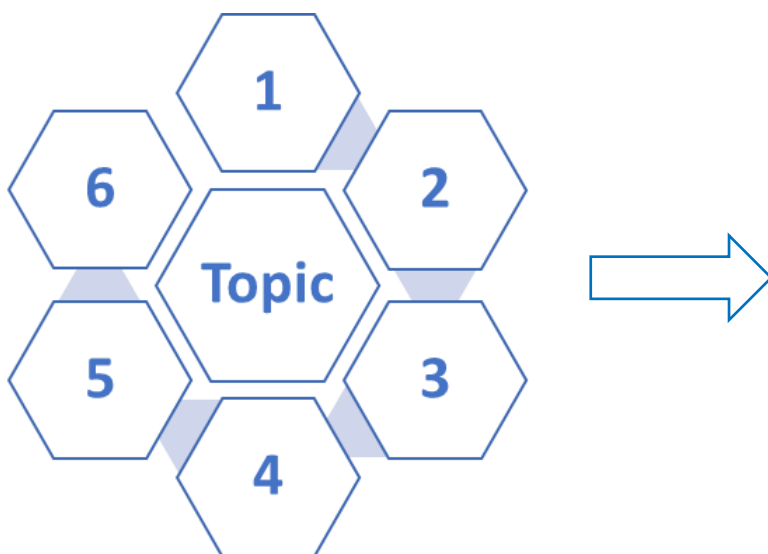
## Non-Work Small Talk

At DBIE we believe that if you do not prepare you are preparing to fail, it is possible to prepare and practice to help your small talk performance. Many professionals find non-work small talk very difficult and the idea of having to spend an hour with a colleague, boss, supplier or customer for an hour is very intimidating.

A lunch with a customer could last anything from 60 to 90 mins, this means having 6-9 topics prepared is a good starting place along, the trick is to keep each topic running by asking supplementary questions and exploring answers in depth. On most topics there can easily be 6 questions to open up the topic and then each of these questions can be followed by supplementary questions. The topics, questions and types of follow up questions can be stored on a mobile or piece of paper as a prompt or help short term memory.

Common non-work topics are family, pets, hobbies, sports, Netflix, films, culture, your city, your country, traffic, music, history of where you live, holidays and travel.

### Topic and 6 Questions



### Supplementary Questions

- 1 How could it be better?
- 2 What else could happen?
- 3 How does it make you feel?
- 4 How could it be even better?
- 5 What next?
- 6 Why is that the case?
- 7 Please tell me more.
- 8 What did you learn?

## Topics to talk about

Effective small talk conversations should be like a game of table tennis with contributors taking turns to speak and the speaking going back and forwards quickly.

Often there are people who just do not want to talk, only giving one-word answers, avoiding eye contact, not asking any questions and generally showing that moment is not good for conversation. When this is the case small talk should be avoided and the person just left to themselves.

Keep the majority questions open-ended. This will make it more likely to get answers that have a lot of detail so that you can ask supplementary questions. If most of your questions are closed-ended you'll end up getting lots of yes, no, and one word answers.

### Starting a Conversation

Commonly the most effective way to start a conversation is to talk about the current situation that both people can relate to. These opening questions will change due to where and when the conversation happens.

Examples for when opening conversation at an exhibition.

“What was interesting when you visited this exhibition before?”

“How was your journey to get here?”

“Where would you recommend we visit in the city this evening?”

“We will eat in the city tonight, what would you suggest we order?”

“How would suggest we cover the exhibition?”

When starting a conversation, the objective is not to share important impact or make a great impression, the objective is to make a connection, understand each other and create a feeling of trust that can lead to further conversation.

Many professionals need time to understand new accents, might be nervous and simply like to take their time when meeting people. Please see the ‘Working Internationally’ booklet to understand how different cultures create trust and adjust the approach to reflect how the other person will feel more comfortable.

## Have a Follow Up Question Ready

We know open questions are great ways of starting small talk but the answer to a great question needs to be ready and equally powerful. When a manager asks an open question, gets an answer and then is either stuck or switches back the conversation to a work subject that is in their interest or comfort zone then they appear insincere, false or disinterested.

Manager - "How are you?"

Staff member - "Great. I am feeling a lot better than last week."

Manager - "Good, let's review those KPIs for the team."

The staff member would think that the manager was only asking a question to open up a conversation about their goals and had not listened to them. A better conversation would have been.

Manager - "How are you (name)?"

Staff member - "Great. I am feeling a lot better than last week."

Manager - "I am glad to hear that (name), I was concerned, please let me know if you need anything this week."

If the manager really needs to arrange a meeting to discuss the KPIs then this would be better.

Manager - "How are you (name)?"

Staff member - "Great. I am feeling a lot better than last week."

Manager - "I am glad to hear that (name), I was concerned, please let me know if you need anything this week. When you have had a chance to assess your workload in the next week please let me know when we can review the KPIs for the team."

When managers ask about non-work topics asking genuinely interested follow up questions shows genuine interest.

Manager - "Do you have any hobbies outside of work?"

Staff member - "Yes, I am learning to play the guitar?"

Manager - "What type of guitar are you learning to play and why did you select it?" or "How is it going? Do you have any goals?"

Manager - "How are your family?"

Staff member - "Everyone is well, my son is taking his final school exams next month."

Manager - "That must be very stressful for him, and possibly you. How is his revision going?"

**Manager - “Do you have any hobbies outside of work?”**

**Staff member - “Yes, I am learning to play the guitar?”**

**Manager - “What type of guitar are you learning to play and why did you select it?” or “How is it going? Do you have any goals?”**

**Manager - “What do you like to read or listen to?”**

**Staff member - “Currently, I am listening to some crime stories?”**

**Manager - “That is interesting, which crime authors do you like?” or “Which platforms do you listen to audiobooks on and are there any books you can recommend?”**

**Manager - “What did you do at the weekend?”**

**Staff member - “I spent most of it building furniture from Ikea.”**

**Manager - “I hope you are better at that than I am, what pieces were you building?” or “What is your view on the instructions, follow them or use them when you get stuck?”**

## Common Small Talk Topics

### **Books**

**“What type of books do you like to read or listen to?”**

**“What’s the last good book you read?”**

**“What’s the best book you have ever read?”**

**“What books, that you have recently read, would you recommend I read?”**

**“What types of books do you think we will buy in the future, printed, eBooks or audio books?”**

**“What book would you go back and read again or more than once?”**

## Children

*This works best when both people have children so it is best to try and judge whether this will be a good or appropriate topic. Possibly it is best to wait to hear if the other person mentions children first before opening the topic.*

“Tell me about your kids?”

“How do you like to spend time with your kids?”

“How are they enjoying nursery/pre-school/school/university/work?”

“What is it like to bring up children in your city/region/country?”

“How do you find being a parent is changing?”

“What advice do you wish people had given you about being a parent?”

## Food

“Do you like to cook and if so, what do you like to cook?”

“What is your favorite type of food?”

“What types of international food do you like?”

“What apps and websites do you use to find new restaurants and dishes?”

“What food do you miss from your childhood?”

“What new food dishes have you tried recently, and would you recommend them?”

## Hobbies

“What hobbies do you have?”

“How did you start them and what was involved?”

“How much time and work does the hobby require?”

“What hobbies would you recommend me trying?”

“What hobbies would you like to try in the future?”

“If you no longer needed to work what hobbies would you take up?”

## Movies

“What are your favourite types of movies?”

“What’s your favorite movie of all time?”

“Who’s are your favorite actors / actresses and directors?”

“What’s the last good movie you saw?”

“How often are you going to the cinema?”

“If you could act in a film which film would you like to be cast in?”

## Music

“What types of music do you like?”

“What music did you enjoy when you were younger?”

“Who is your current favorite band and singer?”

“What was the last concerts you went to?”

“What’s your favorite album of all-time?”

“Do you or have you played any musical instruments?”

“What musical instruments would you like to try to play?”

“How is your singing?”

## Pets

“What type of pets do you have or have had?”

“Do you feel you are more of a dog person or a cat person?”

“What do you think about having mice/rats/snakes as pets?”

“What type and breed of pet would you like to have in the future?”

“What types of pets are popular in your city/region/country?”

“What role do you think pets play in their owners’ lives?”

## Sports

“Which sports do you like to play?”

“Why do you like playing (sport) and how long have you played it?”

“Which sports do you like to watch?”

“What teams do you like to follow?” “How often do you watch them?”

“What was the last game you went to?”

“What is your opinion about (sports player/team)?”

“Who do you think will win the (match/league/competition)?”

## Travel and Holidays

“Where do you like to travel and go on holiday?”

“What do you like about (place they traveled)?”

“Where will you go on holiday in the future?”

“What holiday resort would you recommend?”

“What’s the worst holiday resort you have been to?”

“Where would you go on holiday if you wanted to stay in your country?”

“Where would you travel if you had an unlimited budget?”

## TV

“Which TV shows do you like to watch?”

“What do you think about (TV show or series)?”

“Have you seen (TV show or series)?”

“Which new shows or series would you recommend?”

“How has your TV watching changed with the competition from Netflix?”

“What is the best series you have seen on Netflix?”

## General Tips for Small Talk

Put away your mobile, make others feel comfortable and show you are interested in their opinion. Try to start with common ground.

Respect the opinions of others and share your opinions appropriately.

Try to give yourself a chance, everyone expects awkward moments when getting to know others in small talk, it is completely normal and normally forgotten quickly.

Do not put yourself under pressure to talk too much, aim to listen 2/3 of the time and talk 1/3 of the time.

Prepare questions on a few subjects that will be effective.

Ask supplementary questions to explore topics in more depth and show your interest.

Actively listen and use friendly open body language in the same way you would if with a friend. However you feel, try to avoid your body language being seen as either nervous, aloof or scared, if your body language is not comfortable and open others will copy it. Active listening means listening attentively and then asking follow up questions to develop each topic.

Practice helps, the art of small talk can be learned through effective practice.

Use open questions such as 'Who, what, why and how' questions as they can not be answered with either a 'yes' or 'no', asking questions will keep others talking and that will help them feel more comfortable. By showing genuine interest in others managers can develop connections, trust and create a foundation for relationships.

## Topics to Avoid

Discussions about finances is seen as impolite, unpleasant and unprofessional in most cultures, such conversations may be understood as a method a manager is using to obtain information regarding someone else's salary.

Gender and sexual matters in the workplace are completely inappropriate, using language with sexual innuendo or suggestive connotations is highly likely to induce discomfort in others and may result in a report to the HR Department.

Appropriate sense of humour, particularly in the workplace, is acceptable but inappropriate, suggestive or risky jokes and stories are extremely dangerous and potentially damaging. Any humour based on politics, race, religion or sexuality, should be avoided under all circumstances.

Personal relationships and divorce, unless you are well-acquainted with your coworker, refrain from addressing this matter in the workplace. Divorce particularly is profoundly personal and can be distressing, introducing the topic may evoke very uncomfortable sentiments.

Political, religious and spiritual issues are often deep held, personal, and delicate which means they can result in offence or distress.

Physical attributes such as age, health, height and weight, and health conversations can cause offence and/or uncomfortable self-consciousness for many, plus managers making such comments will be seen as rude and unprofessional. Conversations about severe illness or death should also be avoided in most circumstances.

Rumours and gossip exists everywhere but risks damaging a manager's reputation and credibility, in addition colleagues will question whether they can be trusted.