



LESSON 2: **NETWORKING**

SMALL TALK in the USA and in the UK

TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR COMPANY



Version without a key



WARM UP

THINK ABOUT SMALL TALK.

- What is SMALL TALK for you?
- Is SMALL TALK important? Why?



READING

SMALL TALK IN THE UK

Small talk is the fuel that makes social encounters run smoothly. The British - who are resistant to intrusive questioning, prying remarks and direct interrogations - are very comfortable with small talk.

Completely safe topic areas are: the weather (inevitably); your route (though avoid becoming a motorway bore); your surroundings (admiring the garden, the view, the decor); general news (but keep it non-political); the wellbeing of mutual friends and acquaintances; children (if you have any); sport (no boasting). Asking someone "How do you know [your host]?" is an acceptable ice-breaker, but asking "What do you do?" can sometimes be seen as too direct and intrusive (a circumlocution such as "Do you work with xxxx?" is more acceptable).

Areas to be avoided are: age (it's considered rude to ask someone's age); appearance or weight (too personal, unless it's a generalised compliment - "you look well"); money (it's absolutely fatal to ask how much something cost or how much someone earns); relationships (could be seen as a pick-up); politics (too nosy); religion (potentially controversial); complaints, e.g. about the food, the seating etc. (offensive).

In general British conversation will run very smoothly if you avoid direct questions, and opt for oblique evasions and general comments. Once you've learned to decode small talk, you'll be surprised how revealing it is.

Source: <http://www.debretts.com/etiquette/british-behaviour/r-to-s/small-talk.aspx>

THE ART OF AMERICAN SMALL TALK

Small talk is a must-have skill when trying to get a job. Networking is essential and learning the art of small talk will build your confidence and make them remember you. (...)

First, you must say goodbye to shyness. You need to be open to talking to anyone! You will feel uncomfortable and a little weird, but that is part of the process of changing your normal behavior and stretching out of your comfort zone. This skill will allow you to meet more people, find more opportunities and become more successful.

Use online resources to find events, and give yourself goals for those events. Here's how to turn your small talk conversations into job offers. (...)

What do you talk about?

When you start a conversation with someone you've never met, it's important to begin with light topics—topics that couldn't possibly start an argument or cause controversy. Your goal of every conversation should be to find that mutual interest, something that you can use to build a connection with this stranger (and not antagonize him). Too often, I observe people walk directly up to another person and say, "Hi, what do you do for work?" It is best not to start a conversation this way. You can discuss professions, perhaps not right at the start. People hear that question all the time, and it isn't that memorable. Try to discuss something more fun and personal.

Any of these topics are appropriate small talk topics to discuss with Americans: *Travel, Movies, Music, Theatre, Books, Food, Entertainment, Sports, Travel.*

You might think that these topics are more useful for social settings when you're trying to make friends, but it's not true. Talking about these topics at professional events is normal and a great way to form a business connection.

There are many other topics but those are some ideas to start you off with. I especially suggest that you try discussing your travel stories. Most people enjoy traveling, be it to their cabin in the summer, or to exotic foreign cities. In that vein, any stories from abroad will be new and interesting to most and provide them with useful information. (...)

Read more on the Simply Hired Blog: <http://blog.simplyhired.com/2013/04/the-art-of-american-small-talk.html#ixzz2FYfm7qh9>

Understanding the text

Answer the questions below.

1. What general differences do you find between British and American ways of making small talk?

Complete the chart below.

Small talk topics in the USA	Small talk topics in the UK
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Travelling✓ Movies✓ Music✓ Theatre✓ Books✓ Food✓ Entertainment✓ Family✓ Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The weather✓ Your route✓ Your surroundings✓ General news✓ The wellbeing of mutual friends and acquaintances✓ Children✓ Sports

- Look at the topics. Can you see any similarities?
- What are popular small topics in Poland?
- What topics are to be avoided in the UK and why? Is it the same in Poland?
- Which topic is especially recommended to start off a conversation in the USA?



EXTENDING YOUR VOCABULARY

Exercise 1:

In the texts above find the synonym expressions for phrases or words in the chart.

remarks about private facts about a person	→		be resistant
for example an object that many people wants to own	→		opt for
cause disagreement	→		run smoothly
not willing to accept something	→		prying remarks
to choose to take or not to take a particular course of action	→		direct interrogations
a straightforward question	→		a must-have
bilateral interest	→		mutual interest
function or work without any problem or difficulty	→		cause controversy

Exercise 2

Complete the sentences with the words from the previous exercise.

smoothly	mutual	cause	opt
prying	resistant	direct	must

1. Why are you so _____ to change?
2. Lead is added to fuel to make car engines run more _____.
3. I'm sick of you _____ into my personal life!
4. It was a very _____ response.
5. There was a partnership based on _____ respect, trust and understanding.

6. Most people _____ to have the operation.
7. Drinking and driving is one of the most common _____ of traffic accidents.
8. The iPod quickly established itself as a _____ device.

☑ Exercise 3

Match the words with their antonyms.

smoothly	→		abstain
mutual	→		susceptible
cause	→		ambiguous
opt	→		ignoring
prying	→		unshared
resistant	→		result
direct	→		uneasily



PRACTICE NEW VOCABULARY

Answer the questions using the suggested words in brackets.

1. Why should you avoid asking people in Britain about their age or weight?

(prying)

2. What impression might cause a question about a relationship?

(direct)

3. What can happen when you start a conversation about religion?

(cause controversy)

4. What can happen to a conversation when you start complaining?

(stop running smoothly)



PART TWO

TALKING ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR COMPANY

☑ Exercise 1

Complete the small talk dialogue with phrases below.

- I was recommended a nice small pub nearby. Shall we go there?
- I can imagine that!
- No, not really.
- Oh, interesting. Do you travel a lot?

DIALOGUE

- Nice weather, isn't it?
- **Yes, indeed.**
- Are you doing anything after the conference?
- _____.
- Do you fancy a drink?
- **Yes, why not.**
- By the way what do you do?
- **I am an IT specialist at ABB Data. And you?**

- I am a contract negotiator for WorldTravel.
- _____?
- Oh, yes I do. I have to admit I really love it! It's my job and my hobby at the same time 😊!
- That's great! I love my job too, but sitting at the desk constantly can be daunting sometimes.
- _____!
- And how do you like it here? Do you find the conference interesting?
- Oh yes, I really enjoy it! And you?
- Me too.
- _____?
- Sure, why not!

Exercise 2

Order the phrases to the proper column.

