

Activity Type

Vocabulary Exercises: writing replies, providing vocabulary, writing questions and examples, identifying

Speaking Activity: role-play, communicative practice (pair work)

Focus

Small talk

Echo questions

Echo words

Showing interest and agreement

Wh follow-up questions

Aim

To learn techniques for keeping a conversation going and making small talk.

Preparation

Make one copy of the lesson for each student.

Level

Intermediate (B1)

Time

60 minutes

Introduction

In this small talk lesson, students learn techniques for keeping a conversation going and making small talk.

Procedure

Give each student a copy of the lesson. Begin by explaining how to use echo questions to encourage someone to speak and show interest in what they are saying. Point out that echo questions are not question tags. There is no positive-negative rule. Then, have the students complete the first exercise.

Exercise A - Answer key

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Do you? | 2. Does she? |
| 3. Did you? | 4. Is it? |

Next, go through echo words with the class. Point out that echo words can also help direct the conversation, depending on which echo word is used. Then, have the students complete Exercise B.

Exercise B - Answer key

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Italy / Next week | 2. Two hours |
| 3. Harry / A new job | 4. Sophia / Yesterday |

Then, read the expressions for showing attention and agreement and have the students brainstorm other phrases or words they could use and write them in the spaces provided.

After that, move on to asking *Wh* follow-up questions to help keep a conversation going. Give time for the students to complete Exercise C and then go through their answers.

Next, divide the students into pairs and ask them to read the mini-dialogues. Students then write examples of the techniques used by Student B to make small talk.

Exercise E - Answer key

Echo questions: *Are you? Did she? Have you?*

Echo words: *English. A new computer.*

Showing attention and agreement: *Really? How interesting.*

'Wh' follow-up questions: *Where does he teach? Where do you want to move? Why did she leave? Which brand did you buy?*

In their pairs, students then read the conversation in Exercise F and identify the small talk techniques. Students then practice the small talk techniques they have learnt in the lesson by taking it in turns to start a conversation with their partner. Students keep each conversation going for at least two minutes by asking five 'Wh' follow-up questions and using the other small talk techniques from the lesson.

An important aspect of making small talk is to encourage someone to speak and to show interest in what they are saying. The following techniques will help you accomplish this.

Echo questions

To make echo questions, repeat the verb to be, auxiliary verb, or use *do* in the correct tense if there isn't an auxiliary verb.

Examples:

A: I can speak three languages.

B: Can you?

A: They went to Japan last week.

B: Did they?



A. Reply to the statements using echo questions.

- 1. I like pop music.?
- 2. She works as an accountant.?
- 3. I went to Egypt last year.?
- 4. It's a really nice place to visit.?

Echo words

Repetition of key words back to the speaker also helps to show interest in what the speaker is saying. Echo words can also be used to direct the conversation, depending on which echo word is used.

Examples:

A: I have just brought a new sports car. It cost \$100,000.

B: \$100,000!

A: I travelled around south-east Asia for six months.

B: Six months!

B. Reply to the statements with echo words.

- 1. I'm going to Italy next week.
- 2. It took me two hours to get here.
- 3. Harry is looking for a new job.
- 4. I saw Sophia yesterday.

Showing attention and agreement

When making small talk, it's a good idea to show agreement and sound curious about what the speaker is saying. What other words can you think of to show attention and agreement?

| | | | | | | |
|---------|------|------|-----|-------|------|-----------------|
| Really? | Yeah | Uhuh | Yes | Right | Sure | How interesting |
| I see | | | | | | |

Wh follow-up questions

To keep a conversation going and to help show interest, ask *Wh* follow-up questions. Remember to use the other techniques along with asking *Wh* questions, otherwise it may sound like you are 'grilling' the other person.

Example:

I went to the hospital yesterday.

'Wh' follow-up questions:

- Really? Why was that, then?
- Which hospital did you go to?
- I see. What did the doctor say?



C. Write five Wh follow-up questions for the following statement.

I went to the cinema yesterday.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

D. Read these mini-dialogues with a partner.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| A: He teaches English. | B: English. Really? Where does he teach? |
| A: I'm thinking about moving house. | B: Are you? Where do you want to move? |
| A: She worked there for 10 years. | B: Did she? How interesting. Why did she leave? |
| A: I've bought a new computer. | B: A new computer. Have you? Which brand did you buy? |

E. Write examples of the techniques used by Student B to make small talk.

- Echo questions:
- Echo words:
- Showing attention and agreement:
- 'Wh' follow-up questions:

F. In pairs, read the conversation and identify the techniques for making small talk.

A: What do you do?

B: I'm a student.

A: Really? Where do you study?

B: At the local university.

A: That's interesting. Do you like studying there?

B: Yes, I just started last week.

A: Last week. Not long then. What are you studying?

B: I'm studying business administration.

A: Are you? I studied that too. What do you want to do when you graduate?

B: I'm not sure yet. I might start my own business.

A: Right. That's a good idea. What kind of business?

B: I want to open my own coffee shop.



G. In pairs, take it in turns to start a conversation by asking a question to your partner. Keep each conversation going for at least two minutes by asking five *Wh* follow-up questions. Don't forget to also use the other small talk techniques you have learnt in this lesson.

1. Where do you live?

2. What are you going to do at the weekend?

3. Do you like going to the cinema?

4. Have you ever been abroad?

5. How long have you studied English?

6. Where do you come from?

7. How do you come to class?

8. Where did you go on your last holiday?

9. What's your favourite food?

10. What do you do when you're not working/studying?

