

Mastering the art of small talk at work

1. What is small talk?

Discuss these questions with a partner:

- What is **small talk**? Why do people do it?
- When and where do you usually make small talk at work? (e.g., by the coffee machine, in the lift)
- What topics are "safe" for small talk with colleagues?
- What topics should you avoid?

2. Vocabulary: Small talk topics

Match the topics on the left with the questions or comments on the right.

1. The weekend	a. "Did you manage to avoid the traffic this morning?"
2. The weather	b. "I can't believe it's nearly Friday already! Any nice plans?"
3. Commuting	c. "Wow, this coffee is strong today! Just what I need."
4. Upcoming plans	d. "How was your weekend? Did you do anything fun?"

5. Office life

e. "I hope the rain holds off later. I forgot my umbrella."

3. At the coffee machine: A typical conversation

Read the dialogue between two colleagues, Anna and Ben. Then answer the questions below.

Anna: Morning, Ben. How was your weekend?

Ben: Morning, Anna! It was good, thanks. Pretty relaxing. I just stayed at home and watched a few movies. What about you? Did you do anything special?

Anna: I went hiking with some friends on Saturday. We drove to the national park. The weather was beautiful!

Ben: Oh, that sounds fantastic! I haven't been hiking in ages.

Anna: You should go! Anyway, big week ahead? Any important meetings?

Ben: Not really, just the usual team meeting on Wednesday. I'm going to try to finish the monthly report by Thursday.

Anna: Good luck with that! Well, I should get back to my desk. Catch you later!

Ben: You too. Have a good day!

Comprehension questions:

1. What did Ben do on the weekend?
2. What did Anna do?
3. What is Ben's main plan for the week?

4. How does Anna end the conversation?

4. Grammar focus: Talking about the past and future

We use the **Past Simple** to talk about completed actions in the past, like what you did last weekend.

- "How **was** your weekend?"
- "I **watched** a few movies."
- "We **drove** to the national park."

We use **be going to** to talk about our future plans and intentions.

- "I'm **going to try** to finish the report."
- "**Are you going to see** the new film?"

Grammar practice 1: Past simple

Complete the sentences with the Past Simple form of the verb in brackets.

1. I _____ (have) a very busy weekend.
2. They _____ (not go) to the office party on Friday.
3. _____ you _____ (see) the football match yesterday?
4. She _____ (buy) a new car last week.
5. We _____ (try) that new Italian restaurant, but it was closed.

Grammar practice 2: Going to

Complete the sentences with the correct form of **be going to** and the verb in brackets.

1. I _____ (start) a new project next week.
2. We _____ (have) a team lunch on Friday.
3. He _____ (not / attend) the meeting tomorrow.
4. What _____ you _____ (do) for the public holiday?
5. They _____ (move) to a new office in September.

5. Useful phrases for everyday small talk

Study these phrases. Which ones can you use to start a conversation? Which ones can you use to respond?

Starting a conversation (Monday):

- "How was your weekend?"
- "Did you have a good weekend?"
- "Did you get up to anything interesting?"

Starting a conversation (Friday):

- "Any plans for the weekend?"
- "Got anything nice planned for the weekend?"
- "Looking forward to the weekend?"

Showing interest:

- "Oh, really?"
- "That sounds nice/interesting/fun."
- "How was it?"

Ending a conversation:

- "Anyway, I should get back to it."
- "Well, I'll let you get on."
- "Catch you later!" / "Speak to you later!"

6. Let's talk! Role-play scenarios

Work with a partner. Choose one of the scenarios below and have a short small talk conversation. Use the grammar and phrases from this lesson. Try to keep the conversation going for at least one minute.

Scenario 1: Monday morning

You meet your colleague in the kitchen while making coffee.

- **Student A:** Start the conversation. Ask about their weekend.
- **Student B:** Respond and ask about their weekend.
- **Both:** Show interest and end the conversation politely.

Scenario 2: Friday afternoon

You are both finishing work for the day.

- **Student A:** Start the conversation. Ask about their plans for the weekend.
- **Student B:** Tell them your plans and ask them about theirs.
- **Both:** Wish each other a good weekend.

Scenario 3: Waiting for a meeting

You and your colleague arrive early for a meeting. You have a few minutes to talk.

- **Student A:** Start a conversation about the weather or your commute today.
- **Student B:** Respond and ask a follow-up question.

- **Both:** Talk until your 'manager' (the teacher) arrives to start the meeting.