

Lesson 39, Small Talk

C1 - Advanced

Who is here today?

You have 30 seconds to introduce yourself to the group and answer the questions.

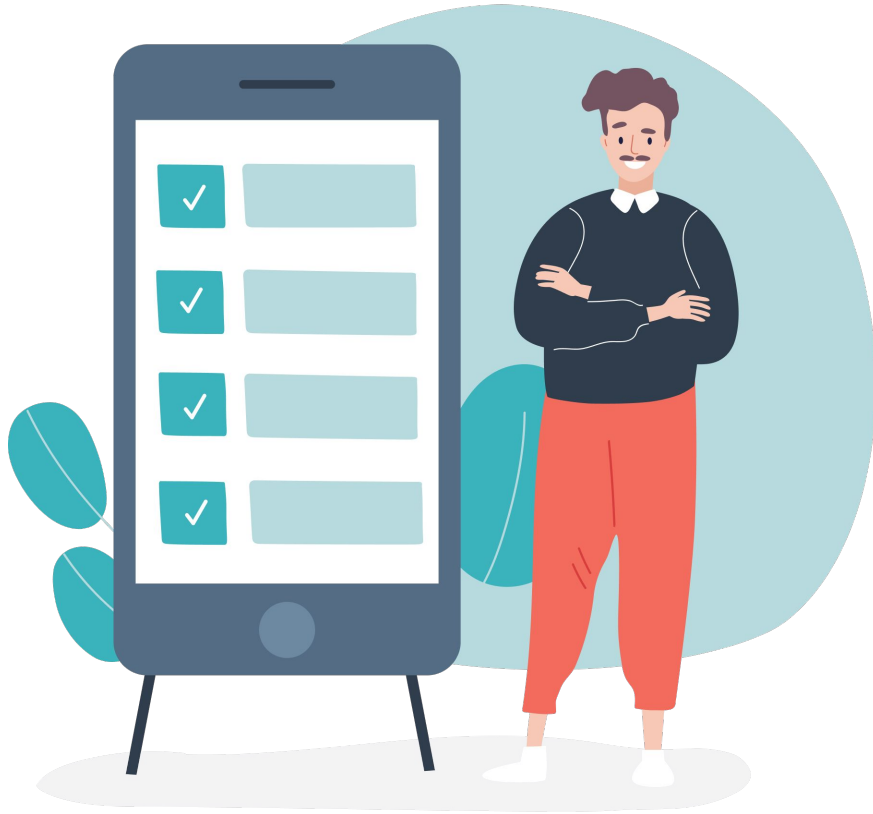
- How long have you been taking classes on Preply?
- When did you last have to maintain small talk, and how did it feel?

Pre-lesson task

Which task did you find easy/difficult?

Do you have any questions?





Lesson objectives

Communication focus

Open and close casual conversations

Grammar focus

Pseudo-cleft sentences for emphasis

Lesson structure

1. Warm-up
2. Group discussion: Innate or learned?
3. Grammar presentation: Pseudo-cleft sentences
4. Controlled practice: Pseudo-cleft sentences
5. Pair work: Hone your skills
6. Review, feedback and error correction

Additional activities are available for use at any time during the lesson.

- Reading
- Group discussion: Grice's maxims
- Roleplay
- Roleplay

Resource links

- [Pre lesson](#) - Reading
- Breakout room slides - <https://bit.ly/3pWnd8r>
- [Post lesson](#) - Reading
- Tutor notes - <https://bit.ly/33oIVKp>

Warm-up

Warm up your English in 5 minutes!

Imagine you are at a dinner party with friends and acquaintances. Brainstorm 4 small talk topics that would be:

1. Appropriate and relevant
2. Potential minefields



Group discussion: Innate or learned?

Meeting new people can be nerve-racking even for the most sociable of us. Finding an opening gambit that doesn't sound either dull or creepy can be a cause of deep anxiety for many of us, whether we are making new friends, talking with co-workers or waiting in line. Successfully engaging in small talk is not necessarily an innate skill, which may explain why a multitude of self-help books claiming to help improve small talk skills flood the market every year.

1. Do you believe that the ability to make small talk is an innate skill, or can it be learned?
 - a. Share an example that justifies your response.
2. Have you ever, or would you ever, take a course that promises to improve your small talk abilities?
 - a. What do you find most difficult about engaging in small talk?
 - b. What difference would it make if your ability to engage in small talk were improved?

Key language

nerve-racking

multitude

opening gambit

flood the market

innate

Grammar presentation: Pseudo-cleft sentences

Cleft sentences can be utilized to add emphasis. A popular type of pseudo-cleft sentence begins with *wh-* words. These cleft structures draw a listener's attention to what you feel is most important.

For example:

Emphasize a preference

Original: I like that remote working means I have the ability to work from anywhere.

-> *What I really like about remote working is (that) I have the ability to work from anywhere.*

Emphasize an event

Original: I was late due to the fact that I hit a huge amount of traffic.

-> *What happened was (that) I hit a huge amount of traffic and was late.*

Pseudo clefts act like signs. A listener quickly knows the type of information you will share. This is followed by specific details.

1. What do you notice about the clausal structures in the example sentences?
2. Does your language have a similar structure for adding emphasis?

Controlled practice: Pseudo-cleft sentences

Consider how the following pseudo-cleft sentences draw focus to different elements.

1. Which element does each focus in on?
 2. What is the main verb structure in each?
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- A. **What** I need now is a refreshing beverage.
 - B. **Why** I want to go can be understood if you just look at this picture.
 - C. **Where** we will end up has yet to be determined.

Complete the following sentences with something that is true for you.

1. What I need now is...
2. What happened was...
3. Why I would like...
4. Where...

Pair work: Hone your skills

Making an effort to improve your small talk skills can help to build your confidence so you can make a connection in both social and professional settings.

Look at the topics below and choose 1 to 3 that spark your interest, and engage in small talk. Use pseudo-cleft sentences where appropriate.

Weather

Nature

Traffic

Celebrity gossip

Traveling

Arts

Hometown

Entertainment

Technology

Hobbies

Work

Sport



Key language

What I like most about... is...

What happened to me was...

Why I prefer... is...

Where I would... is...

Breakout room slides - <https://bit.ly/3pWnd8r>

Review and feedback

On a scale of 1-5, reflect on your competency level in the target areas.



Communication

How well can you open and close casual conversations?

Grammar

How well can you use pseudo-cleft sentences for emphasis?

Vocabulary

What flashcards will you create with new words from today's lesson?

Do you need more practice?

- Speaking: Sign up for this lesson again
- Consolidation: [Post lesson](#) - Reading
 - Fill in the gaps for the small talk conversation

Error correction

Challenge!

Make small talk with someone in English!



What should I do next?

Be part of the most supportive and satisfied learning community by being an amazing Preply student!

1. Download the Preply app: [App Store](#), [Google Play](#)
2. Leave a review for this lesson to help your fellow Preply students.
3. [Book](#) your next lessons.
4. Do your [Post lesson](#) - Reading. This will help you retain all the information you covered today!
5. Do your [Pre lesson](#) - Listening for Lesson 40. This will help you participate more confidently in the lesson.
6. Practice your new vocabulary from your flashcards.



Top tips for making the most of your Preply group lessons!

- Take weekly lessons to accelerate your learning.
- Work through the lessons sequentially. Each lesson builds on knowledge from the previous lesson.
- Take time between lessons to complete the pre- and post-lesson activities and review your learnings.
- Speak up! Your Preply tutor is excited to hear you use the language and help you. Participate as much as possible in discussions.
- Get to know your fellow Preply students; they are on the same journey as you! Help each other!

Reading

Think fast! Can you fill in the gaps in less than 1 minute?

Write your answers in the chat.

There are a (1)_____ of situations in which we may find ourselves in the position of needing to make small talk. Whereas some people seem to have an (2)_____ ability to charm the socks off anyone, for many of us mere mortals, small talk can be utterly (3)_____. It's not just the task of finding an appropriate opening (4)_____ that won't make the other person want to run for the hills; it can also be daunting to find topics of conversation that aren't potential (5)_____.

- A. nerve-racking
- B. gambit
- C. innate
- D. multitude
- E. minefields

Group discussion: Grice's maxims

In order to maintain a solid level of small talk, there are specific rules to follow: turn-taking, question asking, clarity, and not talking for too long. The philosopher H.P. Grice outlined some useful maxims to help us in our conversational abilities.

1. **The maxim of quantity**, where one tries to be as informative as one possibly can and gives as much information as is needed and no more.
2. **The maxim of quality**, where one tries to be truthful and does not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence.
3. **The maxim of relation**, where one tries to be relevant and says things that are pertinent to the discussion.
4. **The maxim of manner**, when one tries to be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as one can in what one says and where one avoids obscurity and ambiguity.

1. How well do you stick to Grice's maxims when making small talk?
2. Which maxims are you most likely to break? How and why?

Key language

pertinent
obscurity
ambiguity
orderly

Roleplay

Role A

It the first day of a course on one of your passions (photography, creative writing, graphic design, etc.). You and a fellow student are early for the class. You haven't met before. Introduce yourself!

Role B

It the first day of a course on one of your passions (photography, creative writing, graphic design, etc.). You and a fellow student are early for the class. You haven't met before. Introduce yourself!



Key language

Let me introduce myself

Why I'm here is...

May I ask why you chose to participate in this course?

What I like most about... is...

Where I see this taking me is...

Roleplay

Role A

You have been standing in a long line and making small talk with one of your neighbors who is someone you have spoken to only a handful of times. It's your turn to be served. Wrap up your conversation and politely excuse yourself.

Role B

You have been enjoying getting to know your neighbor while waiting in line. They are excusing themselves, but you'd still like to get a few details from them so you can contact them more easily in the future. Be polite, but don't let the conversation end too quickly.

Key language

Let's speak soon, OK?

It's been great to chatting with you.

Looks like I'm next.

I've gotta run.

Let's catch up again soon.

Just one second more, if I could.

Breakout room slides - <https://bit.ly/3pWnd8r>