

## Activity Type

Vocabulary Exercises:  
writing replies, providing  
vocabulary, categorising,  
writing questions,  
identifying

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

## Focus

Small talk techniques:

Echo questions

Echo words

Showing attention and  
agreement

Wh follow-up questions

## Aim

To learn and practice  
small talk techniques.

## Preparation

Make one copy of the  
three-page worksheet for  
each student.

## Level

Intermediate (B1)

## Time

60 minutes

## Introduction

In this small talk worksheet, students learn four techniques to make small talk and keep a conversation going.

## Procedure

Give each student a copy of the three-page worksheet.

First, students read about using echo questions to encourage someone to speak and show interest in what they are saying.

Students then reply to statements using echo questions.

### Exercise A - Answer key

1. Do you?
2. Can you?
3. Does she?
4. Have you?
5. Did you?

Next, students learn about echo words and how they can help direct a conversation. Students then reply to statements with echo words and a comment or question.

### Exercise B - Possible answers

1. Mountains? That must be breathtaking.
2. Two hours! That's so long.
3. Three cats. That's awesome. I love animals.
4. A band? That's so cool! What kind of music?
5. A big project. What kind of project?

After that, students read words and phrases to show attention and agreement and write other words and phrases they know in boxes.

### Exercise C - Possible answers

I know, right?	That makes sense.
For sure!	I get it.
Absolutely!	That's a good point.
I understand.	I hear you.
That's true.	You're right.
No kidding!	That's interesting.

(continued on the next page)

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## Procedure continued

Students then move on to practice asking *Wh* follow-up questions to help keep a conversation going by writing five *Wh* follow-up questions for a statement.

Exercise C - Possible answers

Wow, how was the view from up there?  
 Where did you go on the ride?  
 How did you feel?  
 How long did the ride last?  
 What was the most exciting part of the experience?

Next, in pairs, students read mini-dialogues and categorise the phrases to make small talk according to the techniques.

Exercise E - Answer key

Echo questions:	Echo words:	Attention and agreement:
Are you?	Paris?	How interesting.
Have you?	Running?	That's cool.
		Really?

Wh follow-up questions:  
 What did you do there?  
 What kind of hobby are you interested in?  
 How far do you usually run?  
 What book was it?

Following that, students read a small talk conversation with their partner and identify the techniques for making small talk.

Echo Questions:	Echo Words:	Attention and Agreement:
Are you?	Downtown?	That sounds interesting.
Do you?	Two years!	That's awesome.
Is it?	A mobile app?	That's exciting.
		Sounds useful!
		Right. Sounds promising!

Wh follow-up questions:  
 Where do you work?  
 Do you enjoy working there?  
 How long have you been working there?  
 What kind of projects are you working on?  
 What kind of app is it?  
 Do you think it will be popular?

Finally, students take turns asking a question to their partner and keeping the conversation going for two minutes using the four small talk techniques.

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

## Echo questions

To make echo questions, repeat the verb *to be*, the auxiliary verb, or use *do/does/did* in the correct tense if there is no auxiliary verb in the original statement. Then, add the correct pronoun.

Example:

A: My boss lives there too.

B: Does he?

### A. Reply to the statements using echo questions.

1. I like spicy food .....?
2. I can speak Japanese. ....?
3. My wife plays the piano. ....?
4. I've just started a new job. ....?
5. I just got back from a short trip to Spain. ....?



## Echo words

Repeating keywords back to the speaker helps to show interest in what they are saying. Echo words can also guide or direct the conversation by focusing on certain topics and signaling the speaker to continue, depending on which echo word is used.

Example:

A: I travelled around Thailand for six months. B: Six months! That's a long time.

### B. Reply to the statements with echo words and a comment or question.

1. I love hiking in the mountains. ....
2. It took me two hours to get here. ....
3. I've got three cats at home. ....
4. I actually play in a band on weekends. ....
5. I've just finished a big project at work. ....

## 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 or phrases can you think of to show attention and agreement?

<i>Really?</i>	<i>Definitely</i>	<i>Exactly</i>	<i>Totally</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Sure</i>	<i>How interesting</i>
<i>I get it.</i>						

### Wh follow-up questions

To keep a conversation going and show interest, ask *Wh* follow-up questions (*who, what, where, when, why, how*). These types of questions encourage the speaker to give more detailed answers, helping the conversation flow naturally.

Example: I went to a museum yesterday.

*Wh* follow-up questions: Really? What museum did you go to?  
That's interesting. Which exhibit did you see?  
That's great. What time did you get there?



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

I went on a hot air balloon ride yesterday.

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

### D. Read these mini-dialogues with a partner.

- A: I just got back from a trip to Paris.      B: Paris? How interesting. What did you do there?
- A: I'm thinking of starting a new hobby.      B: Are you? What kind of hobby are you interested in?
- A: I started running in the mornings.      B: Running? That's cool. How far do you usually run?
- A: I've just finished reading a great book.      B: Have you? Really? What book was it?

### E. Categorise the phrases used by Speaker B to make small talk.

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

**F. Read the small talk conversation with your partner, identify the techniques for making small talk and make notes on your answers.**

A: What do you do for work?

B: I'm a software developer.

A: Are you? That sounds interesting. Where do you work?

B: I work at a tech company downtown.

A: Downtown? That must be convenient! Do you enjoy working there?

B: Yeah, it's great. I like the team and the projects we're working on.

A: Do you? That's awesome. How long have you been working there?

B: I've been there for about two years now.

A: Two years! It seems like you're settled in. What kind of projects are you working on?

B: We're working on developing a new mobile app.

A: A mobile app? That's exciting. What kind of app is it?

B: It's an app to help people with time management.

A: Is it? Sounds useful! Do you think it will be popular?

B: I hope so! The team is really passionate about it.

A: Right. Sounds promising!



**G. Now, take turns asking a question to your partner. Then, keep the conversation going for two minutes using the four small talk techniques.**

1. Where do you live?

2. What do you like doing at the weekend?

3. What languages can you speak?

4. Have you ever been abroad?

5. How long have you studied English?

6. Where do you come from?

7. How do you get 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 or studying?

