

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.

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| 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: *English.*

Showing attention and agreement: *Really?*

'Wh' follow-up questions: *Where does he teach?*

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?