

Small Talk

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Small talk refers to an informal, polite conversation that often focuses on unimportant topics. Learning to make small talk can help build the confidence you need to start conversations, make connections, and develop your social skills.¹ Even if you are uncomfortable, avoiding small talk altogether only serves to worsen anxiety in the long run.

Rather than being scared of small talk, make a point of overcoming your fear of it. One good way to alleviate anxiety is to know what things to talk about and what to avoid.

Best Topics

- Weather
- Arts and entertainment
- Sports
- Family
- Food
- Work
- Travel
- Celebrity gossip
- Hobbies
- Hometown

Worst Topics

- Finances
- Politics and religion
- Sex
- Death
- Appearance
- Personal gossip
- Offensive jokes
- Narrow topics
- Past relationships
- Health

Weather

Although talking about the weather may seem mundane, it is a good neutral topic that everyone can discuss. Such as:

Lovely day, don't you think?

Looks like rain is in the forecast.

Did you order this beautiful weather?

Arts and Entertainment

Arts and entertainment topics that are good conversation starters include:

- Movies and television shows
- Popular restaurants
- Popular music
- Books

Examples of things you might ask are:

- Are you reading any great books? I could use some recommendations.
- Are there any podcasts you love?
- Have you tried any [new apps](#) or games lately that you really like? I could use some suggestions.

Remember that small talk is about building a bridge between you and another person. It doesn't matter so much what you talk about, but rather that you [start talking](#).

Sports

Sports topics are good things to talk about with people you don't know very well. They can include:

- Favorite or local teams
- Sporting events

Family

People are likely to ask you about your family. Conversation starters about family may include:

- **Do you have any brothers or sisters?**
- **How long have you been with your partner?**
- **Where does your family live?**

Be prepared for these types of questions and reciprocate by asking others about their families. Engaging in this type of small talk displays your communication skills. It also helps you learn a lot about a person in a short period of time.

Food

Food can be a great topic for small talk as long as you keep it neutral and [focus on the positive](#). You might ask someone for recommendations for local restaurants, ask what their favorite dish to order is, or if they enjoy cooking at home.

Some examples of food-based topics include:

- **Have you tried any new restaurants lately?**
- **What's your favorite meal to cook at home?**
- **Do you have any ideas for good work lunches? I'm out of ideas and I'm sick of sandwiches.**

As with other conversation starters, stick to positive topics and [avoid complaining](#) about foods you dislike.

Worst Small Talk Topics

Once you know a few good conversation starters, it's helpful to also recognize what type of small talk topics you're better off avoiding.

Finances

Asking personal financial questions of people you've just met is inappropriate. It is fine to ask what someone does for work or the positive aspects of that career, but do not ask about their salary.

Politics and Religion

The problem with talking about politics is that you never know who in the crowd may have strong opinions. Stay away from this topic unless you want to risk ending up in the middle of a heated conversation. Religion is another extremely personal and sensitive topic that should be avoided.

Sex

Talking about sex or asking questions of an intimate nature is inappropriate during small talk. When talking with strangers, avoid talking openly about sexual topics. Both are likely to make others uncomfortable.

Death

Death is another heavy topic that should be avoided during small talk. When you are in the company of strangers, do not bring up emotional topics that have the potential to be upsetting.

Appearance

Unless you know someone well, don't ask their age. Although the question might seem simple to you, it can be a hot topic for some.

In addition, avoid questions related to [appearance](#). Do not ask anyone if they are pregnant or comment that they have lost weight. You never know

the reason for weight gain or loss and, as a result, could be left in an uncomfortable situation.

Personal Gossip

While celebrity gossip is fair game during small talk, gossip about people you know personally is not.² Gossiping about others not only paints you in a bad light but you never know who might know each other.

Offensive Jokes

Sometimes people make jokes they don't realize might offend others. If the joke pokes fun at someone due to their race, culture, or sex, skip it.