

Oliver

Hi there, my name is Oliver and I'm the founder of the Advanx School of Languages. The topic I would like to talk about today is small talk. By the way, in English you don't have small talk, you **make small talk**. You might think, hey, piece of cake. I'm doing that nonstop. Or you might even say, what a waste of time. When I speak, I want to give only relevant information. The truth is, like always, somewhere in the middle.

Oliver

Small talk is important and it helps you to level and feel comfortable with your counterpart. You can get a first impression what type of person you're speaking with. Then you're able to adapt and change your communication style, especially if you're a non-native speaker. It also gives you time to get used to the other person's accent and speed. So, I'm not alone here today for the podcast.

Oliver: Hi, Bridget. So nice to see you. How are you?

Bridget: I'm fine, thanks, Oliver. And you?

Oliver: I'm fine, too. How was your flight?

Bridget: It was actually not too bad, although there was a little delay due to the weather.

Oliver: **So, talking about the weather. What was the weather like back home?**

Bridget: Poof. It's pretty hot. And I'm so glad that we have air conditioning everywhere. I suppose a heater is more important over here.

Oliver: Wow. Did you notice this was a typical example of two people having a casual conversation or small talk?

Oliver

Bridget, so you're American. Why is small talk so important for you?

Bridget

Small talk is important to get a feel for the other person who you're speaking with, to ease into a discussion with them and honestly to avoid silence and awkwardness.

Oliver

So which topics are usually covered during a small talk? And could you give me some sample questions?

Bridget

Sure. **Weather** is a big small talk topic, such as just how's the weather been here recently? **Health** is also often discussed with a simple question like, how have you been lately? We also discuss work and location. Like you're from New York, aren't you? I was there last year. It's a lovely place. **Travel and transport**. Something so simple, like did you fly direct from New York talking about work in general or free time hobbies and sports? Some quite simple questions like, are you into **sports** or what do you do in your **free time**? Talking about **holidays**, where have you vacationed lately? Or **food and drinks** like I love Italian food. What is your favorite? And discussing sports. Like what's your favorite soccer team?

Oliver

All right. And one of the most important things during small talk is the ability to keep the conversation going. So, make sure that you ask open questions and not these typically yes and no questions. For example, if you ask, "Do you like music?" The other person could simply say, "Yes". And then you have to come up with another topic right away. So, it's better to ask instead, "What kind of music do you like?" The answer, it could be, "Pop music." And then you can continue with this topic.

Oliver

Bridget, could you tell me what active listening is?

Bridget

Active listening is, when you listen to your counterpart, it's really important to give feedback to the speaker. Silence in a conversation makes the other person usually uncomfortable. So active listening is very important. You can say things like.

I see.

Right.

Oh, that's interesting.

Didn't know that.

Oh, really?

Why was that?

Sounds great.

All right.

Oliver

And are there some topics that should not be discussed in small talk?

Bridget

Absolutely. Some topics that should be avoided during small talk are religion, politics and highly controversial topics and really private things.

Oliver

Should you answer small talk questions, honestly?

Bridget

No, not really. Because it's not about information exchange. So, if somebody asks you how you are. He doesn't really expect a detailed health report. You can indicate certain feelings like. I'm great. I'm fine. Thank you. And if that's not the case, you could just say I'm OK.

Oliver

And many people worry about grammar and accent and pronunciation is that a problem for a native speaker.

Bridget

Not at all. People appreciate when somebody is trying to speak their language and grammar does not have to be perfect to be able to understand what a person is trying to say.

Oliver

So, would you make small talk, even with strangers, people you don't know, shop assistants, receptionist, cab drivers?

Bridget

Absolutely. It never hurts to make small talk and you never know what you might learn from somebody or if you get some good tips out of it.

Oliver:

The communication style of Germans and Americans are quite different. The American style is compared to a peach and the German style to a coconut. Could you explain that please Bridget?

Bridget:

Of course, Oliver. Germans are often impressed with the friendliness of the Americans. It seems like a friendship right from the start. Everything is great, fantastic, wonderful or awesome. Some even invite strangers directly into their homes. "You should come and visit us at home." Do they really mean it? The answer is probably no. Germans are then confused and believe that Americans are very superficial. They are like peaches, very soft on the outside, but very hard inside. Some say it's hard to make good friends. Americans on the other hand feel a slight unfriendliness towards strangers. Germans are much less inviting and have larger private sphere. But once you got to know somebody a bit closer, it's much easier to become friends. Like a coconut the outside is much harder, but when you get to the core, they are very friendly and helpful.

Oliver

All right. Small talk is also used at the end of conversations. You can close the conversation like:

"It was so great meeting you."

"Let's keep in touch."

"It was a real pleasure meeting you."

"Have a safe journey back."

"I look forward to meeting you again."

"Take care."

Oliver

Thank you. That's all for today.

So please have a look at the script below and do the following exercises. As always, you can download your certificate, if you answer all the questions correctly.

Thank you Bridget for joining me today in this podcast. For more information, please send a mail to podcasts@advanx.de. See you later. Bye, bye.