

Socializing by Gary Jones

Age:	Adults
Level:	Upper intermediate
Time:	90 mins
Aim:	To practise making small talk; to learn lexis for active listening
Key skills:	Speaking
Materials:	One copy of the worksheet per student; enough role cards for one per student, cut up; tracks 1–3 downloaded from onestopenglish

Procedure

- Hand out the worksheet. Ask students to answer the question in Activity 1. They could do this individually and then you could check the answers with the whole class or by asking them to vote for the correct answer by putting up their hands.

Key: *b*

- Ask students to read through Activity 2 and discuss their answers with a partner. Conduct class feedback when they have finished.

Key: *You would almost certainly use small talk in situation b. For situation f, the answer depends on the individual and the culture they find themselves in. For situations a, c, d and e, small talk is quite likely but would usually take place before and after the main business.*

- Tell students that everyone has their own opinion about small-talk topics and whether or not they enjoy talking about them. Ask them to add more topics to the table in Activity 3, both topics they consider 'good' for small talk and topics they consider 'bad' for small talk. When they have finished, get them to compare their answers in groups of three or four.

Key (suggested answers):
'good' topics

*your surroundings/the venue
holiday plans/plans for the evening or weekend
give compliments (e.g. That's a lovely bag.)
the food and drink at the party/venue
films, TV shows, music*

'bad' topics

politics

religion

personal financial questions

offensive jokes

- Tell the class that they're going to make small talk in their groups. Before they begin, ask them to complete the table in Activity 4 with two things they want to talk about and two things they *don't* want to talk about. They should not allow the other group members to see what they've written. Any topic they do not write in either column will, for the purposes of the activity, be in the 'neutral zone'.

When they've finished, tell them to read the guidelines and then let them begin small talking. Draw a close to the activity when they seem to be finding it harder to keep talking or when you've run out of time.

- The next part of the lesson is on active listening, which is when you offer feedback of some sort to the speaker to show them that you are listening and that you're interested in what they're saying. It also encourages the conversation to continue.

Tell students to read through the active-listening phrases in Activity 5. Model and drill the phrases.

Next, students should discuss with a partner which of the phrases they would use to respond to statements a to d. Point out that one of the statements could be either positive or negative, depending on the viewpoint of the speaker.

Key: *a. negative; b. positive; c. positive or negative (The speaker may have wanted the promotion.); d. positive*

- In Activity 6, students will hear six more statements and should take turns with their partner to respond appropriately. Play track 1, pausing after each statement.

Listening script

- My wife's going to have a baby!*
- Manchester United have just won the Champion's League!*
- I didn't get the job I was going for.*
- Apparently, it's going to be 35 degrees tomorrow.*
- I've just seen on the news that there's been a plane crash.*
- There's going to be a party tonight!*

7. Tell the students that other approaches to active listening include providing short questions to express interest and indicating similarity or contrast to what has been said. Ask for volunteers to read out the two dialogues in Activity 7, which demonstrate these approaches.

Now ask students to study the table, before covering the four shaded columns and taking turns with their partner to say the sentences in the first column and respond truthfully. Tell them that they should give extra information too. For example:

A: He's Spanish.

B: Is he? I'm not. I'm Hungarian.

8. Activity 8 shows some more direct ways of getting the speaker to continue talking. Drill the phrases.

Now tell the students that they are going to hear a story. When you pause the audio, they should take it in turns with their partner to use one of the phrases from Activity 8. Play track 2 – follow along using the listening script below – and pause the audio where indicated to allow students time to respond.

Listening script

You won't believe what happened to me yesterday.

[pause]

A woman ran into the back of my car! I was waiting at red traffic lights when suddenly I heard a loud crash and I was pushed forward. I got out of my car and said, 'Look at what you've done!'

[pause]

She said she was really sorry and that she hadn't been concentrating.

[pause]

Well, I gave her my insurance details. She seemed very upset and started crying.

[pause]

I told her not to worry, that the insurance would sort it all out. It was then that she told me she wasn't insured.

Key: *pause 1: Go on.; pause 2: And what did she say? / So how did she respond to that?; pause 3: So what happened next? / So then what happened? / What did you do next? / So then what did you do?; pause 4: What did you do next? / So then what did you do?*

9. In the next activity, students should form groups of three or four and take it in turns to tell a story

of something that happened to them, to someone they know or to a character in a book or film. Other members of the group should use phrases from Activity 8 that encourage the speaker to continue.

10. Explain to students that sometimes they may wish to join or leave a conversation. Activity 10 has sentences they can use for this. First, they should rearrange the words to make sentences, then decide which are for joining (they write *J* in the box) and which are for leaving (they write *L* in the box). Play track 3 so students can check their answers.

Listening script

1. *Well, I really must be running along.*

2. *Oh, my word. Look at the time.*

3. *Mind if I join you?*

4. *Did I hear someone talking about ...?*

5. *Sorry, have to dash.*

6. *Excuse me, are you here for the conference?*

Key: 1. *Well, I really must be running along. (L);* 2. *Oh, my word. Look at the time. (L);* 3. *Mind if I join you? (J);* 4. *Did I hear someone talking about ...? (J);* 5. *Sorry, have to dash. (L);* 6. *Excuse me, are you here for the conference? (J)*

The students are now going to take part in a role play. Put them into groups of four and give one role card to each member of each group. Give the **Student C** card to the most advanced student.

Check that the students understand their roles. Ensure that **Student D** stands or sits apart from the group at the beginning of the role play. Explain that **Student D** should only join the conversation when you shout *Join!* and that **Student B** should leave the conversation when you shout *Leave!* Students A, B and C begin the conversation. Let the role play begin. After about two minutes call out *Join!* After about another five minutes call out *Leave!* Ensure that the role play continues for at least another two minutes.

The role play can still be done with more than four students to a group, by having more than one **Student A**. If you have only three students to a group, leave out the **Student A** card.

Depending on time, you might want to repeat the role play, with the students taking different roles.

Activity 1

What is small talk? Choose the correct answer.

- a. a very short conversation
- b. conversation about light topics such as the weather
- c. a conversation in which the speakers use only very short sentences

Activity 2

How likely are you to use small talk in each of the situations below? Discuss your answers with a partner.

- a. a business meeting
- b. a party
- c. a presentation
- d. a conference
- e. a job interview
- f. a bus or train



Activity 3

Add more 'good' and 'bad' small-talk topics to the table (according to your own opinion). Then compare your lists in small groups.



'good' topics	'bad' topics
current affairs	your love life
the weather	the football results

Activity 4

You're going to make small talk with your group. First, complete the table below but don't let your group see what you've written.

 2 things I want to talk about	neutral zone	 2 things I don't want to talk about

Now, read these guidelines before beginning to make small talk with your group.

- Try to talk about your  topics as much as possible.
- If someone is talking about one of your  topics, change the subject as soon as you can.
- If the conversation is in the **neutral zone**, continue talking until you become bored, then change the topic to one of your topics.

Activity 5

If someone says something which is very positive, happy or pleasing, you can say:

Really? That's amazing! That's incredible!
 That's fantastic! You're joking! You're kidding!

If someone says something strongly negative, sad or disappointing, you can say:

Really? Oh no! That's awful! That's terrible!

How would you respond to the following statements? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

- My company are making 500 people redundant, me included.
- I'm getting married next month!
- Hey, guess what? John's been promoted to manager!
- Hey, did I tell you I won that huge order I was telling you about?

Activity 6

Listen to some more statements and take turns to respond appropriately.

Activity 7

Read the following dialogues.

A: That man standing at the bar is Spanish.
 B: Is he? So am I! I must talk to him.

A: I'd love to go to Brazil!
 B: Me too! I'd love it! Imagine all that samba!
 C: Would you? I wouldn't. It's too hot for me.

Study the table below for one minute, then cover the four shaded columns. In pairs, take turns saying the sentences in the first column, with your partner responding truthfully.

sentence	question	similarity		contrast
He's Spanish.	Is he?	So am I.	Me too.	I'm not.
She isn't working at the moment.	Isn't she?	Neither am I.	Me neither.	Oh, I am.
I like football.	Do you?	So do I.	Me too.	I don't (I'm afraid).
I don't like horror movies.	Don't you?	Neither do I.	Me neither.	Oh, I do.
I've been to China.	Have you?	So have I.	Me too.	I haven't.
I haven't seen the Bond film yet.	Haven't you?	Neither have I.	Me neither.	Oh, I have.
I'd love to go to Brazil.	Would you?	So would I.	Me too.	I wouldn't.
I wouldn't eat raw fish.	Wouldn't you?	Neither would I.	Me neither.	Oh, I would.

Activity 8

If someone is telling a story, there are more direct ways of encouraging the speaker to continue. For example:

Go on.

So what happened next? / So then what happened?

What did you do next? / So then what did you do?

And what did she say? / So how did she respond to that?

Listen to someone telling a story. When your teacher pauses the audio, use one of the phrases above.

Activity 9

Take turns to tell a story about something that happened to:

you

someone you know

a character in a book or film.

Other members of the group, use phrases that encourage the speaker to continue.

Activity 10

Rearrange the words to make sentences. Then decide which are for joining, and which are for leaving conversations. Write J or L in the boxes.

- | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|-------|--------|------|---------|--------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. be | along | really | I | running | well | must |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. my | time | oh | word | at | the | look |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. join | if | I | mind | you | ? | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. someone | about | I | did | talking | hear | ...? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. dash | sorry | to | have | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. conference | here | are | me | you | excuse | the for ? |

Student A

You are in the hotel bar after a day at a conference, with two of your colleagues. You just want a relaxing conversation and don't want to talk about business or the conference.



Student B

You are in the hotel bar after a day at a conference, with two of your colleagues. You just want a relaxing conversation, but you can't stay long. When the teacher says *Leave!* leave the group.

Student C

You are in the hotel bar after a day at a conference, with two of your colleagues. You're very excited because the next day your favourite speaker, Joe Green, is going to talk about communication technology. Here is some information about his talk:

- It's at 11 am in the Milan room.
- He's just written a book called *Communication Technology in the 21st century*.
- His book describes how smartphones and tablets will transform communication.

Student D

You are sitting alone in the hotel bar after a day at a conference, and a few metres away there is a group of three people. When the teachers says *Join!* go over and join the group. Respond to the topics of conversation in the way you naturally would.