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EC01. Small Talk: Introduction

Student Name: _____ Student ID Number: _____

Instructor: _____ Level: _____ Date: _____

For media links in this activity, visit [the LLC ESL Tutoring website for Upper Level SDLAs](#). Find your SDLA number to see all the resources to finish your SDLA.

Section 1: What is Small Talk?

Small talk is informal, friendly conversation about general topics. Small talk is extremely important to make a good first impression and build positive relationships with other people. Think about it: Many of your closest relationships you have today began with small talk! With this in mind, it is important to always be prepared for and ready to listen to small talk. Watch the [Section 1 video](#) to learn more about why small talk is important. Answer the questions below after you [watch the video](#).

1. Why is small talk important? _____

2. What does the acronym ARE stand for? _____

3. What are two important things you need to do to make small talk successful? _____

Scott Adams (1992)





Section 2: How to Make Small Talk

Where should you make small talk?

Small talk can happen anywhere, so you must always be prepared. People usually make small talk when they are waiting for something. For example, common times to make small talk include when you are waiting in the elevator, at the doctor’s office, for the bus, or for a meeting to begin. Other common times you might need small talk include: at a party, at the grocery store, at work, or in class.

Who should you make small talk with?

You usually participate in small talk with people you do not know at all. However, you can also make small talk with acquaintances, or people you know but are not good friends with.

What should you make small talk about?

Small talk should always be a **friendly** conversation about **general** topics everyone is aware of. You want to choose “safe” topics that will not cause any anger or disagreement. A common “safe” topic people use frequently during small talk is the weather.

Below is a list of topics. Put a check mark ✓ next to *only* the topics that are appropriate for small talk.

- | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Politics | Hobbies | Sports | Your day | Negative comments |
| Gossip | Health problems | Salary | Job description | Relationship status |
| Favorite TV show | Travel | Hometown | Religion | The weekend |

You Try: Here is an example of small talk from the TV show, *The Big Bang Theory*. Sheldon is trying to make small talk with his friend Penny. [Watch the Section 2 video](#) and then answer the questions below.



1. Where did Sheldon and Penny make small talk?

2. What topic did they try to discuss in their small talk?

3. Was their small talk successful or unsuccessful? Explain your answer.





Section 3: How to Initiate Small Talk

How can you start small talk in these situations? Below are different situations in which small talk is often needed. Write a **different question** for each situation that could successfully start small talk.

1. At a bus stop

2. In an elevator with an attractive person

3. In line waiting for coffee

4. At a party where you don't know many people

5. At the doctor's office





(adapted from: *Small Talk: Who, What, Where, When, Why?* (2014), https://www.englishclub.com/speaking/small-talk_wh.htm)





Section 4: Student Self-Assessment

Complete this table BEFORE meeting with a tutor.

Communication Skill	I can't do this YET. 	I can do this WITH help. 	I can do this WITHOUT help. 	I can TEACH this to a classmate. 
I can determine the appropriate topic for small talk.				
I can participate in small talk.				
I can initiate small talk				

Here are some words/phrases I need to practice.

Good Job!

Now make an appointment

with a tutor on the LLC ESL Tutoring Website

(www.mtsac.edu/llc/passportrewards/llctutoring).





Section 5: Practice with a Tutor!

Meet with a tutor and share this activity with the tutor. The tutor will review your work on this SDLA. To make sure you understand how to make small talk, you will participate in small talk with the tutor. The tutor will give you recommendations for improvement below. You may also ask the tutor any questions that you might have.

CHALLENGE!!! Your challenge for this SDLA is to try to make small talk with one stranger or acquaintance. Remember to use the information you learned in this SDLA. Be prepared to talk about your experience in Part 2 (EC02)!!

Grading Rubric

Table with 4 columns: Possible Points, Need Practice (0-1 Point), Good Job (2-3 Points), Excellent Work (4-5 Points). Rows include Content, Skill: Speaking, and Oral Fluency.

*Students must receive at least 10 points to move on

Possible Points: _____ / 15

Tutor Comments:

Congratulations! Keep going.

You have successfully completed this SDLA and are ready to continue to the next.

Work on this more.

You have not yet mastered this SDLA. It is recommended that you complete it again.

Tutor Signature: _____

Date: _____

