ENGLISH STORY PODCAST

Small Talk in English

Start, continue, and politely end friendly everyday conversations

EPISODE 14 | LEVEL A2-B1

Listen and read with Mia and Jake. Then practise the key vocabulary, useful phrases, listening skills, and speaking patterns from this episode.

Today's Small Win
Say hello to one person and ask one small question, such as “How's your day going?”

Episode Guide

What you will learn

• Start small talk with a greeting and a simple comment.

• Ask friendly, non-personal questions about everyday topics.

• React naturally and ask a follow-up question.

• End a conversation politely without sounding rude.

Word Box

small talk	a light, friendly conversation about easy topics
awkward	uncomfortable or difficult in a social situation
topic	a subject that people talk about
neighbor	a person who lives near you

Say It Like This

“How's it going?”

“Pretty good, thanks. How about you?”

“It's a nice day, isn't it?”

“Oh, really? Tell me more.”

“It was nice talking to you.”

Listen & Read Transcript

Read along while you listen. Audio-performance tags have been removed for easier reading.

JAKE	Mia, I have a problem. Yesterday, I was in the elevator with my new neighbor.
MIA	Okay. And what happened?
JAKE	Nothing. That's the problem. We said hello, and then we were silent for six floors.
MIA	The elevator silence. It is the most awkward silence in the world.
JAKE	I looked at the buttons. I looked at my shoes. I even looked at the ceiling.
MIA	Hello everyone, and welcome to the English Story Podcast. I'm Mia.
JAKE	And I'm Jake, the man who knows every floor of the elevator very well.
MIA	Today we're learning small talk in English. Small talk is the short, friendly conversation we have with neighbors, coworkers, and people we don't know well.
JAKE	By the end of this episode, you'll know how to start a conversation, keep it going, and end it politely. And you'll never have to look at your shoes again.
MIA	And before we start, a quick tip. You can read the full transcript of this episode on our website, and listen to the audio while you read. The link is in the description, along with our free ebooks.
JAKE	Lots of valuable help, and all of it is free. So make yourself comfortable, get a cup of tea, and just listen to us talk.
MIA	Let's start with a small idea. Many learners think, I have nothing interesting to say. But small talk is not about interesting things.
JAKE	It's about being friendly. The topic can be very small. The weather, your weekend, the coffee, the traffic.
MIA	Exactly. In small talk, the message is not the information. The message is, hello, I'm a friendly person.
JAKE	That makes it so much easier. I don't need big sentences. I just need to be kind.
MIA	Okay, it's time for our Word Box. These are four useful words for today. Listen, and then repeat after us.
JAKE	The first word is small talk. Small talk is a light, friendly conversation about easy topics.
MIA	Small talk. For example, I had a little small talk with my neighbor this morning.
JAKE	The next word is awkward. Awkward describes a moment that feels uncomfortable.
MIA	Awkward. For example, the silence in the elevator was awkward.

JAKE	The next word is topic. A topic is a subject that you talk about.
MIA	Topic. For example, the weather is an easy topic.
JAKE	And the last word is neighbor. A neighbor is a person who lives near you.
MIA	Neighbor. For example, my neighbor is very friendly.
JAKE	Let's say them one more time. Small talk.
MIA	Small talk.
JAKE	Awkward.
MIA	Awkward.
JAKE	Topic.
MIA	Topic.
JAKE	Neighbor.
MIA	Neighbor.
MIA	Great job, everyone. You will hear these words again in the story.
JAKE	Now, let's learn the secret. Small talk has three simple steps. Start, ask, and react.
MIA	Step one is start. You begin with a greeting, and a small comment.
JAKE	For example, "Hi, how's it going?" Or, "Good morning. Nice weather today, isn't it?"
MIA	Notice the little question at the end. "Isn't it?" We call this a tag question. It invites the other person to agree with you.
JAKE	"It's a nice day, isn't it?" "The coffee here is good, isn't it?" "It's very busy today, isn't it?"
MIA	And the answer is easy. "Yes, it is." Or, "It really is."
JAKE	Now let's talk about "How are you?" This is a very important one.
MIA	Yes. In English, "How are you?" or "How's it going?" is usually not a real question. It's a greeting. People don't expect a long answer.
JAKE	So you can say, "Good, thanks. How about you?" Or, "Pretty good. And you?"

MIA	And the most important part is the end. "How about you?" Or, "And you?" That small question gives the other person a turn.
JAKE	I think I have been saying, "I'm fine, thank you," and then stopping.
MIA	That's very common. And it's not wrong. But the next small question keeps the conversation alive.
JAKE	Step two is ask. After the greeting, ask one easy question.
MIA	Here are some good ones. "Did you have a good weekend?" "Busy day?" "Have you been here long?" "Do you live around here?"
JAKE	And at work, "How long have you worked here?" Or, "What do you do?"
MIA	Choose questions with easy answers. Not too personal, and not too serious.
JAKE	What should we not ask?
MIA	At the beginning, it's better to avoid very personal topics. For example, how much money someone makes, or someone's age. And strong opinions about politics can also make a conversation uncomfortable.
JAKE	So light topics first. Work, food, weather, plans, hobbies, and weekends.
MIA	Exactly. Step three is react. This is the secret ingredient. When the other person answers, show that you are listening.
JAKE	You can say, "Oh, really?" "That sounds nice." "Wow, that's great." "Me too." "I know what you mean."
MIA	These small reactions are very powerful. They make the other person feel heard.
JAKE	And then, ask a follow up question. For example, if someone says, "I went to the beach," you can say, "Oh, nice. Which beach?" Or, "Was the weather good?"
MIA	A follow up question shows interest, and it keeps the conversation going without any effort.
JAKE	So the pattern is, start, ask, react. Start, ask, react.
MIA	Let's try it in a short conversation. Imagine we are neighbors, and we meet in the hallway.
JAKE	Good morning, Mia. How's it going?
MIA	Good morning, Jake. Pretty good, thanks. How about you?
JAKE	Not bad. It's a lovely day, isn't it?
MIA	It really is. I think I'll go for a walk later.

JAKE	Oh, that sounds nice. Do you walk every day?
MIA	Almost every day. It's a great way to relax. Do you like walking?
JAKE	I do, but I'm not very regular. Maybe you can show me a good route.
MIA	Of course. There's a lovely path near the river.
JAKE	Oh, nice. I'd love to try it. Well, I should get going, or I'll be late for work. It was nice talking to you.
MIA	You too, Jake. Have a great day.
JAKE	Thanks, you too. See you soon.
MIA	Did you notice how that went? Jake started, we asked questions, we reacted, and then Jake ended the conversation politely.
JAKE	And I didn't look at my shoes once.
MIA	Not even once. Now, let's talk about ending a conversation, because many people forget this step.
JAKE	Ending a conversation can feel difficult. You don't want to sound rude.
MIA	Here are some polite ways. "Well, it was nice talking to you." "I should get going." "I'd better go. I have a meeting." "Have a great day."
JAKE	And a good ending phrase is, "Let's talk again soon." It sounds friendly, and it leaves a good feeling.
MIA	Let's try another scene. This time, we're coworkers, and we meet at the coffee machine on Monday morning.
JAKE	Hi, Mia. Happy Monday.
MIA	Hi, Jake. Is it a happy Monday? I need a coffee.
JAKE	Me too. Did you have a good weekend?
MIA	I did, thanks. I visited my family. And you?
JAKE	It was quiet. I stayed at home, and I watched a few movies.
MIA	Oh, nice. Anything good?
JAKE	A funny comedy about a baker. I liked it a lot.
MIA	Of course you did. Well, I should go back to my desk. Good luck with your day.
JAKE	You too. See you at the meeting.

JAKE	Notice how short everything was. Nobody told a long story. Everybody used simple sentences, and it still sounded natural.
MIA	That is the beauty of small talk. It doesn't have to be perfect, and it doesn't have to be long.
JAKE	And now it's time for our segment called Say It Like This.
MIA	Here are five phrases you can use every day. Repeat after us. How's it going?
JAKE	How's it going?
MIA	Pretty good, thanks. How about you?
JAKE	Pretty good, thanks. How about you?
MIA	It's a nice day, isn't it?
JAKE	It's a nice day, isn't it?
MIA	Oh, really? Tell me more.
JAKE	Oh, really? Tell me more.
MIA	It was nice talking to you.
JAKE	It was nice talking to you.
MIA	Very good. Now you have five small phrases, and each one helps you start, keep, or end a friendly conversation.
JAKE	And now it's time for our Mini Story. This is a short story with today's new words inside it.
MIA	Our story today is about a woman called Elena. Elena started a new job in a new city. She was good at her work, but she was very quiet, and she ate lunch alone every day.
MIA	She wanted to make friends, but she felt shy. Small talk seemed awkward and difficult. One morning, she saw a coworker called Sam at the coffee machine. Her heart beat fast, but she remembered the three steps. Start, ask, react.
MIA	Elena smiled and said, "Good morning. How's it going?" Sam said, "Pretty good, thanks. How about you?" Elena said, "Good, thanks. Did you have a nice weekend?" Sam laughed and said, "Yes, I went hiking with my dog." Elena said, "Oh, nice. Is your dog big?" And Sam talked for five minutes about his dog.
MIA	The next day, Sam said, "Elena, would you like to have lunch with us?" That day, Elena sat at a table with three new people. She didn't say very much, but she listened, she smiled, and she asked one small question. And that small question changed her whole month.

MIA	A few weeks later, her neighbor, her coworkers, and the man at the bakery all knew her name. She was not shy anymore. She was just a person who knew how to start small.
JAKE	I love that story. Brave Elena, and a very popular dog.
MIA	Dogs are the best topic in the world.
JAKE	Did you notice our words? Small talk, awkward, topic, and neighbor were all in the story.
MIA	That is why we tell stories. When you hear new words inside a story, they are easier to remember.
JAKE	Can you remember the three steps Elena used?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	They were, start, ask, and react. Simple, and very friendly.
JAKE	And now it's time for our last segment, called Your Turn.
MIA	Okay, now it's your turn. I will describe a situation, and you will answer in your head, or out loud.
JAKE	Ready. Question one. You meet your neighbor in the hallway. How do you greet them?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	Here's one idea. "Good morning. How's it going?"
JAKE	Question two. Someone says, "How are you?" How can you answer, and keep the conversation going?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	"Good, thanks. How about you?"
JAKE	Question three. You are at a coffee shop, and it is raining. What small comment can you make?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	"It's a rainy day, isn't it?"
JAKE	Question four. A coworker says, "I went to the mountains last weekend." How can you react, and ask a follow up question?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.

MIA	"Oh, nice. Was the weather good?"
JAKE	Question five. You want to finish the conversation politely. What do you say?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	"It was nice talking to you. Have a great day."
JAKE	And one last question. Think of one person you see often, a neighbor, a coworker, or a classmate. What small question could you ask them this week?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
MIA	If you answered even a little in English, then you just practiced real small talk. Congratulations.
JAKE	Before we finish, let's remember our four words. Small talk, awkward, topic, and neighbor.
MIA	And our three steps. Start, ask, and react.
JAKE	And remember, small talk does not have to be perfect. A smile and one small question are enough.
MIA	Before we go, here is Today's Small Win. A small win is a very small task that you can finish today, and it makes you feel good.
JAKE	Today's Small Win is this. Say hello to one person today, and ask one small question. For example, "How's your day going?" It only takes ten seconds.
MIA	And if you don't have anyone nearby, you can say it out loud to yourself, three times, so your mouth knows it.
JAKE	Now, we have a question for you in the comments. How would you answer, "How's it going?" Write your answer in English, and then ask us, "How about you?"
MIA	We read the comments, and we love to see your sentences. So please write them, even if you feel shy. You can do it.
JAKE	And remember, you can read the full transcript of this episode on our website, and listen to the audio while you read. The link is in the description, with our free ebooks.
MIA	If this episode helped you today, please give it a like, and share it with a friend who is learning English. And if you haven't subscribed yet, please subscribe to the English Story Podcast, so you can find our next episode.
JAKE	Thank you so much for spending this time with us.
MIA	Keep listening, keep practicing, and remember, your English is already better than it was yesterday.
JAKE	Take care, everyone.

MIA	And Jake, how's it going?
JAKE	Pretty good, thanks. How about you?
MIA	Perfect. You did it. And it's a nice day, isn't it?
JAKE	It really is. Much better than the elevator.
MIA	Goodbye, and see you in the next episode.

Practice Exercises

1. Match the Word

1. small talk 2. awkward 3. topic 4. neighbor

A. a person who lives near you B. a subject that people talk about C. uncomfortable or difficult in a social situation D. a light, friendly conversation about easy topics

2. Complete the Sentences

1. How's it _____?
2. Pretty good, thanks. How _____ you?
3. It's a nice day, _____ it?
4. Oh, really? Tell me _____.
5. It was nice _____ to you.
6. Have a great _____.

3. Make It Personal

One new phrase I want to use: _____

My own example sentence: _____

A question I can ask someone: _____

4. Choose the Best Answer

1. A neighbor says, “How are you?”
A. Good, thanks. How about you? B. I am fine. [silence]
2. A coworker went hiking.
A. Oh, nice. Was the weather good? B. Why did you go?
3. You need to leave.
A. Well, it was nice talking to you. B. Stop talking now.
4. You meet someone new.
A. Hi, nice to meet you. B. How much money do you make?

Speaking & Listening Practice

5. Practise Your Answers Aloud

1. Use one phrase from Say It Like This.

2. Give a short answer, then add one detail.

3. Ask a follow-up question.

4. Tell a 20-second personal story using today's language.

5. Repeat one answer again, a little more naturally.

6. Listening Check

1. Where did Jake meet his new neighbor? _____
2. What are the three steps of small talk? _____
3. What did Mia do on the weekend? _____
4. What topic helped Elena talk to Sam? _____

Answer Key & Sample Answers

1. Match the Word

1-D, 2-C, 3-B, 4-A

2. Complete the Sentences

1. going 2. about 3. isn't 4. more 5. talking 6. day

4. Choose the Best Answer

1-A, 2-A, 3-A, 4-A

6. Listening Check

1. In the elevator 2. Start, ask, react 3. She visited her family 4. Sam's dog

Useful Phrases to Keep

- How's it going?
- Pretty good, thanks. How about you?
- It's a nice day, isn't it?
- Oh, really? Tell me more.
- It was nice talking to you.