

What is "small talk"?

Small talk is casual, informal conversation that can be used at networking and social events, or when talking with people who you don't know very well. It's an essential part of the networking process, and also can be helpful outside of networking as well! It does not carry much substance and helps to fill silences, open conversations, or help people bond about a common experience. Small talk is particularly important in cultures where people do not like awkward silences, such as in the United States.

Why do people make small talk, instead of jumping into serious or complex topics?

Often people use small talk as a way to "warm up" and establish a connection before discussing their real topic. The small talk may only last a few minutes before they get to more important things.

Why is small talk important in the workplace?

In professional networking, the ability to engage in small talk shows that:

- You are able to engage in conversations with new clients or customers
- You are easy to be around, without awkward uncomfortable silences
- You are willing to engage, are friendly and interested in people around you.

Additionally, employers are not only recruiting employees who are technically competent - they also want employees who will fit the culture of the company and get along with their other employees!

What if small talk doesn't come easy to you?

What if it doesn't make sense?

Some common barriers to small talk include:

- Being an introvert
- Lacking confidence
- Lacking common experience or interests

If you are introverted → you may want to start with networking and small talk over short periods of time to build your comfort level. Additionally, even if you are just listening to a conversation you can smile and remain focused on the conversation, then add to the conversation where it feels natural rather than starting one yourself!

If you don't feel confident → practice with CPD, a friend, or with your peers! If you are going to a networking event, you might want to bring a friend. Most importantly, the best way to build confidence in networking is to practice and find a rhythm that you are comfortable with!

If you worry about having common experiences or interests to talk about → consider that different interests can make for great conversation! The goal is not to show that you are similar, but to create a connection with someone in a short period of time.

Where can you practice small talk and networking?

- Talk to people in your classes
- Chat with faculty
- Join a club on campus
- Take part in CPD's Mentorship Program
- Comment on people's work online

SMALL TALK TOPICS

CPD

Compliments

- Those are great shoes. Where did you get them?
- I love your glasses.
- That shirt is a great color.
- Your necklace is fantastic.
- I love your zoom background. Is it your work?

Questions about art/design projects

- What kind of art/design do you like to make?
- What kinds of projects are you working on right now?
- Do you have any passion/personal projects you're working on?
- Do you post your work online?

Weather/Traffic/Crowds/Line

- We had beautiful weather today. Were you able to get outside?
- How was the traffic on your drive here?
- This event has a good crowd. Have you been here before?
- This line is long. How fast is it moving?
- Do you mind recommending a dish? The food looks delicious.

Questions about job/work

- What do you like most about your job?
- What's your role at your company?
- What do you hope to achieve in your professional life?
- What was your path to the job you have now?

Questions about the event/context

- Have you been here before? The place looks great.
- Are you familiar with the artist?
- This is my first time at this event. Have you been here before?
- What brings you to this event?
- How did you hear about this event?

General questions about the person/their interests

- What's keeping you busy these days?
- When was the last time you saw a movie in the theatre?
- Do you listen to podcasts? What's your favourite?
- Are you watching anything right now? What are you enjoying?
- Do you have any pets?

What other topics can you move on to?

- Discuss a specific piece of artwork at the exhibit.
- I'm a huge fan of ____. What do you think of their work?
- How are you feeling about AI and art/design?
- What do you think is the most important thing for upcoming designers to know?
- What inspired you to go into your specific area of design?
- What inspires you when you're creating?
- What's your favourite part of the design process?

Wrapping up the conversation

- I've really enjoyed our conversation. I'd love to connect with you further. What's the best way to keep in touch? (offer business card, or ask for business card)
- Are you on social media? I'm (give social media handle) at (platform).
- It was great to meet you. I'll be sure to reach out on LinkedIn.
- I really enjoyed meeting you today. I hope we run into each other at another event/I hope we have the chance to connect again!