



Wrapping up

Read the following article and discuss the questions below.

Small talk made simple

In theory, making small talk in English isn't rocket science. All you need to do is say hello and ask a few questions: 'Where are you from?' 'Do you like it there?' 'How did you get into engineering/marketing/metallurgy?'

Of course, in practice it can be more difficult. Maybe the person you're trying to speak to keeps replying with one-word answers. Maybe you always seem to meet people in noisy conference halls where you can hardly hear what they're saying, let alone understand it. Or maybe – and this seems to happen to a lot of people – you can talk about your job for hours, but feel much less secure making chit-chat.

What can you do to solve these problems? Well, there are a lot of things you can try.

Watch the pros ...

Observe people who are confident speaking English. How do they talk? Contribute, of course, but listen, and note the questions they ask. Also think about their intonation – the way they use their voice to convey meaning. Is it something you can try yourself?

... and the stars

Of course, your colleagues from London will think you're crazy if you start writing down things they say. "Please, call me Bill,' did you say? Oh that's quite good ..." But actors don't mind this at all. So the next time you're in the video shop, try borrowing an English-language DVD. Watch it with subtitles, and pay attention to the way people interact.



Listen and learn

While you're at it, do more than watch: repeat what you hear the actors say. Then record yourself and play it back. (Most laptops and MP3 players have built-in microphones.) It might be a bit embarrassing at first, but this is the best way to become aware of your speech and how it sounds to others. Compare your pronunciation to the one on the CD or DVD, and try again. You'll be impressed at how quickly you improve.

Practice makes perfect

Easier said than done, but really: don't be shy. The more you say during the coffee break, the more confident you'll feel about making conversation at lunch. ■

Over to you

- What tips can you add?
- What ideas have you tried to make socializing in English easier? What has worked for you?
- Do you know anyone who is good at socializing in English? What makes them so effective?