



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B1 · GENERAL ENGLISH

UNIT 2 · B1·2B

Small talk

Theme · Everyday life



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Small talk

Theme: *Everyday life*

B1 · General English



Learning objectives

- Start and keep a short polite conversation with a stranger.
- Use adverbs of frequency in the correct position.
- React with 'So do I / Neither do I' to show interest and agreement.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · The lift test

Imagine you share a 30-second lift ride with a colleague you don't really know. Write **THREE** possible opening lines. Then say them out loud — which one sounds most natural?

One line about the weather or the day.

One line about something you can **BOTH** see.

One friendly question that isn't 'How are you?'.

Lead-in · What would you say?

Read each scenario. Choose the option you'd say in real life, then reveal the 'best' option and why.

1. The waiter brings the **WRONG** dish to your table. (a) 'Excuse me — sorry, I think this isn't mine.' (b) 'What is **THIS**?' (c) Silence, eat it.

2. You're in a taxi. The driver is going the wrong way. (a) 'You're going the wrong way.' (b) 'Sorry, I actually needed the **OTHER** way — sorry.' (c) 'STOP! Wrong way!'

3. Small talk with your partner's parents, first meeting. (a) 'So — do you both work?' (b) 'It's lovely to finally meet you. This is a beautiful home.' (c) Tell them your salary.

4. A colleague you barely know says 'How are you?' in the corridor. (a) 'Fine, thanks — you?' (b) A 4-minute update on your week. (c) 'Terrible, honestly.'

followUp: Which of these situations feels **HARDEST** for you in English? Why?

Reading · The 3-topic rule

There is an old British rule for small talk: when you meet someone new, stay on **THREE** safe topics — the weather, the room, and the reason you're both there. That's it. No politics, no religion, no salary, no relationship status. Boring? Perhaps. Safe? Absolutely.

The rule sounds silly until you understand what small talk is for. It is not a conversation about interesting things. It is a conversation to prove two things: 'I am safe' and 'I have time for you'. Once both people are relaxed, real topics can start on their own. If you jump straight to the deep questions, most people close the door.

So — the weather is warmer than last week. The room has beautiful light. And you both know the same person, which is why you're here. Three topics. Two minutes. Almost always enough to become real friends later.

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1. According to the text, what are the three safe topics?
 - (A) Money, politics, religion
 - (B) Weather, the room, why you're both there
 - (C) Family, work, hobbies
2. What is small talk really for?
 - (A) Sharing important information
 - (B) Proving you're safe and have time
 - (C) Practising English
3. What often happens if you jump straight to deep questions?
 - (A) People love it
 - (B) People close the door
 - (C) People give long answers

Vocabulary in context

Match each phrase from the text to its meaning.

small talk — a short, light, polite conversation

safe topic — a subject that won't offend or embarrass anyone

close the door — become distant, stop being open

on their own — without you pushing for them

True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text.

1. The 3-topic rule includes talking about salary.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
2. Small talk exists mainly to relax both people.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given
3. British people invented small talk.
 - (A) True
 - (B) False
 - (C) Not Given

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4. The 3-topic rule is boring but effective.

- (A) True
- (B) False
- (C) Not Given

React to the text

Answer in 2–3 sentences.

1. In YOUR culture, which of these topics is a normal small-talk topic — and which one is a huge mistake?

2. Give ONE example of a 'safe' small-talk question you could ask a colleague you don't know well.

Scan for meaning

Find the word or phrase from the text.

1. a short polite conversation

2. topics that won't offend

3. become distant / stop being open

Vocabulary · Small-talk phrases & connectors

How have you been keeping? — informal 'how are you?'

I've been keeping well, thanks — polite average answer

It's been quite a while! — we haven't seen each other for a long time

What have you been up to lately? — what have you been doing recently?

Anyway... — signal to change or close a topic

I really must be going... — polite way to end a chat ('I really must be going get going')

So do I — agreeing with a positive statement

Neither do I — agreeing with a negative statement

Is that so? — shows interest, invites more

That sounds wonderful — warm reaction to good news

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Oh no, that's such a shame — warm reaction to bad news

Incidentally... — introduces a small extra topic

practice

Complete each mini-dialogue with ONE phrase from the lists.

1. — How have you been keeping? — ____, thanks. You?

2. — I love a strong coffee in the morning. — ____ ____ ____! I can't function without one.

3. — I don't watch much TV these days. — ____ ____ _____. I prefer podcasts.

4. — We got engaged last month! — Oh, ____ ____ ____! Congratulations!

5. — My cat is very ill. — Oh no, ____ ____ ____ ____ ____.

6. — Look at the time! ____ ____ ____ get going.

Collocations · verbs for conversation

Match each verb with the noun/phrase it usually goes with.

start — a conversation / a chat

keep — in touch / the conversation going

change — the subject / topic

end — a conversation politely

catch up — with an old friend

Odd one out

Choose the phrase that does NOT fit.

1. Nice to meet you · Pleased to meet you · How much do you earn? · Lovely to see you

(A) Nice to meet you

(B) Pleased to meet you

(C) How much do you earn?

(D) Lovely to see you

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2. How have you been keeping? · What's up? · How are you? · Where did you get that jacket?
 - (A) How have you been keeping?
 - (B) What's up?
 - (C) How are you?
 - (D) Where did you get that jacket?
3. Anyway · Incidentally · So · Absolutely
 - (A) Anyway
 - (B) Incidentally
 - (C) So
 - (D) Absolutely

Word building · adjectives that describe a chat

Choose the best word.

1. A conversation that is easy and relaxed is ____ (light / heavy / dark).

2. A conversation that is only polite words is ____ (deep / superficial / important).

3. A conversation that goes on too long is ____ (short / brief / drawn-out).

4. A person who is easy to talk to is ____ (approachable / distant / cold).



Grammar · Adverbs of frequency + so/neither

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1. Position of frequency adverbs — Always / usually / often / sometimes / hardly ever / never go BEFORE the main verb, but AFTER 'to be'. • I always drink coffee at 7. (before drink) • She is always late. (after is) • We hardly ever eat out.

2. Longer frequency expressions — Every day, once a week, twice a month, on Tuesdays — usually go at the END (or the beginning). • I go running twice a week. • On Tuesdays we have yoga.

3. So do I / Neither do I — Agree with a POSITIVE: So + auxiliary + subject. → 'I love pasta.' 'So do I.' Agree with a NEGATIVE: Neither + auxiliary + subject. → 'I don't like coffee.' 'Neither do I.' Match the auxiliary: 'I've been there.' → 'So have I.' 'I can't drive.' → 'Neither can I.'

Exercise A — Put the adverb in the correct place

Rewrite the sentence including the adverb in brackets.

1. I have breakfast at home. (usually)

2. She is late for meetings. (never)

3. We eat meat. (hardly ever)

4. He goes swimming. (twice a week)

5. I check my phone. (too often)

Exercise B — Respond with so / neither

React to the statement with an agreeing short answer.

1. "I love the smell of coffee." → ____ ____ ____.

2. "I don't drink milk in my tea." → ____ ____ ____.

3. "I've been to Japan." → ____ ____ ____.

4. "I can't cook." → ____ ____ ____.

5. "I'm learning Portuguese." → ____ ____ ____.

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**Exercise C — Find and fix the mistake**

Each sentence has *ONE* mistake. Rewrite it.

1. I go always to the gym on Mondays.

2. She is never on time hardly.

3. "I love pasta." "So I do."

4. "I don't like early mornings." "Neither I do."

Exercise D — Complete the small-talk exchange

Complete each response.

1. — I've been to that new bakery. — Oh, ____ ____ ____! What did you think?

2. — I can't stand loud music in cafés. — ____ ____ _____. I always leave.

3. — I usually get up at 6. — ____, ____ ____ ____, but I hate it.

Exercise E — Answer about you

Answer honestly in *ONE* sentence, using an adverb of frequency.

1. How often do you cook a full meal from scratch?

2. How often do you check your phone during a meal?

3. How often do you talk to a stranger in your neighbourhood?

Exercise F — Complete the mini-dialogue

Complete the response.

1. — I go for a walk every evening after dinner. — Oh, ____ ____ ____ — great for digestion.

2. — I don't watch the news anymore. — ____ ____ _____. It's too depressing.

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Listening · Two neighbours in a lift

Two neighbours share a 40-second lift ride. One tries to start small talk; the other is friendly but clearly in a hurry.

pre

Do you say hello to your neighbours in the lift, or stay silent?

What is a normal topic in your country when you don't know the person well?

gist

1. Who starts the conversation — Voice A or Voice B?

2. What does Voice B agree to do?

3. How does the ride end?

detail

1. What is Voice A carrying?

2. How long has Voice B lived in the building?

3. Which topics come up in this 40-second chat?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

1. Is Voice B being cold or just busy? How do you know?

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2. Are these two likely to become friends? Why?

Useful language from the audio

Match each phrase to what it does.

"Lovely day, isn't it?" — classic weather opener with a soft tag question

"That looks heavy!" — friendly comment on something visible

"We should grab a coffee sometime." — soft, low-commitment invitation

"I've been here about three months." — shares personal info using present perfect

"Have a good one!" — informal warm goodbye

Voice A: Morning! Lovely day, isn't it — after all that rain last week?

Voice B: Finally! I was starting to grow gills.

Voice A: That looks heavy — big delivery?

Voice B: A new coffee machine, would you believe. Long overdue. How long have you been in the building now?

Voice A: Ages. Since 2019. And you? You're the fourth-floor flat, right?

Voice B: That's me. Three months, almost. Still finding the light switches.

Voice A: Have you tried the bakery on the corner yet? The bread comes out at 7:30, still warm.

Voice B: Not yet — but you've just made my Saturday morning. We should grab a coffee sometime, actually.

Voice A: One of these days. I'm on the second floor, flat B — knock any time.

Voice B: Deal. Right — bus in three minutes. Have a good one!

Voice A: You too!

Fourth listen — fill the gaps

Listen again and complete the exact phrases.

1. Lovely day, ____ ____?

2. How long ____ ____ ____ in the building now?

3. We should ____ a coffee sometime.

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4. Have a ____ ____!

Speaking · The lift challenge

In pairs, take turns starting a 40-second lift conversation. You MUST use: (1) an opener about something you both can see, (2) at least ONE adverb of frequency, (3) either 'So do I' or 'Neither do I' at least once, (4) a warm closing line.

Scene: In an office lift on Monday morning

A: You: friendly, sunny, holding a big coffee.

B: You: clearly Monday-morning tired, but polite.

Scene: At a wedding, waiting for the drinks table

A: You: bride's cousin, know almost nobody.

B: You: groom's colleague, know almost nobody.

Scene: In the queue at a coffee shop

A: You: regular customer, know the barista's name.

B: You: first time here, ordered wrong.

Discussion · small talk

Choose 2 questions.

In your culture, is silence in a lift comfortable or awkward?

What is the WORST small-talk question you've ever been asked?

Is small talk different online vs in person?

Which is easier for you — starting a conversation or ending one politely?

Role-play · The party corner

Read your role card, prepare for 30 seconds, run the conversation for 2 minutes.

Scene: You meet at a friend's birthday party

A: You: the birthday person's cousin. You know almost nobody. Start with a safe topic and try to keep the conversation going for 2 minutes.

B: You: an old friend of the birthday person. Be warm, use at least ONE 'So do I' or 'Neither do I', and find ONE thing in common.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Mini-presentation · 60-second 'How I do small talk'

Prepare and deliver a 60-second personal guide to small talk. Follow the 4-beat structure.

Beat 1 (10s) — Your favourite safe opener.

Beat 2 (15s) — A frequency habit you have with small talk (I always / I usually / I hardly ever...).

Beat 3 (20s) — A situation where small talk saved you socially.

Beat 4 (15s) — Your golden closing line to end a chat politely.

sample: My favourite opener is always something we can both see — 'That's a great bag, where did you get it?' works nearly every time. I usually keep my first questions light — hobbies, food, the neighbourhood — never work in the first two minutes. One time small talk really saved me — I was completely lost at a wedding and started talking to a stranger about the terrible playlist, and we ended up dancing all night. My golden closing line is 'I'd better say hello to the others, but so lovely to meet you — let's talk again later.' Warm, honest, done.

Writing · A polite message to a new colleague

Write 60–90 words to a new colleague you haven't met yet. Introduce yourself, mention ONE small routine you share with the team ('We usually...'), and end with a warm, low-pressure invitation.

bonus: Bonus — Rewrite the message in ONE sentence (max 25 words) that would fit in an internal chat.

Wrap-up · What did we cover?

Small talk is not about interesting topics — it's about proving you're safe and have time.

Adverbs of frequency: BEFORE the main verb, AFTER 'to be'.

So + auxiliary + I (agree with positive). Neither + auxiliary + I (agree with negative).

End politely: 'I'd better get going' + a warm 'have a good one'.

Quiz

1. Choose the correct sentence.

- (A) I go always to bed late.
- (B) I always go to bed late.
- (C) Always I go to bed late.

2. "I love strong coffee." — ____

- (A) So do I.
- (B) So I do.
- (C) Neither do I.

3. "I don't watch the news." — ____

- (A) So do I.
- (B) Neither I do.
- (C) Neither do I.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. Which is the **WEAKEST** small-talk opener with a colleague?
- (A) "Lovely day, isn't it?"
 - (B) "How much do you earn?"
 - (C) "Have you tried the new coffee place?"
5. 'Hardly ever' is closest in meaning to...
- (A) always
 - (B) sometimes
 - (C) almost never



Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary recall

Complete each sentence with the best word.

1. Write ONE new word from the lesson and its meaning in your own words.

2. Write ONE collocation from the lesson and use it in a sentence about your life.

3. Write ONE phrase you'd use in real conversation this week.

2. Grammar practice · Adverbs of frequency · so/neither

Rewrite each sentence using the target grammar of this lesson.

1. Sentence 1 → rewrite it correctly with the target grammar.

2. Sentence 2 → rewrite it correctly with the target grammar.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. Sentence 3 → find and fix ONE mistake.

4. Sentence 4 → complete the gap with the correct form.

5. Sentence 5 → write your own example, true about you.

3. Reading recall

Look back at the class-book reading. Answer briefly in your own words.

1. What was the main idea in ONE sentence?

2. What is ONE opinion of the writer you agree with?

3. What is ONE opinion you disagree with, and why?

4. Listening · a follow-up dialogue

Two voices talk about everyday life for about a minute. Notice the target grammar in use.

1. What is the main topic of the conversation?

2. Who sounds more confident and why?

3. Which target-grammar phrase appears TWICE in the audio?

Voice A: So — tell me about your everyday life this week. Anything different?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice B: Honestly, yes. I've been trying something new — and it's changed how I feel completely.

Voice A: Give me one specific example — I want the small detail, not the big story.

Voice B: OK: I stopped checking my phone before bed. Just that. And I already sleep better.

5. Writing · a short reflection

Write 70–100 words about the theme of this lesson. Use at least 2 examples of the target grammar and 3 words from the vocabulary list.

6. Reflection

Look back at your notes from class. Answer briefly.

1. What is ONE thing from this lesson you already use naturally?

2. What is ONE thing you'd like to practise more this week? How exactly?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in · What would you say?

1. (a) — polite, uses 'excuse me' and softens with 'sorry, I think'. (b) is aggressive; (c) is passive.
2. (b) — 'actually' softens; two 'sorries' keep the driver relaxed. (a) is direct-blunt; (c) is panic.
3. (b) — warm, specific, and safe. (a) is a job interview; (c) is a very short evening.
4. (a) — quick, warm, hands the question back. Corridor 'how are you' is a greeting, not a question.

Reading · The 3-topic rule

1. (B) Weather, the room, why you're both there
2. (B) Proving you're safe and have time
3. (B) People close the door
1. (B) False
2. (A) True
3. (C) Not Given
4. (A) True
1. Model: in Brazil, family and football are safe. Asking someone's salary is a big mistake with a stranger, but very normal with close friends.
2. Model: 'Have you tried the new coffee place on the corner?' — a shared local reference, no personal risk.
1. small talk
2. safe topics
3. close the door

Vocabulary · Small-talk phrases & connectors

1. keeping well
2. So do I
3. Neither do I
4. sounds wonderful
5. that's such a shame
6. I really must be going
1. (C) How much do you earn?
2. (D) Where did you get that jacket?
3. (D) Absolutely
1. light
2. superficial
3. drawn-out
4. approachable

Grammar · Adverbs of frequency + so/neither

1. I usually have breakfast at home.
2. She is never late for meetings.
3. We hardly ever eat meat.
4. He goes swimming twice a week.
5. I check my phone too often.
1. So do I.
2. Neither do I.
3. So have I.
4. Neither can I.
5. So am I.
1. I always go to the gym on Mondays.
2. She is hardly ever on time.
3. "So do I."
4. "Neither do I."
1. so have I
2. Neither can I
3. So do I

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. Model: I hardly ever cook a full meal from scratch — I usually just reheat leftovers.
2. Model: I sometimes check my phone at breakfast, but never at dinner.
3. Model: I often chat with the baker on my street — I've known him for years.
 1. so do I
 2. Neither do I

Listening · Two neighbours in a lift

1. Voice A starts with a comment about the weather.
2. Come round for a coffee 'one of these days'.
3. The lift doors open on the ground floor and Voice B rushes out for the bus.
 1. A big cardboard box (a delivery).
 2. For about three months — she moved in in the summer.
 3. The weather, the delivery box, and the local bakery on the corner.
1. Just busy — she agrees to coffee 'one of these days' and warmly says 'have a good one', but she has to catch a bus.
 2. Probably yes — the tone is easy, they've already exchanged three friendly topics in one lift ride.
1. isn't it
2. have you been
3. grab
4. good one

Quiz

1. (B) I always go to bed late.
2. (A) So do I.
3. (C) Neither do I.
4. (B) "How much do you earn?"
5. (C) almost never

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary recall

1. Open answer — check with your teacher.
2. Open answer.
3. Open answer.

2. Grammar practice · Adverbs of frequency · so/neither

1. Model answer — see class notes.
2. Model answer — see class notes.
3. Model answer — see class notes.
4. Model answer — see class notes.
5. Open answer.

3. Reading recall

1. Open answer — around 15 words.
2. Open answer.
3. Open answer — 2 sentences.

4. Listening · a follow-up dialogue

1. Model: both speakers compare their own experience of everyday life.
2. Open answer — look for specific detail and full sentences.
3. Open answer — see transcript.

6. Reflection

1. Open answer.
2. Open answer — be specific: what, when, how often.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class