

SMALL TALK

I'm being quiet now. That means it's your turn to talk. – I'm trying to think of what to say.
(Cagney & Lacey, 1982)

Here are a few hints on how to navigate small talk conversations (phrases):

HOW TO START?

Start with the conference itself

"How are you finding the conference so far?"

"Which talk or session has been your favourite?"

"Have you presented yet, or are you attending?"

"What brought you to this conference? Are you presenting or just attending?"

"What did you think of the keynote?"

"That last talk was really interesting! What did you think of it?"

"The panel on [topic] was thought-provoking. Did you attend?"

"Have you been to any good sessions today?"

"Is there a talk you're looking forward to attending later?"

Talk about research interests

"What area of research are you focused on?"

"Are you working on anything interesting right now?"

Mention their presentation or paper (if applicable)

"I really enjoyed your presentation on [topic]. What inspired you to choose that area?"

"Your paper on [subject] was fascinating! What are you planning to explore next?"

Discuss shared challenges

"I'm curious, how do you manage to balance staying current with the latest papers while working on your own research?"

"Have you found any strategies for handling the fast-paced changes in our field?"

General conference tips

"Do you have any tips for making the most out of this conference?"

"I'm trying to build more collaborations. How do you go about it?"

Casual conversation topics

"Have you had a chance to explore the city while you're here?"

"What other conferences or events do you usually attend?"

Comment on the break

"Nice to have a break, don't you think! How's the conference going for you so far?"

"These breaks are always a great time. I love catching up and meeting new people. Have you had any interesting conversations yet?"

Ask about their background

"So, what area of research are you working in?"

"It's great to see so many people from different universities. Where are you based?"

"Have you attended this conference before, or is this your first time?"

TURN-TAKING

Taking a Turn

To add a point: "That's a great point. It actually reminds me of something I've been working on..."

Building on their idea: "I'd love to build on what you just said. Have you considered how [related topic] could factor into that?"

Transitioning into your perspective: "That's interesting! In my experience, I've found that..."

Acknowledging their comment, then shifting focus: "I see what you're saying, and it's definitely important. What I'd add to that is..."

Politely signalling to speak: "If I could just jump in for a second..."

Adding something before the conversation moves on: "Before we move on, I just wanted to quickly say..."

Asking for clarification before continuing: "Can I quickly ask, just to make sure I understand you correctly?"

Encouraging the Other Person to Speak

Passing the floor to them: "What's your take on that?"

Inviting their opinion: "I'd love to hear your thoughts on this."

Encouraging elaboration: "That's really interesting! Could you explain a bit more about how that works?"

After sharing your point: "Does that align with your experience?"

Opening the floor after your turn: "I'm curious to know what you think about that."

After a long point: "But I've been talking a lot—what about you? How do you approach this?"

After finishing your thoughts: "That's just my perspective. How do you see it?"

Ensuring everyone gets a turn: "I know [Name] had a point to make earlier—what was it?"

FORMAL TURN-TAKING PHRASES

Taking a Turn

"If I may, I'd like to add something to that."

"That's an excellent point. I'd like to contribute by mentioning..."

"I appreciate your perspective. I'd like to offer another viewpoint."

"Before we move on, may I briefly share my thoughts?"

"I'd like to follow up on what you just said with an additional observation."

Encouraging the Other Person to Speak

"Would you care to elaborate on that?"

"I'd be very interested to hear your thoughts on this matter."

"Could I invite you to share your perspective on this?"

"Do you have any insights you'd like to add to the discussion?"

"I'd like to hear your opinion on this topic."

Interjecting Politely

"Pardon the interruption, but I believe this point is relevant to our discussion."

"If I could just clarify something quickly before we move on..."

"I apologize for interrupting, but I'd like to address a key point here."

Returning the Conversation to Them

"I've shared my perspective; I'd now be curious to hear yours."

"That's my stance on the matter. May I ask how you approach it?"

"I believe I've spoken enough—what's your view on this?"

INFORMAL TURN-TAKING PHRASES

Taking a Turn

"That's so true! Let me add something to that..."

"I was just thinking the same thing—what if we also looked at it this way?"

"That's interesting! I had a similar experience when..."

"I'd love to jump in here for a second!"

"Hold on—before we move on, I wanted to mention this quickly."

Encouraging the Other Person to Speak

"What's your take on this?"

"How do you feel about that?"

"I'm curious to know what you think."

"Want to chime in on this?"

"You were saying something earlier—care to elaborate?"

Interjecting Politely

"Oh, sorry to cut in, but I just wanted to add this real quick."

"Wait, before you move on, can I throw something in?"

"Just jumping in here—this reminded me of something!"

"Sorry, but I couldn't help thinking—what about this?"

"Mind if I add something to that real fast?"

Returning the Conversation to Them

"But enough from me—what about you?"

"Okay, that's what I think. What about you?"

"I've been talking a lot—what's your opinion on this?"

"So, what do you make of all this?"

"I've shared my side; now it's your turn!"

INTRODUCING PEOPLE

Introducing people is a great way to help others network and make meaningful connections. Here are some tips and phrases for introducing people in a smooth and professional manner:

Mention names first: Start with names, so everyone knows who is being introduced. Introduce the person with the higher status (e.g., senior researcher, keynote speaker) to the person with the lower status first. If status isn't a factor, introduce the person you know better to the other person.

Provide context: Give a little background about each person to spark conversation. Mention their area of research, institution, or why they're attending the conference.

Include a common interest: Mention something easy to remember (or exceptional), e.g. what they have in common, what they excel at.

Formal Introductions:

"Dr. Smith, I'd like to introduce you to [Name], who is working on AI ethics at [University]. [Name], this is Dr. Smith, a keynote speaker here and our leading expert in machine learning."

"Professor Thompson, this is [Name] from [University]. She's researching cloud computing. [Name], meet Professor Thompson, who teaches at [Another University] and has written extensively on data privacy."

"I think you two would have a lot to discuss. [Name], this is [Other Name], who's also working on sustainable technology. I know you've both been exploring solutions in this space."

Informal Introductions:

"Hey [Name], I want to introduce you to [Other Name]. You both are working in the cybersecurity space, so I thought it'd be great for you to meet."

"You guys should meet! [Name], meet [Other Name]—he's also working on machine learning, especially in healthcare. I think you'd have a lot to talk about."

"I was just talking to [Name] about their project on robotics, and I know you're doing something similar. Let me introduce you two."

General Introduction Phrases:

"Let me introduce you to..."

"I'd like you to meet..."

"I think you two should meet—[Person A], this is [Person B]."

"Have you met [Name] yet? They're working on [topic]."

"I don't think you've been introduced yet. [Name], this is [Other Name]."

Introductions with reactions

A: Oh, Doctor Fischer, have you met my colleague, Ms Carraro? Doctor Fischer is the Head of our Department. Ms Carraro is the Director of the Office of International Studies in Padova.

B: Hello, Ms Carraro, pleased to meet you.

C: Hello, Doctor Fischer, very nice to meet you too.

A: Professor Colwell, there's someone I'd like you to meet, it's Mr Sanz. Mr Sanz is our National Contact Point in Spain. Professor Colwell is responsible for the UK section.

B: Hello, Mr Sanz, it's a pleasure to meet you.

C: The pleasure is mine.

A: Hi, this is Garry. Garry, it's Eva. Garry is the crazy guy I met in Morocco last year. Eva studies Law and is Mark's best friend.

B: Hi. How're you?

C: Hi.

A: Anybody going to introduce me?

B: Sure. This is Andrea, my room mate. And here's Clara, Steve and Johann, we all met at Erasmus in Barcelona.

A: Hi guys!

C,S,J: Hi!

A: Hello, excuse me ... I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt ... I just wanted to introduce myself, I'm Bob Font from the University Press.

B: Oh, hello, nice to meet you. I don't believe we've met before.

A: No, no we haven't. I saw your presentation this morning and I think it is great what you are doing and I just wanted to know if I could ask some questions.

A: Good evening, Mr Siddall, isn't it?

B: That's right, yes, hello.

A: Hi, it's a very nice party you have put on here.

B: Oh, well, glad you're enjoying it!

A: I don't think we've actually met formally yet.

B: No, no I don't think we have.

A: My name's Linda Osborne and I work in our Research and Development Office.

A: Sally, I think you've met Mr Lomell.

B: No, I haven't actually.

A: OK, Mr Lomell is the colleague from Birmingham I told you about. They've been doing more or less the same as us, you know the OPAL Project. Sally is my colleague, Sally is responsible for the quality assurance management.

L: Hi, nice to meet you. And, call me Mark.

S: Hi, Mark. Nice to meet you.

ENDING A SMALL TALK

It is important to conclude a conversation by showing appreciation for the interaction, ensuring you leave on a positive note.

Transitioning to Other Activities

"It's been great chatting with you! I'm going to grab a coffee before the next session starts."

"I've really enjoyed our conversation, and I should probably check out some of the posters before the break ends."

"I'll let you get back to networking. Hope to see you later in another session!"

Expressing Interest in Future Conversations

"This has been a really interesting conversation. Let's exchange contact details and continue it after the conference."

"I'd love to follow up on this topic. Let's connect on LinkedIn to stay in touch!"

"It was great to meet you! I'd love to continue this conversation later —feel free to reach out."

Referring to Upcoming Sessions or Events

"I see the next session is about to start—let's grab seats. It was great talking to you!"

"I've got to catch the next talk, but I really enjoyed our chat!"

"I'm looking forward to the next panel. I'll see you around later!"

Politely Excusing Yourself

"I won't take up any more of your time—I'm sure there are lots of people you'd like to meet."

"I've got to catch up with a colleague, but I really enjoyed our conversation!"

"It's been a pleasure talking to you. I should go catch up with my team now."

Offering a Farewell with Future Plans

"I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference! Hopefully, we'll bump into each other again."

"Good luck with the rest of your sessions today. It was great meeting you!"

"Have a great time at the conference! I'll see you around."

MEETING CHAIRING PHRASES

Opening and Welcome (2-5 minutes)

The chair welcomes everyone: Starts by introducing the purpose of the meeting and outlining the agenda.

Phrases:

"Good morning/afternoon, everyone. Thanks for joining."

"Before we get started, let's quickly review the agenda for today's meeting."

"Our main objectives today are to [mention goals], and we'll finish with [final agenda point]."

Review of Previous Meeting / Follow-up

"Before we dive in, let's quickly review the action items from our last meeting."

"Has everyone completed the tasks they were assigned? Let's check on our progress."

"Last time, we agreed to [task]. How did that go?"

Updates / Reports

"Let's start with updates. [Name], can you give us an overview of where we are with [project]?"

"Does anyone have any updates they'd like to share on their current work?"

"What's the status of [specific task or project]?"

Discussion of Key Issues / Challenges

"Let's move on to the main agenda items. The first issue we need to address is [specific issue]."

"What challenges have you encountered with [project/task]?"

"How can we resolve the bottleneck we're seeing in [area]?"

"Does anyone have suggestions on how to approach this?"

Brainstorming / Solution-Oriented Discussion

"Let's brainstorm some ideas on how we can move forward with this."

"What are some possible solutions to this problem?"

"I'd love to hear everyone's input. What do you think, [name]?"

"Do we have any alternative approaches that we haven't considered yet?"

Task Assignment and Next Steps

"Alright, let's summarize the next steps. Who will be responsible for [specific task]?"

"Let's assign action items. [Name], can you take the lead on [task]?"

"What deadlines are we setting for these action items?"

"To confirm, [name] will handle [task], and we'll aim to have it done by [date]."

Future Plans / Scheduling

"When is a good time for our next meeting? Let's schedule it now."

"What should our key focus be for the next week/month?"

"Are there any upcoming deadlines or milestones we need to be aware of?"

Open the Floor for Final Questions or Comments

"Before we wrap up, does anyone have any final comments or questions?"

"Is there anything else we haven't covered that needs attention?"

"Any concerns about the tasks we've discussed?"

Wrap-Up and Conclusion

"Thanks, everyone. Just to summarize, we've agreed on [decisions] and [task assignments]."

"In conclusion, we'll meet again on [date], and everyone will have completed [tasks] by then."

"Thanks for a productive meeting. Let's keep up the good work!"

"I'll send out the meeting notes and action items shortly. Have a great rest of your day."