Making conversation

Objective: develop students’ conversation skills: appropriate responses, follow-up questions
Level: pre-intermediate
Time: around an hour

Outline:
1 Lead-in (5 minutes)
Write a question on the board such as *Did you have a good weekend? What did you do last night? How’s it going?* (depending on when your class is).
Students ask & answer the question in pairs.
At this stage you can note how adept they are at follow-up questions, appropriate responses, and note examples you may want to use later.

2 Sample dialogue (5 mins)
Give out the *How was your weekend?* dialogue. Ask students to read it aloud with their partners, then ask if there’s anything wrong with it.
Hopefully, students will note the lack of interest demonstrated by inappropriate responses and lack of follow-up questions. You can then act it out with a student, with yourself taking the part of the very disinterested friend.

3 Responses (20 mins)
Make some statements about yourself (it works well if you can make the students believe they are true, even if they are not) and try to elicit some appropriate responses.
Possible examples:
- My cat died yesterday.
- My boyfriend asked me to marry him.
- I’m going on holiday tomorrow.
- The traffic was terrible this morning.
- My mobile phone was stolen yesterday.
Etc, etc…
Put the elicited responses into 3 categories on the board: responses to good, bad & neutral news.
Then put students into groups of 3 and give each group a set of responses cards. Ask them to put them into the same 3 categories. When they have finished, conduct feedback and ask students if they can think of any more.

Responses game: (optional, depending on how much time you have)
Then give each group a set of prompt cards. Ask them to divide the response cards equally between them (at random) and place the prompt cards face down in the middle of the table.
A student takes a prompt card from the pile and reads it out. The other students must give a suitable response using their response cards. The object of the game is to get rid of your response cards first. The first person to give an appropriate response can put down that card. If the other students don’t think the response is suitable, that player must keep that card.
4 Follow-up questions

Write a statement on the board, e.g. *I’m going to Xian at the weekend*. Elicit possible follow-up questions, e.g. *How long are you going for? Who are you going with? Have you been there before?*

Students compete to make the greatest number of follow-up questions to a statement within a time limit. Two suggestions for doing this:

- Divide the whiteboard in half and the students into 2 teams, with each team having half the board. Write a statement at the top of the board. The teams compete to write as many (correct) follow-up questions to that statement as they can within a time limit (e.g. 3 minutes)
- Put students into pairs/threes and give each group a different statement. Then set a time limit and the group with the greatest number of questions at the end is the winner.

*Some possible statements:*

- *I’m going to a party tonight.*
- *I had a terrible day yesterday.*
- *My husband/wife just got promoted.*
- *I went to Chengdu last weekend.*
- *I love football.*

5 Dialogue

Ask students (in pairs) to re-write the dialogue in order to make it into a better conversation. They should use appropriate responses, follow-up questions and anything else they think necessary. When complete, you can ask them to act their conversation out for the group (depending on time).