

Teacher's notes

LEVEL: Elementary / A1

TIME: 50 minutes

SKILLS: speaking, writing

AIM: to practise basic small talk in a business context

MATERIALS: one copy of the worksheet per student; one set of cut-out cards per pair of students; one copy of the transcript per pair of students

Grammar and functions

question forming and word order
present simple vs present continuous
present perfect

Useful words and phrases from the activities

small talk; taboo; pleasant; traffic jams; directions; navigation system; turbulence; on time; motorway (BritE) / highway (AmE); journey; trip (AmE); delays; forecast; satisfied; comfortable; view; to overlook; to make you (feel); pedestrian zone; delicious; to get stuck (in a traffic jam); to bother; attentive; flight attendants; matches (sport); underground / tube (BritE)

Possible elicited vocabulary and phrases

crowded; airport; train station / railway station; organized / disorganized; relaxing / stressful; to do / to play (sport); motorway accidents; motorway construction; efficient; clean / dirty; car trouble; to get lost (with directions); rude; unfriendly; unhelpful; unpleasant

Procedure

1. As a warm up, ask the students if they've had any experience with business trips. Ask the following questions.

Is this part of your normal job?

Which countries do you travel to?

2. Focus on the concept of 'small talk'. In what situations would we need to *make small talk*?

Write these situations on a flipchart or whiteboard.

Where we can make small talk

first time meeting a client

greeting business contacts we already know

having meetings: before, during and after coffee breaks and meals

talking at a business lunch or dinner

Can they add any other situations?

3. Then ask:

What are good small talk topics for any culture?

What are taboo topics in your country or other countries you've visited?

Suggest the example of talking about how much money people earn. Is this a good topic or not?

Write up their comments on the whiteboard or flipchart.

Good topics for most countries

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Taboo topics for most countries

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

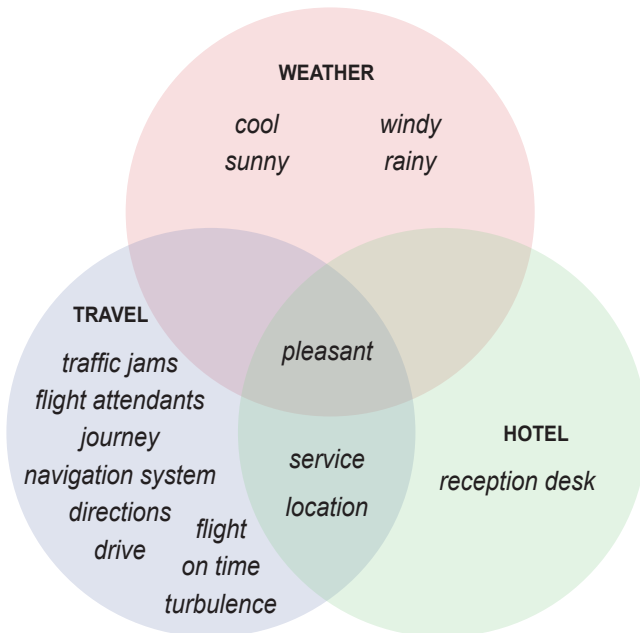
Let them know that the lesson will be concentrating on three basic topics that are safe to talk about in nearly every culture: *weather, travel* and *hotel*.

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A

1. Get the students to do Activity A in pairs. Ask them to check their diagram with the pair next to them. Then check answers as a whole class.

Key (suggested answers only):



These are suggested answers only. While some of the answers are very easy, others might be more complicated or might involve some discussion. For example, you can talk about a city having a good bus or train service but also getting good service in a hotel. So allow plenty of time to review and discuss answers with the whole class.

Teaching tip:

This activity could be made more challenging for stronger students by getting them to do it against the clock and / or awarding a prize to the pair that finishes first.

2. When you have finished reviewing answers ask them if they can add any other topics to the diagram. Again, you could do this with a time limit offering a prize for the pair that comes up with the most (correct) suggestions.

B

1. Get students to complete Activity B in pairs. Ask the pairs to check each other's answers and monitor them while they are doing this. Then review answers with the whole class and correct any mistakes.

Key:

Weather

1. *What do you think of our weather?*
2. *What was the weather in Manchester like? / What was the weather like in Manchester?*
3. *What's your favourite kind of weather?*
4. *Have you heard the forecast for this weekend?*
5. *Which kind of weather do you not like?*

Travel

6. *How was the drive from the airport?*
7. *Did you have a good flight?*
8. *How was your train journey yesterday?*
9. *Did you have any problems finding us?*
10. *How was the service on Star Airways?*

Hotel

11. *Where are you staying while you're here?*
12. *Are you satisfied with your hotel?*
13. *Do you have a room with a view?*
14. *Is the hotel in a good location?*
15. *How's the breakfast buffet?*

C

1. Get students to complete Activity C in pairs. Check the answers by listening to the audio as a whole class.

Note: The easiest way to do this is to read out a question, ask the class for the correct response and then play the audio. Do this question by question.

2. When you have done this, tell the students to do Activity B and C as a role-play. Have them switch to another partner and do the questions and answers again. Use the audio recording as a model for any pronunciation.

Key: 1. P; 2. A; 3. M 4. E; 5. D; 6. C; 7. F; 8. H; 9. O; 10. G; 11. I; 12. J; 13. K; 14. B; 15. L

Teaching tip:

With weaker students, play the recording first and draw their attention to any difficult points of pronunciation, e.g. pronunciation of *flight*, *satisfied*, *breakfast*, etc.

2. Explain some or all of the following language points arising from the previous activities.

• *What is it like?* Tell the students this means *asking for a description of something: a person, place or thing*. Write up these examples:

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Q: *What's your home town like?*

A: *It has about 250,000 people. It's located directly on the sea, so it's a good place for water sports.*

Q: *What's your job like?*

A: *My job is really interesting and the pay is good. I've got friendly colleagues and a nice boss.*

Q: *What's your school like?*

A: *I go to a really big university with about 100,000 students. The lecturers are just great.*

Ask the students to practise the example question and answers with each other. Tell them to use their own ideas for the answers.

- Elicit the meaning of *weather forecast*. Ask the students:

How can I find out about the weather at the weekend?

This is a chance for them to discuss how they get weather information from the internet, TV or radio.

The following notes cover travel, weather and hotels. You can do some or all of them, depending on the time available.

Travel: Explain that *travel* is a general word for going from one place to another. We don't use it in the following way.

~~*Did you have a good travel to the UK?*~~

Instead, we use the word *journey* (or *trip* in American English).

Did you have a good journey to the UK?

- Explain to the students that the verb or noun, *drive* is only for cars, not for any other form of travel. *Drive* has the automatic meaning of operating a car, so it's not necessary to say *I drove to Bristol by car*. Instead, we simply say: *I drove to Bristol*.

- With other forms of travel, tell the students to use verbs like *take* or *come*.

I took the train to Edinburgh, not ~~*I drove with the train to Edinburgh*~~.

I'm coming to the meeting in Cardiff by train, not ~~*I'm driving to the meeting in Cardiff by train*~~.

- Get them to do some practice with *drive*. Write these questions on the flipchart or whiteboard:

How did you come to English class today?

- I came by underground (tube) / bus / tram.
- I drove here.

How did you travel on your last holiday?

- I took the train / the bus.
- I drove to Brighton.

Elicit their own answers for each question. Then have the students ask the person next to them.

- Ask the students if they've ever *got stuck in a traffic jam*. What happens? Why can't someone move on the motorway? The students can come up with some ideas of *construction*, *accidents* or just too many cars on the road.

Hotel: Explain to the students that we ask *Where are you staying?* not ~~*Where do you stay?*~~ This shows the *present continuous* form, not the *present simple*, to use for being somewhere for a short time.

The correct answer is: *I'm staying at the Hilton Hotel (for three days)* not ~~*I stay at the Hilton Hotel*~~.

- In order to show the contrast with the present simple, write up these example questions for them to practise in pairs.

Q: *Where do you work?*

A:

Q: *Where do you live?*

A:

- Elicit from the students other important things about staying in a hotel. Have the students add to a list of what makes a person *satisfied* or happy with his / her hotel stay.

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Possible ideas from the students:

- good bars and restaurants
- fitness club
- room service
- clean and comfortable rooms

Have each student survey two other students on the following:

What is important for you in a hotel?

1.

2.

Discuss as a whole class the results of their survey questions.

Weather: Explain how the weather can be used as a lead-in to other small talk topics. Write this formula for the students on the whiteboard or flipchart.

weather → season → sport → favourite team or player

D

Get students to look at the dialogue on their worksheet. Ask one pair to do a model role-play for the rest of the class.

A: So you don't care much for **cold weather**. What's your **favourite season**?

B: **Summer** is my favourite time of the year. I really love **outdoor sport**.

A: Really? So do you like tennis?

B: Oh yes, I love tennis. **I play** twice a week. **I also watch professional matches on TV**.

A: Do you have a **favourite professional player**?

B: Well, in the men's game, I like Alonso Torres. In the women's, Alicia Simpson is just great!

Tell the students in pairs to practise the dialogue. They can use their own ideas for the weather, season, sport and favourite players or teams. Get the students to switch pairs and do the conversation again.

As a wrap up, distribute a set of the topic cards per pair of students. Get them to show their card to their partner and then act out one or two small talk questions and answers on each topic. When they finish, you show the whole class one card at a time and elicit their example questions and answers.

Follow-up activity

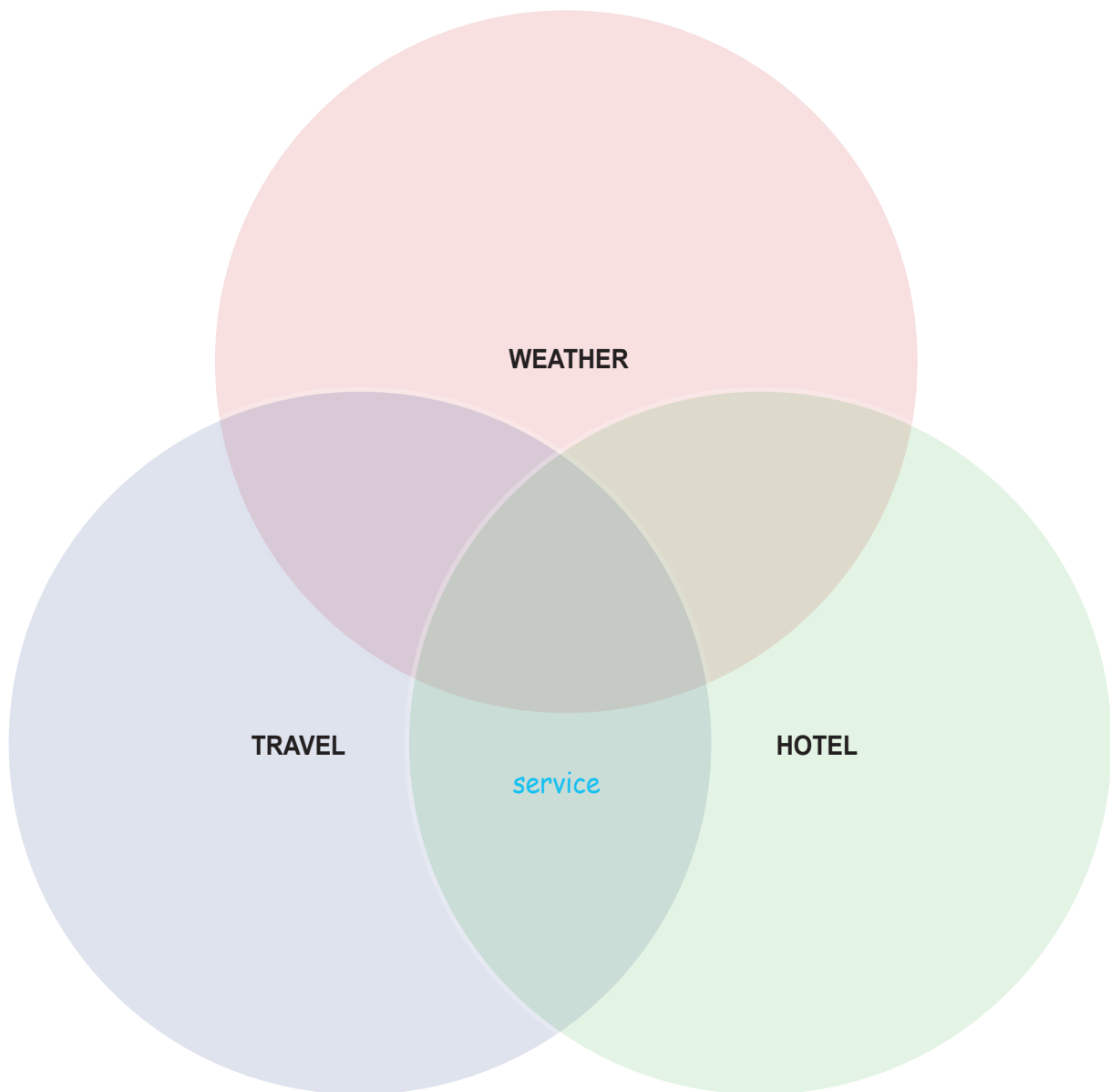
Students can ask each other about their last holiday. Have them refer to Activities A, B and C to make small talk on:

- weather
- travel
- hotel

A

With a partner write the words and phrases from the box in the right place in the diagram.

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------|
| service | pleasant | traffic jams | cool |
| journey | navigation system | sunny | directions |
| flight attendants | turbulence | drive | windy |
| flight | rainy | location | on time |



Worksheet

B

With a partner, put the words in the right order to make questions.

Weather

1. weather? / do / What / our / think / you / of
.....
2. was / What / like / Manchester? / in / weather / the
.....
3. your / kind / weather? / favourite / of / What's
.....
4. the / Have / forecast / you / for / weekend? / this / heard
.....
5. Which / like? / kind / you / weather / of / don't
.....



Travel

6. airport? / drive / the / How / was / the / from
.....
7. you / Did / flight? / a / good / have
.....
8. journey / was / train / yesterday? / your / How
.....
9. problems / us? / any / Did / finding / you / have
.....
10. How / service / was / Star Airways? / the / on
.....

Hotel

11. are / Where / here? / staying / you're / you / while
.....
12. Are / with / hotel? / satisfied / you / your
.....
13. a / a / have / view? / Do / you / room / with
.....
14. good / the / location? / Is / hotel / a / in
.....
15. buffet? / How's / breakfast / the
.....



C

Match the answers below to the questions in Activity B.

Weather

- A It was snowy and a bit windy. [2]
- B Yes, it's in the pedestrian zone with lots of shops, restaurants and pubs. []
- C There was no problem on the motorway. Fortunately, I didn't get stuck in any traffic jams. []
- D Well, I really don't like hot weather. It's very uncomfortable and makes me feel tired. []
- E It will be cool and rainy. []
- F We had some turbulence, but the pilot got through it just fine. []
- G The flight attendants were really great. []
- H It arrived on time with no delays. []
- I I've got a room at the Hotel Plaza. []
- J Oh, yes definitely. The service at the reception desk was friendly and helpful. []
- K Yes, it overlooks Hyde Park. It's just lovely. []
- L Absolutely delicious! They offer just about anything you want to eat. []
- M I prefer the winter since I like skiing and snowboarding. []
- O No, your directions were fine. They worked well with the navigation system in my car. []
- P It's really pleasant today. []

D

Practise this conversation with your partner. Then repeat the conversation using your own answers.

- A: So you don't care much for **cold weather**. What's your **favourite season**?
- B: **Summer** is my favourite time of the year. I really love **outdoor sport**.
- A: Really? So do you like tennis?
- B: Oh yes, I love tennis. **I play** twice a week. **I also watch professional matches on TV**.
- A: Do you have a **favourite professional player**?
- B: Well, in the men's game, I like Alonso Torres. In the women's, Alicia Simpson is just great!

Cut-outs

BUSINESS BASICS CUT-OUTS

flight

delays (train)



turbulence

weather

drive

the hotel room

traffic jams

the hotel service

journey (train)

the hotel location

Transcript

C

1

A: What do you think of our weather?

B: It's really pleasant today.

2

A: What was the weather like in Manchester?

B: It was snowy and a bit windy.

3

A: What's your favourite kind of weather?

B: I prefer the winter since I like skiing and snowboarding.

4

A: Have you heard the forecast for this weekend?

B: It will be cool and rainy.

5

A: What kind of weather don't you like?

B: Well, I really don't like hot weather. It's very uncomfortable and makes me feel tired.

Travel

6

A: How was the drive from the airport?

B: There was no problem on the motorway. Fortunately, I didn't get stuck in any traffic jams.

7

A: Did you have a good flight?

B: We had some turbulence but the pilot got through it just fine.

8

A: How was your train journey yesterday?

B: It arrived on time with no delays.

9

A: Did you have any problems finding us?

B: No, your directions were fine. They worked well with the navigation system in my car.

10

A: How was the service on Star Airways?

B: The flight attendants were really great.

Transcript

Hotel

11

A: Where are you staying while you're here?

B: I've got a room at the Hotel Plaza.

12

A: Are you satisfied with your hotel?

B: Oh, yes definitely. The service at the reception desk was friendly and helpful.

13

A: Do you have a room with a view?

B: Yes, it overlooks Hyde Park. It's just lovely.

14

A: Is the hotel in a good location?

B: Yes, it's in the pedestrian zone with lots of shops, restaurants and pubs.

15

A: How's the breakfast buffet?

B: Absolutely delicious! They offer just about anything you want to eat.

D

A: So you don't care much for **cold weather**. What's your **favourite season**?

B: **Summer** is my favourite time of the year. I really love **outdoor sport**.

A: Really? So do you like tennis?

B: Oh yes, I love tennis. **I play** twice a week. **I also watch professional matches on TV**.

A: Do you have a **favourite professional player**?

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