

## Medium talk by Hall Houston

<b>Age:</b>	Adults
<b>Level:</b>	Intermediate
<b>Time:</b>	45 minutes
<b>Objectives:</b>	To start and maintain conversations; to ask and answer questions; to ask follow-up questions
<b>Key skills:</b>	Speaking, listening
<b>Materials:</b>	One copy of the Questions handout; plain paper for each student

### Preparation

1. Before the class, choose enough questions from the Questions handout for half of your students (for example, choose 15 questions for a class of 30 students).
2. Read over the questions on the handout and decide if you need to pre-teach any words or phrases.
3. Next, prepare a PowerPoint presentation, featuring all the questions you selected, one question per slide.
4. Print and cut out the questions you chose, along with an equal number of slips with question marks.
5. Tape the slips of paper under students' desks, before any of the students enter the classroom. If this is not feasible in your context, you can also hand out the slips during step 14 of the lesson plan.

### Procedure

1. Begin by asking students, 'What are the most common topics that you talk about with your friends?' Encourage students to shout out topics as you write them up on the board.
2. Tell the class you want to show them how to keep a conversation going and expand the range of topics they talk about.
3. Wipe the board clean, then write three headings across the top of the board:
  - SMALL TALK
  - MEDIUM TALK
  - SERIOUS TALK

Leave lots of space between each heading.

Ask students to write these across the top of a sheet of paper, with the paper turned on the side (landscape view).

4. Explain that you are going to dictate some conversation topics and students need to write the topics in the column where they belong. Call out these topics:
  - death
  - work
  - hobbies
  - goals
  - feelings
  - sex
  - role models
  - politics
  - sports
5. Put students in pairs and ask them to discuss their answers.
6. Next, call on three pairs to come to the board. Assign each pair a column and have them write their answers under the relevant heading. (*Answers: SMALL TALK: work, hobbies, sports; MEDIUM TALK: goals, feelings, role models; SERIOUS TALK: politics, sex, death*)
7. Explain that small talk is light, superficial conversation. Write a couple of small-talk questions on the board, such as 'What's your hobby?' or 'What do you do?' Tell the class that serious talk can include deep or even controversial topics. Write a couple of questions, such as 'Who did you vote for last year?' or 'How do you feel about death?'
8. Ask your students to think for a minute about what might go wrong with small talk, as well as with serious talk. Give them a minute to think, then call on several students to share their ideas.
9. Ask students to guess what medium talk means. After getting a few answers, tell the class that medium talk is a fairly new expression and it refers

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to talk that is deeper than small talk but doesn't delve into more controversial or offensive topics. Medium-talk questions can help you get to know someone better and lead to more interesting conversations than small-talk questions.

10. (Optional) Read aloud several additional conversation questions that clearly fit into one of the three categories on the board. Ask for volunteers to tell you which category the questions fall into.
11. Tell the class that you want them to read a series of medium-talk questions. (Pre-teach unknown vocabulary, if necessary.) Show the class your PowerPoint presentation. Display each question for about ten seconds and encourage students to think about how they would answer them.
12. Tell students that, in a few minutes, they will mingle and ask each other some of these questions. They will need to stand up, walk around, find a partner and ask the question on their slip of paper. In addition, they need to answer their partner's question. Suggest that they keep the conversation going by:
  - using good body language (nodding, making eye contact);
  - reacting to their classmates' answers appropriately ('Wow! That's interesting!' or 'Really?');
  - asking a follow-up question or two.
13. At the end of the interaction, everyone must swap papers with their partner and find a new partner to repeat the process. You can do a demonstration with a student before you begin the activity, to make sure everyone knows what to do.
14. At this point, tell students that they need to look under their desks for a slip of paper with a question on it (or hand out the slips yourself). If they get a slip of paper with a question mark on it, they need to think of their own medium-talk question. Allow some time for this.
15. Now, they should begin mingling. Tell everyone to repeat the interaction five times (talk to five different partners) and then return to their seats.

16. Finally, when everyone is sitting down again, tell the class that you want to ask them a few of the medium-talk questions they practised earlier, along with follow-up questions. Tell them that you expect them to ask you one of their own medium-talk questions. Ask several students until roughly half the students have been called on.

### Extension activities

- For more information on medium talk, read Jesse Singal's article 'Tired of Small Talk? Try Medium Talk'

[www.thecut.com/2016/02/tired-of-small-talk-try-medium-talk.html](http://www.thecut.com/2016/02/tired-of-small-talk-try-medium-talk.html)

- For a follow-up, you might wish to do a lesson on a taboo topic. I can suggest two books for doing so: *52* by Luke Meddings and Lindsay Clandfield (the round) and *Parsnips in ELT* by Phil Wade and Katherine Bilsborough (Smashwords).

The following onestopenglish lesson plans provide controversial questions for discussion:

- [www.onestopenglish.com/skills/speaking/lesson-plans/discussion/sex-sells/550640.article](http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/speaking/lesson-plans/discussion/sex-sells/550640.article) (sex)
- [www.onestopenglish.com/speaking-verbal-boxing/550232.article](http://www.onestopenglish.com/speaking-verbal-boxing/550232.article) (gender equality and capital punishment)
- [www.onestopenglish.com/community/lesson-share/winning-lessons/speaking/speaking-drugs/145139.article](http://www.onestopenglish.com/community/lesson-share/winning-lessons/speaking/speaking-drugs/145139.article) (drugs)

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If you were the leader of your country for one week, what three changes would you make?

Which song title reminds you of your life right now?

What are your favourite and least favourite film genres? Why?

Which period of your life was the best? Why?

What do you usually do when you can't sleep?

Would you ever eat a piece of food that fell on the floor? Why? Why not?

What smell do you find the most unbearable?

Do you have a pet phrase? If so, what is it?

Can you describe the last dream you remember having?

What do you think your future self (ten years in the future) will say about who you are now?

If you could travel through time, would you go to the past or the future? Why?

Which snack have you been craving recently?

What goals do you have for the next year?

What is your favourite app on your phone? Why?

Can you name an item of clothing that you've always wanted to wear?

Who is your role model? Why?

Lesson Share QUESTIONS

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What is one thing about yourself that surprises people when you tell them?

What is your dream job? Why?

If you could have dinner with three famous people, who would they be?

What have you been thinking about a lot this week? Why?

What's your guilty pleasure?

Can you recommend a TV show or film not many people know about?

What memory from childhood makes you laugh?

Are you a morning person or a night person?

In what three ways have you changed in the last ten years?

What is your least favourite colour? Why?

Can you recommend a good habit that helps you save time or money?

If you could live abroad for one year, which country would you go to?

What's the most boring book you have ever read? Why?

Which song do you think makes the best ringtone? Why?

Where would you like to go on a first date? Why?

Do you have any tattoos? If not, would you consider getting one?

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