

A moment that changed me: I gave up small talk for a month – and the world came alive

Level 1: Elementary

Article summary: This article describes what happened when the author decided not to engage in 'small talk' for a month.

Time: 60 minutes

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Phrasal verbs

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the sentences using words from the previous activity in the correct form.

Key:

1. *relieved*
2. *experiment*
3. *rude*
4. *performance*
5. *trained*
6. *purpose*
7. *lockdown*
8. *results*
9. *ignore*
10. *approach*

1. Warmer

- a. This activity aims to get students thinking about what 'small talk' is, why people use it and what topics they generally talk about. Ask students if they feel comfortable making small talk in social situations and what people typically talk about. You can extend the activity by asking pairs of students to role-play a typical conversation between people who are meeting for the first time, where they engage in small talk.

2. Key words

- a. Ask students to work individually to match the words from the box to the definitions. Remind them to read the sentences that come before or after the words in bold to help them work out the meaning of the words in context. Allow a few minutes for students to check answers in pairs or groups before checking answers with the whole class. Check that students are pronouncing the key words correctly as they give you the answers.

Key:

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. <i>purpose</i> | 6. <i>rude</i> |
| 2. <i>experiment</i> | 7. <i>ignore</i> |
| 3. <i>relieved</i> | 8. <i>trained</i> |
| 4. <i>approach</i> | 9. <i>results</i> |
| 5. <i>lockdown</i> | 10. <i>performance</i> |

3. Comprehension check

- a. Students can work individually or in pairs to do this activity. Encourage them to highlight the section of the article where they found the answers to the questions, and if possible, to use their own words in the answers.

Key:

1. *Because it was boring and stressful.*
2. *The writer didn't have to make small talk. / The conversations she had felt more real.*
3. *At a friend's party*
4. *What's your star sign?*
5. *That small talk has a purpose – it's about human connection.*

4. Key language

- a. Students work individually to match the expressions to the correct definition.

Key:

1. *e*
2. *d*
3. *a*
4. *b*
5. *c*

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- b. Ask students to work individually or in pairs to complete the sentences with the expressions from task a. You might like to point out to students that the phrasal verb play along is often followed by with, e.g. *When Jake started joking about the boss during the meeting, I didn't play along with it – it felt unprofessional.*

Key:

1. at ease
2. fed up with
3. give up
4. play along
5. on edge

5. Discussion

- a. Students discuss the questions in pairs or groups. Ask them to justify their opinions, referring to their own experiences whenever possible.

6. In your own words

- a. The aim of this task is to get students to think about small talk and practise asking questions in English. You can limit the number of questions they have to write before. This activity can also be done in groups.
- b. Give students time to present their lists. Hold a class discussion about how cultures differ by what topics are acceptable to discuss with a stranger.