

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

Level 2: Intermediate

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

Key:

1. *networking*
2. *torture*
3. *awkward*
4. *last*
5. *lockdown*
6. *deflect*
7. *common ground*
8. *freelance*
9. *suspicion*
10. *authentic*

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

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. Finally, ask students to speculate whether people from different countries and cultures use small talk in the same way as people in the UK generally do, and whether there are particular generic topics that they use and why.

Key:

1. *awkward*
2. *lockdown*
3. *deflect*
4. *common ground*
5. *authentic*
6. *suspicion*
7. *networking*
8. *freelance*
9. *torture*
10. *last*

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.

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. *It was boring and stressful. She didn't understand the rules, e.g. how long it should last or whether to answer honestly.*
2. *An actor practising lines for a play*
3. *When someone mentioned the sun, she talked about her favourite season instead. When a woman mentioned her children weren't in school, she asked what her favourite subject had been.*

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

Level 2: Intermediate

4. *Most people seemed relieved. The writer suggests she wasn't the only one who found small talk awkward.*
5. *Some gave her a funny look and walked away. Others reacted with suspicion.*
6. *Small talk helps people connect with each other. She describes it as a passport.*

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

- 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. seek out
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 a habit, behaviour or social convention that they don't like or find annoying and to devise a social experiment to do things differently for a month in the same way that the writer of the text did with small talk. Monitor as they do this, helping with ideas or suggestions if students need guidance.
- b. Give students time to develop their experiment before they present it to the class. Encourage them to explain their choices and to answer any questions that their classmates may have. Students can vote on the experiment that they think is the most interesting, the most fun or the most practical.