



SMALL TALK and conversational mojo

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1. What do you usually say when someone asks, “How are you?” in a meeting? Has that changed since the pandemic began?
2. Do you think small talk is harder or easier in video calls compared to in-person? Why?
3. Have you ever felt awkward starting a conversation after a long time without seeing someone face to face? What did you say or do?
4. During the pandemic, did you ever miss random chats with strangers (e.g., at work, in cafés, or public transport)? Why or why not?
5. How do you feel when there’s no small talk before a meeting – just straight to business? Does it affect your mood or performance?



A large rectangular area filled with a light blue dotted grid, intended for handwritten responses to the questions above.

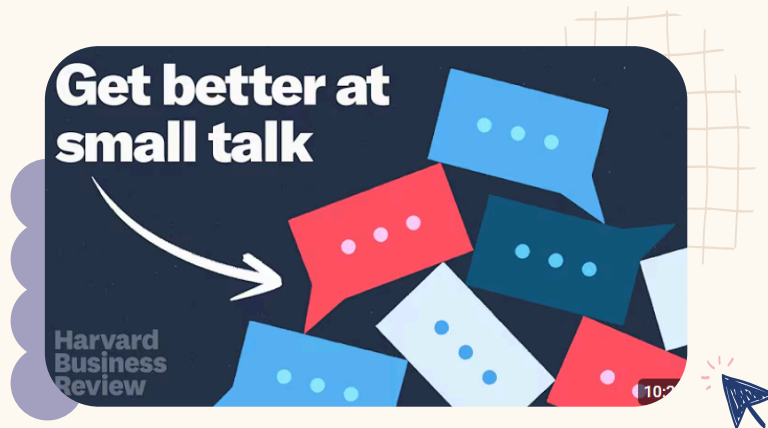
Video vocabulary

misnomer / sth lands well / the gist of / distillation / fidelity / intently /
inquisitively / concision / trite / off and running

Translate Polish phrases in brackets into English and complete each sentence.

1. The term "strategic review" is actually a [] (nadużycie) — it's just a quarterly update.
2. She started with a light joke that luckily [] (wszyscy dobrze to odebrali).
3. You don't need all the details, just try to catch [] (sedno sprawy).
4. This slide is a clear [] (esencja) of the data from our latest customer feedback.
5. In legal documents, [] (dokładność i wierność) to the original text is essential.
6. Everyone was listening [] (uważnie) as the CEO spoke.
7. He asked questions [] (dociekliwie), which showed real engagement.
8. I really appreciated the report's [] (zwięzłość) and clarity.
9. The slogan was rejected for being [] (banalne i mało oryginalne).
10. The marketing team is [] (pełną parą ruszył do pracy) after the project got approval.

Watch the video and fill in missing information.



Small talk, often dismissed as trivial, serves as a vital means of (1), fostering personal growth and understanding. Rather than viewing it as a competitive exchange, one should perceive it as a (2), akin to a game of hacky sack. The key to effective small talk lies in being (3), as suggested by matchmaker Rachel Greenwald, who emphasizes the importance of (4). Pausing and paraphrasing enhance (5), allowing for more meaningful interactions. Initiating conversations with (6) can spark interest and engagement, moving beyond conventional greetings. Additionally, exiting conversations (7), perhaps by signaling the end while asking a final question, can enhance the overall experience. Emphasizing (8), even in spontaneous settings, can lead to clearer and more impactful exchanges.

Over to you

Reflect on the quotes from the video.

- “Your goal needs to be interested, not interesting.”
- “Tell me more.”
- “Mistake vs missed take.”

Reading

Read the two excerpt passages from the Guardian article and answer the questions below.

Reading the whole article to gain insights on how to get your conversational mojo back is highly recommended!

Passage 1 questions

1. What humorous comparison does the writer make about the colleague pairing system at work?
2. How does the writer describe his personal struggles with social interaction after isolation?
3. What is the significance of the pineapple anecdote?
4. What symptoms of post-pandemic social anxiety are mentioned in the passage?
5. In your own words, do you think people can really "forget how to talk"? Why or why not?

Passage 2 questions

1. What does the author miss about group socializing, and why does he feel unable to enjoy it?
2. What deeper fear does the author associate with his conversational anxiety?
3. What does Kendall mean when he says, "We're not honeyeaters"?
4. What is the final piece of advice offered by the experts?
5. What does the ending exchange about Bath reveal about the author's recovery of confidence?

Over to you / Reflections

Have you ever felt awkward or unsure in a social situation after a long break (e.g., after lockdown, holidays, or moving to a new place)? What helped you feel more comfortable again?

The author jokes about “babbling about pineapples.” Have you ever found yourself oversharing or talking too much out of nervousness? How did it go?

What’s your “mental screensaver” – something you often think about when you’re not focused on anything in particular? Would you feel comfortable sharing it in conversation?

The article suggests that presence and genuine listening are key to good conversation. Can you think of a time when someone made you feel truly ‘seen’ during a chat? What did they do?

Do you think people can ‘forget’ how to connect socially – or is it more about confidence?

Vocabulary - Slang

Read the dialogues and choose the best meaning of the **bold** expression from the three options.

1. A: I made a joke to lighten the mood, but... it **didn't really land**.
B: Awkward.

What does it mean?

- A** It was confusing
- B** It didn't go over well
- C** It started an argument



2. A: We could do a 7 a.m. team check-in every day.
B: **Hard pass.**

What does it mean?

- A I strongly disagree
- B Maybe later
- C I'm unsure

3. A: Did she ever get back to you about the contract?
B: Nope. She totally **ghosted me.**

What does it mean?

- A Rejected politely
- B Disappeared without explanation
- C Blocked communication officially

4. A: How's your day going?
B: I've been in back-to-back meetings since 9. I'm **Zoomed out.**

What does it mean?

- A Ready for more meetings
- B Tired of video calls
- C Focused on Zoom presentations

5. A: You OK? You seem off.
B: I'm just **low-key burned out.**

What does it mean?

- A Very angry
- B Extremely excited
- C Slightly exhausted or emotionally drained



6. A: He thinks a one-hour meeting will fix the whole workflow issue.
B: Yeah... that's a **stretch**.

What does it mean?

- A That sounds realistic
- B That's physically tiring
- C That's unrealistic or unlikely

7. A: Do you want to review the report tonight?
B: Honestly? I'm **fried**.

What does it mean?

- A I'm exhausted
- B I'm angry
- C I'm hungry

8. A: How's the launch going?
B: I'm totally **in the weeds** with final edits.

What does it mean?

- A Lost in nature
- B Deeply involved in details and overwhelmed
- C Doing well and organized

9. A: Need anything before the meeting?
B: No, but **ping me** if anything changes.

What does it mean?

- A Add me to the list
- B Call me later
- C Message me quickly



10. A: I made a sarcastic comment about management, but no one laughed.

B: Oof. Time to **read the room** next time.

What does it mean?

- A Understand the mood and reactions of others
- B Look at the meeting agenda
- C Check who's present

11. A: I suggested switching platforms, but I got a lot of **pushback** from the tech team.

B: Sounds like they weren't on board.

What does it mean?

- A Technical delay
- B Resistance or disagreement
- C Help from colleagues

12. A: The candidate was a total **no-show** for the interview.

B: Not even an email? That's unprofessional.

What does it mean?

Someone who forgets to speak

- B Someone who cancels last minute
- C Someone who doesn't attend without notice

13. A: We're out of time for the marketing budget discussion.

B: Let's **table it** and come back to it on Monday.

What does it mean?

- A Cancel the topic
- B Pause or postpone it
- C Approve it quickly



**Fill in the blanks using the slang/jargon expressions from the list below.
Use each only once.**

read the room, hard pass, ping me, ghosted, vibe check, fried, Zoomed out,
low-key burned out, no-show, take it offline, circle back, off and running,
didn't land, in the weeds, pushback, big ask, table it

1. A: Are you ready to pitch that bold idea to the leadership team?
B: Honestly... I'm not sure. I really need to [] before I go in there.
2. A: Can we finalize this tonight?
B: I'm totally [] — I'll do better in the morning.
3. A: He was supposed to present his section.
B: Total []. Didn't show, didn't message.
4. A: Your joke about cancel culture really [].
Everyone just stared.
B: Oops. Timing was off.
5. A: Let's set up a quick sync after lunch.
B: Sure. Just [] when you're ready.
6. A: Are we discussing the team restructuring now?
B: Nah, let's [] until Thursday's call.
7. A: I emailed them three times.
B: Sounds like you've been [].
8. A: I got serious [] from the finance team when I mentioned monthly bonuses.
B: No surprise there.

Role Plays

In pairs or small groups, roleplay one of the scenarios below having casual conversations about these situations and using at least 2–3 of the slang/jargon expressions. Try to use them naturally.

1. Remote Team Check-In:

You're catching up after a busy week of online meetings. One of you is exhausted, someone ghosted the team, and another wants to table a long discussion.

2. Client Debrief:

You've just finished a tricky presentation. You need to read the room, touch base later, and figure out why a proposal didn't land.

3. Planning a Social Event (and Failing):

You tried to organize a casual team meetup, but got pushback on the date, one person was a no-show, and someone else gives a hard pass.

Agree / Disagree Debate

"Employees who feel low-key burned out should speak up, even if it risks looking unprofessional."

Agree or disagree? Should openness about burnout be normalized in the workplace?

"Getting ghosted after a job interview is worse than receiving a formal rejection."

Agree or disagree? Is silence more damaging than honest feedback?