



Key:

“Tutor: xxx” indicates that the tutor should say the sentences aloud to the learner.

Brackets [] indicate information to the tutor about how to have a successful session; this should not be spoken aloud to the learner.

{Chat: xxx} indicates that the tutor should type the information to the learner in the messaging function.

Vocabulary:

- Bump into
- Catch up
- Food court
- Native speaker
- Sympathy

Learning objectives:

- Practice being a responsive listener
- Use short questions in conversation / Use tag questions

Tutor:

Today we’re going to talk about talking. That is, we’re going to go over things you can say to start a conversation when you meet someone, to keep the conversation going, and to stop it when you need to.

What to say, what to say



Tutor:

Sometimes, you can be out in public, and you see someone that you want or need to talk to.

It might be someone you have to ask a question. Someone in a library, or a government office, for example.

What a cute scarf



Tutor:

Or it might be someone in a store or a shop. Maybe a salesperson.

It could be someone who has a nice scarf, or nice shoes, and you want to find out where they got them.

Or it could be someone that you think you know. Maybe someone from your high school, or an old friend.

B1:

- Did you ever do this? Go up and talk to someone—a stranger—in public?
- What was the reason you had to talk to them?

B2:

- In your culture, is it okay to go up to a person and start talking? When is it okay? Is it ever not okay?

C1:

- How do you feel if you have to approach a person you don't know?
- Are you an introvert or an extrovert?
- Do you talk to strangers easily? Or do you have to get your courage up?

Tutor:

Today we're going to go through the things you can say to start a conversation.

But we also want to go through the things you can say to keep a conversation going.

So instead of pretending that we're approaching a person just to ask a question, we're going to pretend we see someone that we used to know.

When “bumping into” doesn’t hurt



Bumping into a friend

Tutor:

English has a special verb for when you see someone in public that you know. It's **bump into**.

Bump into also means to walk into someone or something accidentally. In other words, to hit it with your body. For example, when you bump into a chair.

But here, *bump into* means to see someone you know. You don't actually bump into them with your body. You might just say hi and continue on. If you don't say hi at least, if you don't talk to them, then we don't use the words *bump into*.

B1:

- What are some places you might bump into someone?

B2:

- When you bump into someone, do you usually know what to say?
- Do you usually talk, or just say hi and keep going?

C1:

- Are you comfortable when you bump into someone, or does it make you uncomfortable?
- Why do you think it would make a person uncomfortable?

Starting a conversation



Tutor:

So let's talk about starting a conversation. It would be the same in all sorts of circumstances with strangers.

First, get their attention

- Excuse me
- Pardon me
- Hi / hello

[Move quickly through this slide.]

Tutor:

What I'm going to say is true for any situation. It doesn't need to be an old friend.

Here's the easy part. The first word or words are merely to get a person's attention. Here are some examples that we use in American English.

You can use whatever you're comfortable with.

To get someone's attention we don't say *hey*. Younger people might say *hey* instead of *hi* but even they don't say it to get someone's attention.

We also don't make a noise, or snap our fingers or anything.

Next words – the warmup

- I'm sorry to bother you.
- Do you have a moment?
- Could I ask you something?

Tutor:

The next words are a bridge of some kind to the thing you want to say.

In other words, we don't jump straight in to what we want. We warm the person up first.

Notice that two of them are actually questions. We don't usually wait for answers.

One thing we often do is apologize. We say we're sorry to bother, or we're sorry to interrupt, or we're sorry if this sounds stupid.

Otherwise, we might ask for permission.

Native speakers use all three of those, and more, but those three are probably the main ones.

{chat: native speaker}

Have you heard the term *native speaker*? It means someone who speaks a language as their first language. For example, I'm a native English speaker. Another phrase that's useful is *mother tongue*, which means the language that you used to communicate with your mother when you were a child.

{chat: mother tongue}

Now your question



“Didn’t we use to work together?”

Tutor:

After we’ve got their attention, and warmed them up, next comes the start or the topic of the conversation. It’s almost always a question.

Here are some ideas. You could start with *Do you know* and then ask something. For example, *Do you know where the library is? Do you know how I register for this class?* And so on.

[Learner may or may not know how to invert the verb and subject as in reported speech syntax. It’s unnecessary to correct for it, as it is outside the scope of this lesson.]

Or you could simply say what problem you have. For example, *I’m having trouble finding the library.*

B1:

- Is this similar to how you go up to a stranger in your culture? Is there anything different?

B2:

- In your culture and language, is it common to apologize to someone that you go up to talk to?

C1:

- How do you change what you say or do based on the age of the person?

- Is there anything else besides age that will influence how you approach someone?

Your turn



Tutor:

Pretend that you see the man in this photo, and you want to ask him something. Let's say you think you know him from high school. What would you say? I'll be the man.

[Assist learner as needed to sustain dialogue by offering prompts, suggestions, or possible responses.]

Catching up with an old friend



Tutor:

Now let's say you want to talk longer with this person. What is something you could do?

When we see an old friend, someone we haven't seen in a long time, and we want to talk more, what we usually do is **catch up**.

{chat: catch up}

Catch up means to exchange information about our lives with another person who we haven't seen in a long time. For example, if you got married, or had a baby, or if you changed jobs, or something like that, you would mention that when you catch up with another person.

B1:

- Is it the same in your culture? What do people talk about when they catch up with one another?

B2:

- Do you enjoy catching up with old friends? Or do you prefer getting to know new people instead?

- If you see someone you know on the street, do you stop and talk for a while?

C1:

- Do you think social media has changed how we keep up with friends? Do you think you know more about your old friends than people in earlier generations did?

A word on handshakes



That word is “maybe”

Tutor:

Before we go on, this is a good opportunity to have a quick word on handshakes.

{chat: noun – handshake; verb – shake hands}

In our culture here in the U.S., two men will almost always shake hands when they meet. Two women might or might not.

If a woman and a man meet, the polite thing is for the man to do is to wait, and let the woman decide. If the woman holds out her hand, then the man will shake it. If she doesn't, then they won't shake hands.

B1:

- Do people shake hands in your culture? Is there anything else they do?

B2:

- Is it different when two women meet than when two men meet?

- What about when a woman and a man are meeting?

- What about when a young person is meeting an older person?

C1:

- In your culture is it different depending on the setting? For example, in a business setting you might do it one way, but in a casual setting you might do it another way?

Continuing the convo



“Do you have time for a cup of coffee?”

Tutor:

See that heading? *Convo* just means conversation. Let's say the person you met is an old friend, and you want to talk more with them. You want to continue the convo. It's slang. Some people use that word, but some people don't, because it's slang.

In the United States, if we want to have a long conversation with someone, if we want to have time to talk, we usually invite them to get something to drink. It can be planned or unplanned. We'll just say, *Do you have time to get something to drink?* Or, *Do you have time for a cup of coffee?*

Usually it means coffee, but it can also mean soda, such as Coca-Cola. In fact, in some parts of the country, we don't even say *soda*. We say, *Do you want to get a Coke?*

Getting a drink

- Coffee shop
- Juice bar
- Food court
- Cafeteria
- Bar

Tutor:

Here are some places where we usually will go to have a talk with someone we just met, or an old friend.

See that list. See the third one? **Food court**. Do you know what that is?

The fun, friendly food court



Tutor:

Those are places in malls and airports and shopping centers, where they have a group of restaurants or fast food places.

{chat: food court}

If you're older, and it seems like you're both done with your duties for the day, you can offer to go to a bar, for something that's alcoholic, but usually we wouldn't do that with someone we haven't seen in a long time. And of course you have to be over 21 to drink alcohol in our country.

B1:

- What kind of places do friends go to for a drink in your country?
- Are there places that are popular?

What do people drink?

B2:

- Is it okay to invite someone you just met, or someone you haven't seen in a long time, for a drink?
- Is it common to stop what you're doing, and go for the drink, or would you set a future time?

C1:

- Do you think men catch up with an old friend differently than women do?

Getting a drink



Tutor:

So let's say you and your friend chose a coffee shop. Now you're in the coffee shop, and you are catching up.

B1:

- Do you enjoy going to coffee shops?
- What do you order?

B2:

- In your culture, who pays for this?
- Do you ever pay for the other person's drink, or offer to pay for it?
- Is it common to pay for someone else's drink?

C1:

- What kind of atmosphere do you look for when you want to catch up with an old friend?
- Would you do something else other than get a drink?

Chatting over coffee



Tutor:

If you meet an old friend, and go to get a coffee, what are some things you could ask your friend about?

How would you ask it?

[Some possible ideas:

Welfare of family (parents, brothers, sisters, spouse, children)

Relationship status

Job or employment status

Home or living location]

[Introducing next slide]

So you're having your conversation in the coffee shop.

You don't want to make the other person do all the work in the conversation. So there are some ways to keep the conversation going. That's what we're going to talk about now.

Supporting a conversation

- Words, sounds, gestures: you're listening
- Brief comment
- Brief question
- Detailed question

Tutor:

There are basically four ways we use in English to support a conversation and keep it going. It might be the same in your culture.

The first is, to use words or sounds or gestures that show you are listening and you understand.

The second is, making a brief comment to show concern or surprise.

The third is, asking a very brief question. Usually it's just one or two words.

The fourth is asking a more detailed question, to get more information.

All of these show you're interested in what the person is saying. Let's go through all of them one by one.

I hear you!

- Uh-huh / Mm-hmm
- Yeah
- Sure
- Right
- (Nodding)

Tutor:

Here's the first way. Just to use words or sounds that show you are following along.

That last word—nodding—means to move our head up and down. It means *yes* in our culture, but it also means, *I understand*.

Native English speakers use these all the time. We change them up, but the first is the most common. It's the way we write this sound. [Make the *uh huh* sound for the learner.]

But one thing is certain: If we're totally silent, if we don't make any noises, the person who is speaking will think something is wrong with them.

B1:

- Do you have something like the *uh-huh* sound in your language, something that you use just to show you're listening?
- What other ways do you use to show you are listening?

B2:

- How do you show good listening in your culture? Is listening an important skill?
- Are there things you do with your head or your body when you listen?

C1:

- Is silence acceptable in your culture when you are listening to a friend or acquaintance?
- What should I be careful to do when I'm listening, if I come to your country?

Showing support

- Nice
- Great!
- Wow
- Really?
- Oh no

Tutor:

Next on our list is a brief comment. That first shows we're listening, but it also can show support, or it can show surprise, or it can show concern. Native speakers typically choose one word that they use a lot to show support.

We show **concern** when the speaker is talking about something bad that happened to them. *Concern* is a useful word when we're talking about conversations. It just means you feel worried about someone or something. You feel for them, almost like a mother.

{chat: concern}

These depend on your age. Young people wouldn't use the same ones older people use. To show concern a young person might use the word "bummer" or "What a bummer."

{chat: bummer}

B1:

- When do you think you would show support? What would a person say that you would show support for?
- Do people in your country show concern when they listen? How do they do it?

B2:

- Are you the kind of person to show support when you listen? Or do you like to be more neutral?
- Is it polite to show support in your culture?
- Why do you think it's good to show concern when you're listening?

C1:

- When do you think it's important to show support?
- What kind of people don't need to show support?
- How does your concern change, based on who you're listening to?

Brief question

- Wh- question (one word), like *Where?*
- Tag question, like *Are you?* and *Is it?*
- *What then?*

Tutor:

The third way is asking a very brief question.

Native English speakers sometimes do this with just a single word.

For example, if I said, *I'm going on vacation next week*, you could say, *Where?*

Or you could say, *Are you?* That means you're interested, because you're giving me the opportunity to say something more, or it can give you time to think of another question. Sometimes it can also say just, "Tell me more."

Tag questions

- At end of statement
- To make sure of answer
- Make statement a question
- Helping verb + subject

Tutor:

That question, *Are you?* is similar to a tag question, because it's very short. Let's talk for a second about tag questions.

A tag question is just an extremely short question. It comes at the end of a statement, which can be a statement you made, or a statement someone else made. We use it to make sure of something.

For example, if you want to make sure someone is coming, you'll say, *You're coming, aren't you?* And that question, *Aren't you?* is a tag question. Another example might be, *She went to the store, didn't she?*

Here, we can use it to ask questions. If someone says, *I went to Paris last spring*, the question form of that would be, *Did you go to Paris last spring?* So the short question is, *Did you?*

The way to do it is, first, make the statement a question. Then, use the helping verb and subject of that question, then add a question mark.

Let's practice. I'll say something, and you ask a short question.

B1:

I really like chocolate ice cream. [Do you?]

I was downtown last night. [Were you?]

B2:

He has a brand new car. [Does he?]

She is waiting at home. [Is she?]

C1:

I have seen this movie before. [Have you?]

We'll see her tomorrow. [Will we?]

Stopping a speaker

- Wait a minute.
- Hold on.
- Wait, what?
- Just a sec.
- I'm not following.

Tutor:

Finally, the fourth way is asking a more detailed question. In this, we usually stop the speaker. In other words, we have to interrupt. So the question can be anything, but here are some words to stop a speaker so you can ask the question.

In that fourth one, *just a sec*, the word *sec* is short for *second*.

B1:

- Is it okay to stop a speaker to ask something in your culture?

B2:

- If you need to stop someone in your culture, how do you do it?

C1:

- In your culture, are there people you shouldn't interrupt?

Yak, yak, yak



Stopping a conversation

Tutor:

Now let's say that your friend just keeps talking. That heading, *yak yak yak*, is something we use to show a person doesn't stop talking.

Let's say you have a meeting you have to go to. Or your family is waiting for you. Let's say your friend just keeps talking and talking.

Now you have a new problem: How to stop the conversation.

One thing we almost always say at one point or another is: Well. Just that word. We'll draw it out: *WeIIII*.
{chat: WeIIII}

And then after that, we might say something that signals we don't have anything more to say

Conversation enders

- It was good to see you.
- It was great talking to you.
- I have to run.
- I really should go.

Tutor:

In the United States, we are kind of careful about how we end a conversation. Because one kind of ending suggests you expect to see the person again, and another kind suggests you don't.

None of these show that you plan or think you'll see the person again.

We might say, *I would love to talk more, but*, and then give a reason we can't.

Notice that we use the word *run* sometimes. I'm not exactly sure why. It doesn't literally mean "run."

Conversation enders

- I'll see you later.
- Let's keep in touch.
- Give me a call sometime.
- I'm on Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Tutor:

These are some of the things we say when we want to see the person again.

With friends, the phrase *See you later* is very, very common. It's the way a lot of people end most conversations.

The others are when we meet someone new or someone we used to know.

B1:

- How do people say goodbye in your culture, when they want to see the person again?

B2:

- Are people in your culture careful about how they end a conversation? Or is it casual?

- Is it normal to invite someone to friend you on social media, or is that too informal?

C1:

- Some people say, I'll give you a call, when they don't mean it, and never call. Do you think it is rude to do that?

Important vocabulary:

- Bump into
- Catch up
- Concern
- Food court
- Native speaker

For each of the five words, follow these four steps.

1. Tutor says the word
2. Learner repeats the word three times
3. Tutor (or learner) reads the definition
4. Tutor says a sentence containing the word (below)

Last weekend, Johan **bumped into** an old college friend, Michael, at the mall.

They talked for a long time to **catch up** on each other's life. .

Johan was **concerned** when he heard about Michael's sick father. .

The **food court** at the mall was crowded at that hour. .

They spoke English because Michael is a **native speaker**, and Johan's English was excellent.

Wow, I know her



Tutor:

Okay, now let's pretend.

Let's pretend that this is me, sitting alone in a coffee shop. And you see me, and think we used to work at the same big company. And you think maybe we could be friends.

So you have two goals: The first is to start the conversation. Then you want to keep the conversation going.

Okay, go.

[While catching up, relate life events the learner can react to, both positive and negative, either real or made up.

Possibilities include:

Just promoted to manager

Spent a year living in Spain

Had car stolen

Moved to a great new apartment

Got laid off

Bought a dog

Need a roommate

Got divorced



Thanks for chatting with me today!

[At the end of the session, the tutor should restate the topic and objective of the session, and give learner feedback on what they did well, as well as provide one piece of actionable feedback on what they can do to improve.]