

Learner Level: Low Intermediate - Advanced
Language focus: Small Talk
Skills: Speaking and Listening
Time: 10 minutes +
Materials: None
Grouping: Pairs or small groups (2-3)
Preparation: Explain that a "cup of Joe" means a cup of coffee

Quick Reference:

Students pretend to enjoy a drink at a coffee shop. They have to make small talk with strangers.

Teacher Instructions: 

1. As a class, brainstorm the different types of topics that are suitable for small talk (weather, current events, films or books, related situations). Write these ideas on the board. Then, brainstorm a few topics that are NOT appropriate for small talk (religion, politics, salaries, abortion, capital punishment). Write these on the board too.
2. Put the class in pairs. Tell each pair to think of a coffee shop. (Pairs can invent a name or use a popular one from their own town or city. This step helps students visualize.) Each student should also choose a persona (old man, young student, father of two, business woman).
3. Let the conversations begin (simultaneously)! Tell the students to pretend to sip their drinks. One member of each pair should start up a conversation and the other members should join in. Remind students they do not need to introduce each other when making small talk.

For Example: ✓

Young mom: *Sorry my kids are a little loud. They want to go to the park.*
Old man: *No problem. Every mom deserves a cup of Joe.*
Young mom: *The coffee here is so good, isn't it?*
Old man: *Yes, I've been coming here for twenty years now. I always get a muffin and a black coffee.*
Young mom: *Oh, are the muffins good?*
Old man: *Yes, if you order one early in the morning they are delicious. By afternoon they aren't as fresh.*

4. After 2 minutes of small talk have the students switch partners and try again. New pairs should invent a new location and new personas.

Teacher 2 Teacher: ☀

If some students seem to be running out of things to say, jump into a conversation by pretending to be a nearby coffee drinker. Assume a persona. Sip from your cup and comment on the weather or a current event. After the warm up, discuss any concerns about inappropriate topics used in the small talk conversations.

Related Topics from the ESL-Library.com:

Flash Cards: Drinks
Famous Things: Coffee
Warm Ups: Whatcha' Makin'?