

SMALL TALK INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

Often at the beginning and/or end of an interview, employers want to engage in small talk with you. This is typically a conversation about unimportant or uncontroversial matters unrelated to the company or position. The purpose of these conversations may be to set you at ease or, the employer may use this opportunity to assess your transferable skills or how you act under pressure. Small talk gives you a chance to form a good first impression, as well as demonstrate some job-relevant attributes. For example, you have the opportunity to highlight skills like listening and communication that you might not be able to show if you're giving rehearsed responses during the interview.

Tips for Engaging in Small Talk

- **Be engaged.** Although it may seem as though the conversation doesn't have anything to do with you getting the job, this is an opportunity to showcase your interpersonal skills and connect with the employer. Small talk is about relationships, not about content. Make sure to pay attention to what they are talking about and show interest by smiling, nodding, and asking and responding to questions.
- **Stick to safe topics.** The weather, traffic, and sports are usually safe topics. If an interviewer tries to draw you into a conversation about something more controversial like politics or religion, it's best to try and change the subject. Or, you can say something like, "I haven't heard the details about that. What do you think?" Also, stay away from personal information about yourself and the interviewer. If the interviewer is making you feel uncomfortable or asking questions that seem too personal in nature, you might want to consider whether this is a good place to work or not.
 - There are some questions that interviewers in the U.S. should not be asking such as: *How old are you? What is your religious or political affiliation? What is your race, color or ethnicity?* These questions could be used to discriminate against you which is illegal.
- **Don't be the one to go off topic.** Don't be the one to initiate small talk, rather let yourself be led by the interviewer. If your interviewer wants to spend five minutes talking about golf, then spend five minutes talking about golf. If the conversation seems to go on longer than necessary, try to bring it back to the topic at hand: your interview.
- **Listen more than you talk.** People are often more interested in what *they* have to say than in what you have to say. Avoid long stories about the huge traffic jam you were in that morning. On the other hand, if the interviewer wants to tell you about the horrors of his or her morning commute, let them rant. In addition, don't compliment falsely or gush unnecessarily. For example, if an employer has a photo of his or her pet on their desk, you can definitely make a positive comment or ask a question about the pet but there is no need to go on and on about it. However, this may be a good opportunity to make a connection with the employer if you can tell that you have something in common.

- **Make the small talk work for you.** Or at least don't let it work against you. Avoid sharing stories or anecdotes that show you in a negative light. Everything you say in a job interview should make you look intelligent and mature.
- **Watch your body language.** Maintain good eye contact and keep your chin up. Smile when there is something to smile about; the rest of the time, look pleasantly alert. Most of all, don't fidget unnecessarily. Small talk is a way to establish a genuine human connection with your interviewer which can help you get the job!

If English is not your first language you may want to:

- **Practice ahead of time.** Practice your English with American English speakers to polish your English language and your American social skills. Joining organizations will provide you with the opportunity to practice the English language and social etiquette. Join at least one on-campus organization which has American student members. For a list of organizations, please visit this link: <https://www.wit.edu/student-life/student-organizations-activities>. Also, take advantage of networking opportunities on and off campus.

Based on "7 Tips for Chatting With Your Job Interviewer" by Karen Burns on usnews.com.