

Soft Skill:

Verbal Communication

Small Talk is a Big Deal

Good conversational skills are a critical component for workplace success. One important conversational strategy that will help students build good personal and business relationships is learning to make small talk. Small talk is informal, light conversation that often precedes more important discussions.

Job interviews most often begin with small talk exchanges, so those job candidates with good small talk skills will make a more positive impression right from the start. Because students spend so much time behind their computer screens or on their cell phones, they have fewer face-to-face encounters and are reluctant to strike up conversations with strangers. Consequently, they have not been participating in small talk or reaped its benefits.

While small talk helps people make a connection, recent studies found that friendly get-to-know-you interactions improved one's problem solving abilities and even boosted memory and test performance. In contrast, more serious competitive conversation tended to dampen one's abilities.

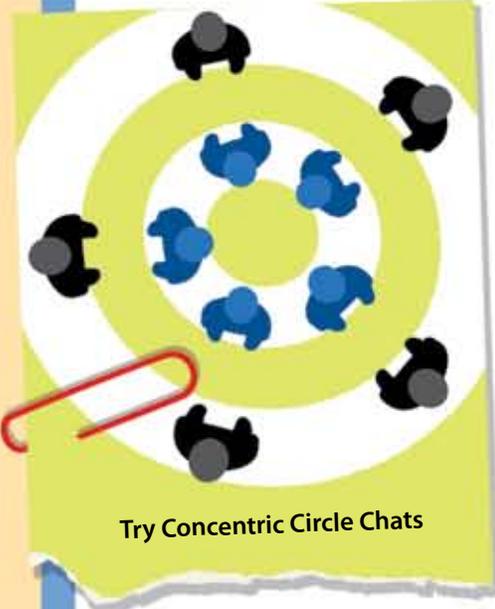
If your students want to know a secret to success, one that will help open workplace doors and make them smarter in the process, encourage them to practice friendly chit chat in this concentric circle activity.

Brief them...

- ✓ Open class by engaging students in some small talk conversation.
- ✓ Ask questions about small talk and how often students participate in get-to-know-you interactions.
- ✓ List some of the advantages of small talk.
- ✓ Distribute **Small Talk**, review the directions and give students time to draft their OARs.
- ✓ Form **concentric circles** to practice small talk.

Divide class in half and have students form inside and outside circles, pair up, and try out their conversation starters. Have students change partners several times to make more chit chat.

- ✓ Discuss how they felt doing this activity and have them commit to making small talk with strangers this week.



Small Talk

One of the most important secrets to success is to learn how to engage people of all ages in casual conversation. This casual conversation, often dubbed small talk, will help you build positive personal and professional relationships. Author and speaker Kathleen D. Pagana suggests using the acronym OAR to help generate conversation. Write 3 small talk conversation starters for the O, A and R.



Observe — Make an observation. *It looks like we are in for some warm weather...*



Ask questions — *What do you plan to do over the holiday?*



Reveal something — *I'm really looking forward to meeting new people in this class...*

Use your OAR's to practice your small talk as you move around the conversational circle.

10 things Co-workers Want You to Say*...

1. Good morning
2. Good afternoon
3. You did a great job on that!
4. Are you free for lunch?
5. Hang in there.
6. You look nice today.
7. I love this place!
8. What's new?
9. I really like learning from you.
10. Can I help you with anything?

* from *Effective Immediately* by Emily Bennington and Skip Lineberg



Your job interview starts in the company's parking lot. Make small talk with different people you meet at the company. Making small talk will give you added insights and help you relax before your interview.