

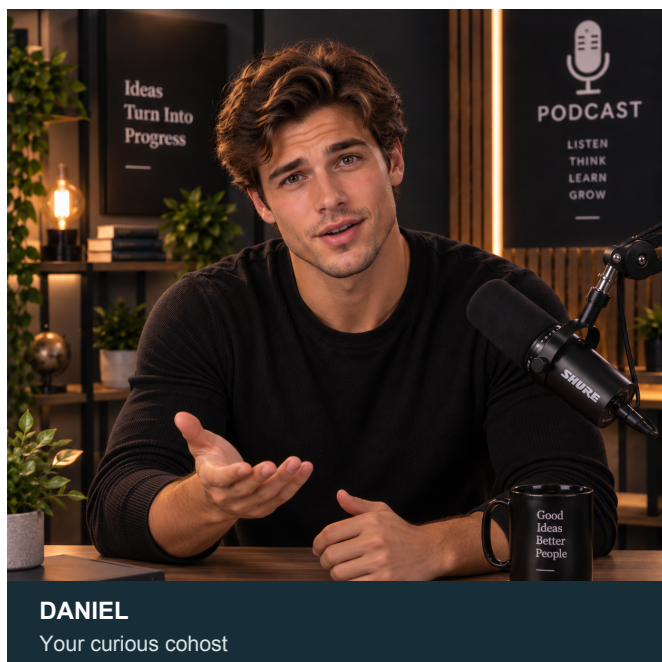


Making Small Talk

English listening & speaking with Daniel and Maya

Read along with Daniel and Maya. Practise useful English from this episode.

B1-B2 / 19:26 AUDIO / FULL TRANSCRIPT



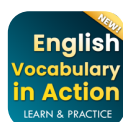
DANIEL
Your curious cohost



MAYA
Your English teacher

LISTEN. READ. SAY IT.

- 1 Listen once for the story.
- 2 Read along and notice useful expressions.
- 3 Choose one useful phrase and try saying it out loud.





FULL TRANSCRIPT / 01 OF 09

The conversation

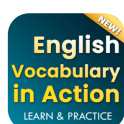
Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

00:00 The room full of strangers

- Daniel** Welcome back! I'm Daniel, and today I'm at a welcome event with forty strangers, twelve name tags, and one bowl of crisps. Maya, how do I start a conversation without interviewing a crisp?
- Maya** I'm Maya, your English teacher. Start small and sound curious. You can say, "Hi, I'm Daniel. Is this your first time here?" The answer gives you something to build on. You don't need a clever speech.
- Daniel** My clever speech was, "Hello, fellow humans. I also enjoy being in rooms." I'll put that away. What if the person is already talking to someone else?
- Maya** Wait for a natural pause, smile, and say, "Mind if I join you?" That is friendly and brief. If they seem busy, give them space. Small talk works best when both people have a choice.
- Daniel** So I shouldn't jump between them like a football referee. Fair enough. People say "break the ice." What ice? The room is quite warm.
- Maya** "Break the ice" means help people feel more comfortable at the beginning. A simple question can do it: "How did you hear about this event?" Or mention what you share: "That talk was interesting, wasn't it?"
- Daniel** I can do that. But I often ask, "Where are you from?" immediately. Is that always a good opener?
- Maya** It can be fine, but don't assume someone is a visitor because of their name or accent. Begin with the situation: "What brings you here tonight?" Later, if it feels natural, ask where they live or grew up.
- Daniel** "What brings you here?" sounds as if a taxi brought them. Does it really mean "Why are you here?"
- Maya** Exactly. It is a warm, natural question. You could also ask, "Are you taking a course here?" or "Have you been to one of these events before?" Give the other person an easy answer to start with.
- Daniel** And if they answer, "Yes," then stare at me while I stare at the crisps?
- Maya** Add a little of your own story: "It's my first time, so I'm still finding my way around." Now they can respond. A good opener is a doorway, not a test with a correct answer.

02:16 Better questions, better answers

- Daniel** I've entered through the doorway. Now I ask, "Do you like the course?" They say, "Yes." The doorway shuts. Should I carry emergency questions in my pocket?



Transcript edition 01

02 / 10



FULL TRANSCRIPT / 02 OF 09

The conversation

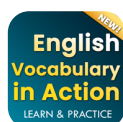
Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

02:16 Better questions, better answers (continued)

- Maya** You can carry a few, but learn to make them open. Try, "What have you enjoyed about the course so far?" That invites more than yes or no. Then listen for a detail you can ask about.
- Daniel** What if they say, "The group projects are fun"? My group projects usually involve one person doing all the work and another person choosing the font.
- Maya** You could say, "Oh, what kind of projects have you done?" That's a follow-up question. "Follow up" here means continue from something the person just said. It shows you actually heard them.
- Daniel** Could I ask, "Why? Why? Why?" after every answer, like a very polite detective?
- Maya** Please don't. Mix questions with comments. "That sounds interesting. I haven't tried a group project here yet. What was your part?" Sharing one sentence about yourself stops the chat from feeling like an interview.
- Daniel** So the pattern is question, listen, comment, follow-up. I might write that on my hand, unless that looks like an exam cheat sheet.
- Maya** Keep it in your head. You can also echo one word naturally. If someone says, "I started painting last month," you might respond, "Painting? Nice! What got you interested?" It gives them room to tell a story.
- Daniel** "What got you interested?" means "What made you interested," right? I like that. Can I say, "How did you get into painting?"
- Maya** Yes. "Get into" means become interested in an activity. Another useful question is, "What do you like about it?" These are open, friendly, and easy to adapt to cooking, sport, music, or any hobby.
- Daniel** What if I don't know anything about the hobby? If they say rock climbing, I can only picture a rock and some fear.
- Maya** You don't have to pretend you're an expert. Say, "I've never tried that. What's it like?" Genuine curiosity is better than inventing an impressive climbing story. And you might learn something new.

04:36 Finding common ground

- Daniel** I meet someone who loves climbing, and I love sitting down. Do we need the same hobby to get along?





The conversation

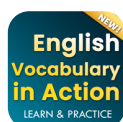
Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

04:36 Finding common ground (continued)

- Maya** No. "Get along" means have a friendly relationship. You can connect through a shared feeling or experience. "I haven't climbed, but I know what it's like to be nervous before trying something new."
- Daniel** That's true. I was nervous before making tea in someone else's kitchen. The spoons seemed to be hiding. How do I find a topic we both enjoy?
- Maya** Look for clues in what they say. If they mention a weekend trip, ask about the place. If they mention a film, ask what they thought. You can also ask, "What do you like doing when you're not studying?"
- Daniel** Is "What do you do?" dangerous? I mean, they might think I only care about their job.
- Maya** It often means "What is your job?" and can feel a little narrow. At a student event, "What are you studying?" may fit, but not everyone is a student. Try "What keeps you busy these days?" if the mood is relaxed.
- Daniel** "What keeps you busy?" sounds like a question from my calendar. It knows too much about me. What if they answer with something I disagree with?
- Maya** You don't have to win a debate. You can say, "That's an interesting way to see it. What made you think that?" Or change to a lighter topic if the conversation is getting uncomfortable.
- Daniel** Could I say, "Let's agree to disagree" after thirty seconds, then flee toward the crisps?
- Maya** You could, but it's a little formal for a small difference. Try, "I see what you mean. I had a different experience." That acknowledges their view and leaves space for yours. If you want to move on, you can.
- Daniel** Suppose we discover we both like terrible science-fiction films. Do I say, "Finally, a fellow expert in plastic spaceships"?
- Maya** Absolutely. A light joke can help if it fits your personality. Then ask, "Have you seen anything good lately?" Common ground doesn't mean identical opinions. It means finding a subject both people are happy to explore.

06:48 When the conversation stalls

- Daniel** The chat is going well, and then we both stop talking. For three seconds. In my head, those three seconds last until next Thursday.
- Maya** Silence usually feels longer to you than to the other person. Take a breath. You can return to an earlier detail: "You mentioned a trip. How did that go?" That is more natural than changing topics randomly.





FULL TRANSCRIPT / 04 OF 09

The conversation

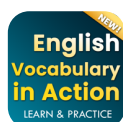
Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

06:48 When the conversation stalls (continued)

- Daniel** But if I cannot remember the trip, I might ask how their pet elephant is, and they don't have an elephant.
- Maya** Then use the room around you. "Have you tried the food?" or "Do you know when the next talk starts?" A shared setting offers easy topics. Don't force a deep conversation every minute.
- Daniel** Is "by the way" useful for changing the subject? I hear it constantly, but I don't want to use it like a fire alarm.
- Maya** Yes. "By the way, have you been to this place before?" introduces a related or new thought. It sounds natural if the change isn't too sudden. You can also say, "That reminds me," when there is a real connection.
- Daniel** For example, "You like painting. That reminds me, where is the bathroom?" Maybe not a real connection.
- Maya** Maybe not, but practical questions are allowed! If you've missed what someone said, don't guess. Say, "Sorry, I didn't catch that. Could you say it again?" People appreciate clarity more than a mysterious smile.
- Daniel** I do the mysterious smile when I hear a word I don't know. Then I accidentally agree to a mountain marathon.
- Maya** Ask, "What does that word mean in this context?" Or, more casually, "What do you mean by that?" You can learn a word and keep the conversation going at the same time.
- Daniel** What if the other person gives short answers again and again? Should I keep offering questions until one works?
- Maya** Notice their signals. They may be tired, shy, or ready to talk to someone else. You can say, "It was nice meeting you. I'm going to get a drink." A good conversation includes knowing when to let it end.

08:57 Names, introductions, and good exits

- Daniel** Small problem: I met someone called Priya, and five minutes later her name fell out of my brain. Can I just call her "my friend with the excellent jacket"?
- Maya** You can tell her you forgot. "I'm sorry, could you remind me of your name?" Most people understand. When you hear it, use it once: "Thanks, Priya." That helps you remember without repeating her name in every sentence.
- Daniel** So not "Priya, would you like a drink, Priya? Priya, how is the course, Priya?" I can hear how strange that sounds.





FULL TRANSCRIPT / 05 OF 09

The conversation

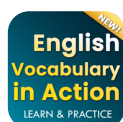
Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

08:57 Names, introductions, and good exits (continued)

- Maya** Exactly. If you introduce two people, give each person a helpful detail: "Priya, this is my friend Leo. He's also taking the photography course." Now they have a starting point, and you don't have to perform a magic trick.
- Daniel** What if I know one person's name but I've completely forgotten the other's? My plan is to say, "You two should meet," and then disappear.
- Maya** Better to be honest: "I'm sorry, your name has just slipped my mind." "Slip my mind" means I forgot for a moment. Then make the introduction. A small honest pause is less awkward than a dramatic escape.
- Daniel** What about exchanging contact details? I don't want a nice chat to end with, "Give me your phone number immediately."
- Maya** Say, "I've enjoyed talking with you. Would you like to stay in touch?" If they agree, ask what they prefer. A social media account or email may feel more comfortable than a phone number. If they hesitate, leave it there.
- Daniel** And if I need to leave because the talk is starting? I always say, "I must go now," then walk away as though I've received a secret mission.
- Maya** Give a short reason and a warm ending: "The next talk is about to start, so I'd better head in. It was lovely meeting you." "Head in" means go inside. You can add, "I hope we can catch up later."
- Daniel** "Catch up" means talk again and share what we've been doing. But what if I don't actually expect to see them again?
- Maya** Then don't promise it. "It was nice chatting with you. Enjoy the rest of the event." That's enough. Small talk should be kind and honest, even at the goodbye.
- Daniel** Good. I can leave without pretending I'm late for a submarine. I think that's already progress.
- Maya** It is. Remember the other person may be wondering how to end the chat too. A graceful exit gives both of you room to move on.

11:32 Safe topics and personal boundaries

- Daniel** People laugh at talking about the weather, but maybe it exists for a reason. Is weather actually a useful small-talk topic?
- Maya** It can be. It's shared and usually easy. "I'm glad the rain stopped before we got here." Then move to a question: "Do you come to these events often?" The weather can open the door; it doesn't need to furnish the whole house.





FULL TRANSCRIPT / 06 OF 09

The conversation

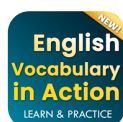
Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

11:32 Safe topics and personal boundaries (continued)

- Daniel** What topics should I avoid with someone I've just met? My uncle asks everyone how much rent they pay before he learns their names.
- Maya** Personal money, health, relationships, religion, and politics may be sensitive. People differ, so pay attention to context. Don't assume someone wants to discuss their family or job. Start with lighter shared subjects and let trust grow.
- Daniel** Suppose someone asks me a question I don't want to answer. Do I have to give them my complete life history because I'm practising English?
- Maya** Not at all. You can say, "I'd rather not get into that right now," then change direction: "How are you finding the event?" "Get into" can mean discuss a topic in detail. You can set a boundary politely.
- Daniel** I like that. What about compliments? Is "Your jacket is amazing" okay? What if I add, "And I would like to own it"?
- Maya** Keep the first part. A compliment about someone's choice, such as a jacket or a presentation, can be friendly. Don't comment on a stranger's body. And don't demand an explanation for a personal choice.
- Daniel** I sometimes worry that my English sounds too direct. I say, "Tell me your opinion," when I mean to invite one.
- Maya** Try, "What do you think?" or "I'd be interested to hear your view." Both are softer. You can also say, "If you don't mind me asking," but don't use that phrase to push into a private subject.
- Daniel** So "If you don't mind me asking, why did you leave your last partner?" is still a terrible question. Understood.
- Maya** Exactly. Politeness is more than a phrase at the start. It's noticing whether the other person is comfortable. If they step back, look away, or change topic, follow their lead.
- Daniel** That's useful beyond English. I want people to feel comfortable, not trapped in a language exercise.
- Maya** Right. The goal is connection. Good grammar helps, but kindness and attention keep the conversation alive.

14:04 Two practice conversations

- Daniel** Can we practise? First, pretend you're a new classmate at the welcome event. I'll try not to interview the crisps.



Transcript edition 01

07 / 10



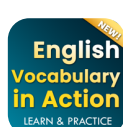
FULL TRANSCRIPT / 07 OF 09

The conversation

Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

14:04 Two practice conversations (continued)

- Maya** Of course. I'll be a classmate. "Hi! Is this seat free?"
- Daniel** "Yes, please sit down. I'm Daniel. Is this your first time at the event?"
- Maya** "It is. I'm Maya. I signed up for the evening photography course, and I'm still trying to find the right room."
- Daniel** "Photography? Nice! How did you get into that? I mostly take photos of my lunch, and even the lunch looks disappointed."
- Maya** That's good: a friendly reaction, a follow-up question, and a little of your own story. As your classmate, I'd say, "I borrowed my brother's camera last summer and never gave it back."
- Daniel** "That sounds like a very successful borrowing plan. What do you enjoy photographing?"
- Maya** "Mostly people and street scenes." Now you could share a connection or ask for an example. You don't need to ask three more questions in a row.
- Daniel** "I love looking at street photos, although I know nothing about cameras. Do you have a favourite place to take them?"
- Maya** Excellent. Let's change the situation. We're standing in line for coffee after a talk. You don't know me, and you're curious about the speaker's idea.
- Daniel** "That talk gave me a lot to think about. What did you make of the speaker's last point?" Is "what did you make of" natural?
- Maya** Very natural at B2. It means "What was your opinion of it?" A simpler version is, "What did you think of the last point?" Either is fine. I'd answer, "I liked the example, but the conclusion felt too simple."
- Daniel** "I see what you mean. The example was clear, but I wanted more evidence. Have you heard another speaker on this topic?"
- Maya** Perfect. You acknowledged my view before adding yours. Now the line is moving and you need to order. How do you end?
- Daniel** "It's my turn to order. I enjoyed hearing your view. Enjoy the rest of the event!" No secret mission, no submarine.
- Maya** Exactly. You were curious, polite, and yourself. The joke helped because it was light and connected to the situation.



Transcript edition 01

08 / 10

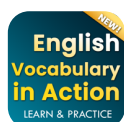


The conversation

Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

16:18 Your turn to try it

- Daniel** I think I understand. But I still want a tiny phrase list for the moment my brain turns into a bowl of crisps.
- Maya** Here it is. To start: "Hi, I'm Daniel. Is this your first time here?" To continue: "What did you enjoy about it?" To show interest: "That sounds interesting. Tell me more." And to leave: "It was nice meeting you."
- Daniel** Let me try a bad version first: "Hello. Do you like music? Yes? What kind? Why? When? Please complete this survey before dessert."
- Maya** That's an interview, not a conversation. Try adding a comment and giving the other person time. "I went to a concert last week. Do you enjoy live music?" If they answer, pick up on one detail rather than reading another question.
- Daniel** "Pick up on" means notice and use a detail. Like, "You mentioned jazz. Have you been to the little club near the station?"
- Maya** Exactly. Let's give listeners three practice moments. First: someone says, "I just moved here." What could you say? Pause and think of a kind response. You might try, "How are you settling in?"
- Daniel** "Settle in" means become comfortable in a new place. I'd add, "I moved last year, and I needed a map for the first month." That's a small piece of my story.
- Maya** Second: someone says, "I started learning to cook." Ask one open question. "What got you interested?" works. So does, "What's the first dish you'd like to make?" Both invite a story.
- Daniel** And if they say soup, I must not give a speech about my excellent toast. I should listen first.
- Maya** Third: the conversation has a pause. You remember they mentioned a weekend trip. Try, "By the way, how did your trip go?" If you don't remember a detail, use something you both can see or politely end the chat.
- Daniel** Quick recap: "break the ice" means make the beginning easier; "get into" means become interested; "get along" means have a friendly relationship; and "slip my mind" means I forgot for a moment.
- Maya** And "catch up" means talk again after some time, while "pick up on" means notice and use a detail. None of these phrases will save a conversation if you don't listen, so leave room for the other person.
- Daniel** My final plan: smile, introduce myself, ask one real question, listen, and share a little. Then, if the chat ends, I can say goodbye like a normal human.
- Maya** That's the whole skill. Practise one opener and one follow-up today. You don't need to impress everyone in the room; you just need to make one friendly connection.





The conversation

Read along with Daniel and Maya. Times mark the start of each chapter.

16:18 Your turn to try it (continued)

- Daniel** Thanks, Maya. I'm off to break the ice. If the crisps answer me, I'll know I need a break. See you next time!
- Maya** See you next time, everyone. And good luck with your next conversation!

