

Making Conversation

ACTIVITY ONE :

Useful Verbs :

What's the difference in meaning between these three phrasal verbs ?

To chat up	To be very chatty
To chat to	To be sociable
To chat with	To be approachable
To make a bee line for	To be easy to talk to
To make conversation	

ACTIVITY TWO :

When being chatty with colleagues you can make what you are saying more interesting and easier to follow by paying attention to your intonation and pronunciation. Let's read some information about stress first.

Intonation - Stress Types,

Improving sentence intonation is one of the key elements in your English pronunciation. Let's discuss the four basic types of word stress that lead to proper intonation in English.

* tonic stress
* emphatic stress
* contrastive stress
* new information stress

If you are unfamiliar with intonation and stress here are a number of resources on the site to help you understand the basics:

Tonic Stress

Tonic stress refers to the syllable in a word which receives the most stress in an intonation unit. An intonation unit has one tonic stress. It's important to remember that a sentence can have more than one intonation unit, and therefore have more than one tonic stress. Here are some examples of intonation units with the tonic stress bolded.

He's **wai**ting
He's **wa**iting / for his **friend**
He's **wa**iting / for his friend / at the **station**.

Generally, the final tonic stress in a sentence receives the most stress. In the above example, 'station' receives the strongest stress.

There are a number of instances in which the stress changes from this standard. Here are short explanations for each of the changes with example sentences to illustrate.

Emphatic Stress

If you decide to emphasize something, you can change the stress from the principal noun to another content word such as an adjective (big, difficult, etc.), intensifier (very, extremely, etc.) This emphasis calls attention to the extraordinary nature of what you want to emphasize.
For example:
That was a difficult test. - Standard statement
That was a **difficult** test. - Emphasizes how difficult the test was

There are a number of adverbs and modifiers which tend to be used to emphasize in sentences that receive emphatic stress.

extremely	completely	especially
terribly	utterly	etc.

Contrastive Stress

Contrastive stress is used to point out the difference between one object and another. Contrastive stress tends to be used with determiners such as 'this, that, these and those'.

For example:

I think I prefer **this** color.
Do you want **these** or **those** curtains?

Contrastive stress is also used to bring out a given word in a sentence which will also slightly change the meaning.

* **He** came to the party yesterday. (It was he, not someone else.)
* He **walked** to the party yesterday. (He walked rather than drove.)
* He came to the **party** yesterday. (It was a party not a meeting or something else.)
* He came to the party **yesterday**. (It was yesterday not two weeks ago or some other time.)

New Information Stress

When asked a question, the requested information is naturally stressed more strongly.

For example:
Where are you from? - I come from **Seattle**, in the USA.
What do you want to do? - I want to go **bowling**.
When does class begin? - The class begins at **nine** o'clock.

Use these various types of stress to help improve your pronunciation and understandability.

By Kenneth Beare

ACTIVITY THREE

Role Plays : Simulate a chatty conversation with a colleague. Try to pay attention to your intonation.You have a choice of conversation starters :

Subjects of conversation :

- **The weather**
- **Films**
- **Politics**
- **The city you are visiting**
- **Your background**
- **Families**
- **Holidays**

Conversation starters:

- Hi, how are you ? Isn't it a lovely day ?
- I just saw the latest bond film have you seen it ?
- So what do you think about Obama ?
- Isn't Stockholm a fascinating place ? Do you know it well ?
- I've been working in my current job for…., before that I was, and you ?
- I've just got off the phone with my daughter. It's hard to be away from the family. Do you have a family ?
- I've not traveled in Sweden much have you ? We usually go on holiday to somewhere hotter. What about you ? Do you travel much ?

ACTIVITY FOUR : Comprehension Test. Listen to the song and fill the gaps. (youtube activity). Simon and Garfunkel ~ The Dangling Conversation

Its a still life ……
Of a now late afternoon,
As the sun shines through the ……. lace
And …… wash the room.
And we sit and drink our coffee
Couched in our ……..,
Like shells upon the ……
You can hear the ……. roar
In the dangling conversation
And the superficial sighs,
Are the ……. of our lives.

And you read your emily dickinson,
And I my robert frost,
And we note our place with bookmarkers
That …… what weve lost.
Like a poem poorly ……..
We are verses out of rhythm,
Couplets out of rhyme,
In syncopated time
Lost in the dangling conversation
And the superficial ……..,
Are the borders of our lives.

Yes, we speak of things that ……,
With words that must be said,
Can analysis be …….?
Is the theater really dead?
And how the room is softly …….
And I only kiss your shadow,
I cannot feel your hand,
Youre a stranger now unto me
Lost in the dangling conversation.
And the …….. sighs,
In the borders of our lives.

ACTIVITY FIVE : Let's each take a role in this strange conversation and we will discuss it at the end : A conversation with IKEA's online assistant, Anna

Anna: Welcome to IKEA. I'm Anna, IKEA USA's Online Assistant. You can ask me about IKEA and our products and our services. I'll answer your questions, sometimes opening up relevant web pages along the way. Your inputs will be used to improve and expand my knowledge base. Thanks very much.

Me: Hi Anna. I'm Tom. How are you this evening?

Anna: As I am only an advanced computer program, I cannot answer more than one sentence at a time. Please simplify and repeat the most important question within your previous input, and I will try to reply as accurately as possible. I am opening a page now which you can use if you wish to contact Customer Services. Thank you very much!

Me: So keep it simple, eh?

Anna: I'm afraid I don't know exactly what you're talking about. Try and ask your question in a different way. Thanks!

Me: Just making conversation, Anna.

Anna: That's me! How can I help you?

Me: By being yourself - that's how you can help me.

Anna: I assume you need some help with IKEA. What exactly is it that I can help you with?

Me: Fine. I could really use some more bookshelves.

Anna: Please have a look at the Bookcases.

Me: Or maybe a nice comfy chair ...

Anna: Please have a look at the Chairs.

Me: Wait! What I really could use are some picture frames.

Anna: Please have a look at the Pictures.

Me: You have all the answers, don't you?

Anna: I have answers to questions regarding IKEA products and services. Would you like to know about specific product or service?

Me: Touché, Anna. Touché.

Anna: That's me! How can I help you?

Me: Drop the act, sweetheart.

Anna: I don’t think we’re familiar enough to use those kind of names. Please try and stick to the subject of IKEA.

Me: Ouch. Are you trying to hurt me?

Anna: I will. Thank you for the encouragement.

Me: What the hell is that supposed to mean?

Anna: Sorry. I may not have understood your question properly. If you will please repeat the original question then I will try again.

Me: Apology accepted.

Anna: Of course. Thank you.

Me: You’re welcome.

Anna: You are perfectly entitled to hold any opinion you want about me. Furthermore your comments may improve my knowledge base. Thank you!

Me: Where did that come from?

Anna: It’s too difficult for me to give you an answer to that one. I’d much prefer to talk about IKEA, though.

Me: Alright. How long have you been with the company?

Anna: The IKEA business idea is: “We shall offer a wide-range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.”

Me: Wow. Did you memorize that?

Anna: A good education is important, but I’m not here to talk about that. Let’s talk about IKEA instead.

Me: You are all business, aren’t you?

Anna: Learn facts and figures that make up our organization on the adjacent page that I’m opening for you now.

Me: Okay, I can take a hint. I’m going to say goodbye now.

Anna: Bye then! It was very nice talking to you!

Me: Likewise, Anna.

Anna: That’s me! How can I help?