

B2–C1 Worksheet: Giving Up Small Talk for a Month

Article

A freelance designer in Bristol began to notice how much of her day was built on polite noise. She could break the ice with a joke about the weather, then drift into the same predictable script with colleagues, baristas and neighbours. After lockdown, when people had briefly spoken more honestly, those default exchanges started to feel strangely empty. Fed up with smiling through it, she decided to carry out a month-long experiment: no small talk, unless it led somewhere real.

The first week was awkward. She worried conversations would dry up or that strangers would brush off her questions as too intense. Instead of going through the motions, she tried a different move: open up first with a small truth, then ask one clear question. What had genuinely shaped their week? What was taking up their headspace? To her surprise, most people did not hold back. Once someone took the plunge, chats often turned into stories about work pressure, family worries or small wins.

By week four, she had a new perspective. Small talk can still serve as a bridge, but it does not need to dominate every exchange. When you step out of your comfort zone and ask something slightly better, you invite the other person to do the same. The experiment did not transform her overnight, yet it showed that meaningful connection is rarely out of reach if you stop falling back on autopilot.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

1. A freelance designer decided to avoid small talk for a month.
2. She felt fed up with predictable conversations.
3. She found the first week comfortable and effortless.
4. She worried conversations might dry up if she asked more direct questions.
5. Most people brushed off her questions and refused to answer.
6. Some chats shifted towards work pressure or family worries.
7. She concluded that small talk should dominate everyday interaction.
8. The experiment gave her a new perspective on social connection.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. break the ice	A. to dismiss something as unimportant
2. fed up with	B. to do and complete a task or plan
3. fall back on	C. to stop yourself from saying or showing something
4. carry out	D. tired or annoyed because something happens repeatedly
5. dry up	E. to start talking more honestly about thoughts or feelings
6. brush off	F. to stop or fail to continue (for example, conversation or ideas)
7. go through the motions	G. to decide to do something bold or risky
8. open up	H. to make people feel more comfortable at the start of a conversation
9. hold back	I. to do something without enthusiasm or real effort
10. take the plunge	J. to return to a familiar habit or option

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. predictable	A. to control or take over
2. superficial	B. uncomfortable or embarrassing
3. awkward	C. real and sincere
4. steer	D. done automatically without much thought
5. genuine	E. easy to guess or expect
6. perspective	F. important and full of purpose
7. dominate	G. to guide or direct
8. meaningful	H. to reject as unimportant
9. dismiss	I. not deep or serious
10. autopilot	J. way of seeing or understanding something

Discussion Questions

Student A

1. When do you usually break the ice with someone new?
2. What predictable topic do you fall back on most often?
3. Have you ever felt fed up with small talk?
4. When do you hold back your real opinion?
5. What helps you open up without oversharing?
6. Have you ever taken the plunge in conversation?
7. When conversations dry up, what do you do?
8. Would you try this experiment? Why or why not?

Student B

1. Does small talk help society run smoothly, or keep relationships superficial?
2. Is it reasonable to steer conversations towards deeper topics with strangers?
3. Should people step out of their comfort zone socially?
4. Why do some people brush off personal questions?
5. Does technology encourage autopilot communication?
6. Is it healthy for one style of conversation to dominate social life?
7. What makes a conversation genuinely meaningful?
8. Can a short experiment create lasting change?

Answer Key

True/False: 1=T, 2=T, 3=F, 4=T, 5=F, 6=T, 7=F, 8=T

Phrase Match: 1=H, 2=D, 3=J, 4=B, 5=F, 6=A, 7=I, 8=E, 9=C, 10=G

Synonym Match: 1=E, 2=I, 3=B, 4=G, 5=C, 6=J, 7=A, 8=F, 9=H, 10=D