

OWAD BUSINESS ENGLISH TRAINER

Die Briten verstehen

When asked which of today's cultures is best-known for civilised behaviour and politeness, you're sure to think of the British. And for good reason, for over the centuries, the British have developed being civilised and polite into a fine art. It pervades everything they say and do. This may at first sound nice, but in international business it can have its drawbacks.

The first issue is directness. In Germany, saying what's on your mind in a non-emotional tone and with a friendly facial expression is considered polite. In Britain, such directness is regarded as extremely impolite. Disagreeing, making unpopular statements, saying *No* and contradicting others usually require the use of indirect language. Unless you understand how the language is being used, what is being said can sound inappropriate, puzzling and at times even evasive.

Unfortunately, the challenge doesn't stop there. Along with politeness and courtesy, the need to maintain that very famous and uniquely British "stiff upper lip" has a significant influence on British behaviour – even while most of the British would say that's nonsense. Open displays of emotion – whether positive or negative, and whether through facial expression or tone of voice – are also to be avoided. In business, the British can thus be expected to react with reserve and restraint, which can make them appear formal and standoffish. When faced with unpleasant situations, they will usually attempt to soften the issue and may also try to procrastinate.

This doesn't mean the British are deceptive or lack an appropriate level of seriousness; they simply wish to avoid burdening a situation with unpleasantness.

Nor are the British humourless. Quite the contrary. Humour plays a crucial role in British culture and is present in almost all forms of British communication. Most British people inject humour into almost everything they say. This may include provocative comments that are easy to understand, but more often than not includes the usage of understatement and irony that you may not even notice because they are delivered with such a straight face.

Finding the meaning

When you read or listen to what a British colleague is saying and you're not quite sure what is meant, the first step is to understand that the content is being filtered by the necessities of politeness and courtesy, toned down by a stiff upper lip and then possibly injected with humour that can get by the politeness and courtesy filters. Getting through all of these layers to find a true meaning requires knowing a bit about the linguistic devices most Britons use.

Understatement

Understatement is a form of speech in which one uses a weaker expression than one would expect. For example, if the temperature is 45°C, a German might say *Es ist knallheiß*. (This is a direct, accurate observation). An American might say *It's hotter than Hell*. (Americans tend to use the linguistic device known as *hyperbole*, or extreme over-exaggeration, to describe situations.) You could expect a British colleague to use understatement to render the situation harmless – for example, *It is a bit warm, isn't it?*



You can find a classic example of British understatement in the film *Monty Python's Meaning of Life* (Monty Python is a well-known group of British comedians from the 70s and 80s). An army officer has just lost his leg. When asked how he feels, he looks at his bloody stump with a straight face and says "Stings a bit."

As a general rule, you can expect the British to play down almost any situation – private or business – to a point where it seems benign. The danger here, of course, is that the situation may not be benign, and the person issuing the played-down statement may not think so either.

Tip!

If a British colleague plays down a situation you think is serious, assume that the situation is still serious. Use his subsequent behaviour – rather than his words – to determine his actual opinion.

Understatement is also used to soften statements to keep them from sounding boastful, impolite or overly direct:

I think we may have slightly different opinions on this. (Possible meaning: I don't agree with you at all.)

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We know a little about selling to customers in China. (Possible meaning: We've been selling to customers in China for decades and probably have little to learn from you.)
She's not the best manager we've had. (Possible meaning: She's one of the worst.)
He's not a bad salesman. (Possible meaning: He's actually quite a good salesman.)

Tip!

If a British colleague gives active attention to making something seem small or unimportant, assume what is being said is much larger and more significant than the words themselves imply.

A lack of seriousness

When playing down a situation, your British colleague may appear as if he doesn't understand that the situation is serious, but this isn't the case. To develop a feeling for how this works, it helps to consider the British fascination for tea. The drinking of tea has many purposes:

- it's relaxing
- it provides a way to procrastinate
- it provides an excuse to avoid discussing a difficult subject
- it provides one with something to say when one can't think of anything else

In a business context, the custom of drinking tea can be especially useful for setting a comfortable tone. Consider these situations:

It's now time to move on to a discussion of our less-than-stellar sales numbers from last quarter. But shouldn't we first have a cup of tea? (Procrastination)

You might think the speaker does not take the issue very seriously or is behaving in a frivolous manner, but this assumption would be incorrect. This is simply a way to procrastinate and soften the issue. Another example:

It's very nice to meet you, Mr Smith. Did you have a pleasant trip?

Yes.

Did you find your hotel comfortable?

Yes. (Silence)

Well, would you like a cup of tea before we get started? (Filler)

Now imagine you've just sat down in the meeting room. Someone will be presenting figures about how the Koreans have been stepping up the competition and have been doing a very good job of taking customers away in large numbers. In fact, they've

become a serious threat, and everyone knows it. The first statement:

Well, the Koreans have managed to edge us out of our market a bit. (Understatement)

And someone else says:

One moment, I'll ask Amanda to put the kettle on. (Procrastination, and tea-drinking in the face of a difficult discussion)

And then:

Now I'd like to present some of the numbers showing how our customers have responded to their gorilla marketing tactics.

And the next remark (which may also be sarcastic):

Yes; would anyone like more tea?

Irony

Irony is the humorous use of words to express something completely opposite of their actual meaning. This type of linguistic device is very useful for injecting humour into a situation while maintaining a stiff upper lip and playing it down at the same time. As such, it's a staple of British conversational style and – unfortunately – can make it very difficult to understand what someone really means. There are no rules for understanding irony. You have to learn by example. Here are a few:

1. In small talk:

Q: *And how are your children?*

A: *Simply delightful: cheerful, helpful and always a joy.*

Incorrect response: *That's nice to hear!*

Correct response: *So it's been one of those days, has it?*

2. In small talk:

The sun is shining, the temperature is perfect. You're in your office with a colleague who says: *Terrible weather we're having, isn't it?*

Incorrect response: *What? It's beautiful outside!*

Correct response: *Yes, simply frightful.*

Here, the first speaker is probably joking about the fact that on such a day, one would rather be outside and not stuck in the office. But maybe your colleague has bad allergies, and maybe his remark was made in earnest!

Tip!

If a British colleague says something that seems contradictory or unexpected within the current situation, your safest course of action is to play along!

3. In a meeting:

Q: *So, do you think you could put together a summary for me by Tuesday morning?* A: (said with a smile) *Well, I'm in a meeting all day on Monday; I'd be more than happy to cancel my family plans and finish it over the weekend.*

Incorrect response: *Okay, excellent – that would be very helpful.*

Correct response: *Maybe Thursday would be better?*

Tip!

The British will often use an ironic statement as a substitute for a direct *No*, which is considered very impolite and is anyway rarely funny. If your partner seems to be going above and beyond the call of duty or uses irony in any way, assume there is a hidden *No* in what was said.

4. In conversation:

Really! That's very interesting!

Incorrect response: *None.*

Correct response: *None.*

This is one of the trickiest things a British colleague can say, for it usually has one of the following three meanings, and it's usually impossible to determine which:

- *Really! That's very interesting!*
- *Really! That's the most boring thing I've ever heard!*
- *Really! You really are a boring idiot!*

When you hear this comment, play it safe and change the subject immediately. Ask your British partner questions and let him do the talking instead.

► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

• to pervade	durchdringen
• evasive	ausweichend
• restraint	Hemmung; hier: Zurückhaltung
• standoffish	reserviert
• to procrastinate	aufschieben, verzögern
• deceptive	trügerisch, falsch
• to burden	belasten
• device	Gerät; hier: Kunstgriff
• to render	machen
• to play down	herunterspielen, verharmlosen
• benign	günstig, harmlos
• boastful	überheblich, prahlerisch
• stellar	sternförmig; hier: herausragend
• frivolous	leichtfertig, unernst
• to step up	antreten; hier: intensivieren, verstärken
• to edge out	schrittweise hinausdrängen
• staple	Haupt-, Grund-
• earnest	Ernst

Ich muss jetzt leider los

Knowing how to gracefully say goodbye is not only helpful when you really need to say goodbye; it's also useful when you'd like to **extract yourself** from an unpleasant, boring, or time-wasting encounter with one or more business associates. Here's a **compendium** of phrases you can use in various contexts to say goodbye with skill.

Setting the stage for your departure

The two most common departure situations are: leaving because it's really time to go and leaving because you want to extract yourself from someone's conversational tentacles.

Of course it's rude to simply say *goodbye* and walk away. First you have to set the stage by signalling your **imminent** departure; then say *goodbye*.

To signal an end to a positive encounter, start with a compliment or similar positive statement about the other person or persons

Thanks ever so much. We've had a most pleasant evening!

Well. It's been a delightful morning/afternoon/evening!

Well, I'm really glad we met!

I'm really glad we finally got a chance to get to know each other better!

I've really enjoyed speaking with you!

Thanks so much for the superb dinner.

Well, I haven't had a lunch this entertaining in quite some time.

It's refreshing to finally meet someone with a really good sense of humour!

You've provided a lot of insight into the current situation I hadn't considered.

... but I'm afraid I really must go.

... but I'm afraid it's time for me to move on.

... but I'm afraid it's time to go.

... but I'm afraid I'll have to say goodbye now.

Referencing the future

After you've made a compliment and said you need to leave, making a reference to the future is an ideal way to ensure you've left the relationship open and friendly:

I hope we can do it again next time.

I hope I/we have the opportunity to

return the favour — I'd/we'd love to get together with you again.

I hope we'll have the chance to pick up our conversation again where we left off.

I hope we'll have the chance to delve into things a bit deeper the next time we see each other.

Signalling your exit when you want to escape

Goodness, is it that time already?

Goodness, the time has really gotten away from me/us.

Well, I'm afraid it's time to go.

Well, I'm afraid it's time to say goodbye.

I really think I should be going now.

I'm afraid I must be going now.

Well, I mustn't keep you.

Well, I don't want to overstay my welcome.

I'm afraid I really can't stay any longer.

I'm afraid I must be setting off now.

Explanations

Tomorrow is going to be a hard day for me.

I've got a train to catch.

It's already late and we've to make an early start tomorrow morning.

We're facing a long trip home, I'm afraid.

I have a meeting in five minutes.

I'd like to attend the next session.

I'm scheduled to ...

People know when you're blowing them off

If you signal your coming departure with a reference to the time or the need to meet a responsibility, it is a clear indication that you wish to terminate the conversation quickly and move on. Such statements are commonly called *blow-offs*. The corresponding verb is *to blow off*. Then *he suddenly blew me off*.

Selecting the correct type of signal to indicate your imminent departure is very important. If you truly enjoyed your encounter — whether it was a lunch or dinner, a meeting over coffee or a chance conversation at a trade fair — **the correct first signal is always a compliment or reference to the fact that you found the conversation or encounter valuable**. It's



crucial to make your conversation partner feel respected, complimented and good about himself. References to the late time or other commitments and responsibilities should come second. This way, the reason for your departure will not sound like a blow-off.

Important!

Be sure that any reason you give for having to go is a reference to what comes next. You have to get up early, for example, or have a meeting in five minutes or have a long drive home. References to the past can be insulting. For example, *It's been a long day/afternoon*. Such statements can imply that you have found your conversation tedious.

The final goodbye

See you soon! *All the best!*

See you tomorrow! *Good night!*

See you later! *Goodbye!*

See you! *Bye!*

Take care!

Tip!

Although you might see it in a phrasebook, avoid the goodbye phrase *Cheerio!* Only the British themselves can get away with using this very British form of *Tschüss!* Coming out of a foreign-speaker's mouth, it can sound **pretentious**, if not laughable.

► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

• to extract oneself	sich aus einer Situation herausziehen
• compendium	Kurzfassung; hier: Sammlung
• to set the stage	den Weg ebnen
• imminent	bevorstehend
• pretentious	wichtigtuertisch

Nach dem Wochenende fragen

Every now and then you'll be speaking with someone and want to make small talk, but the right subject matter doesn't seem to spring to mind. You could ask about the weather, but that's very impersonal and for most people rather boring. In this case, many will choose to ask about how the other person's weekend was. Or, if you're telephoning on Friday, what a person will be doing.

Here are a few phrases you can use to streamline your English and make a good impression when conversing on this subject. Be aware, however, that asking a native English speaker about his or her weekend can also be tricky business. You'll find information on this further below.

Useful Friday phrases

So ...

What do you have planned for the weekend?

Are you doing anything interesting this weekend?

How will you be spending the weekend?

Tip!

If the upcoming weekend is a holiday weekend, add the word *holiday* before the word *weekend*. You can also add the word *upcoming*.

How will you be spending the (upcoming) holiday weekend?

I hear we're/you're expecting nice weather this weekend. Are you planning to make the most of it?

What will you be doing this weekend?

Beware of your wording, however. The following, similar phrase sets the expectation that you wish to invite your conversation partner to do something with you. This may not be so well-received, and may sound even more strange if it's not followed by an invitation.

Are you doing anything this weekend?

Useful Monday phrases

How was your weekend?

Did you do anything over the weekend?

Did you do anything interesting over the weekend?

I hear you had great weather over the weekend. Did you make the most of it?

Responding on the subject yourself

It's of course very possible that someone may enquire about *your* weekend. In this case, you need to be ready with a response. At the beginning of each Friday or Monday, or at the latest before you pick up the phone to call someone, it's helpful to pre-formulate what you'll ask or what you'll say on this subject so that you can respond strongly and confidently. Keep your response positive, active and complete. Short answers like *Not much* and *Nothing* are likely to send signals that you are simultaneously uninteresting and unable to engage in friendly conversation.

On Friday

I'll be visiting friends/relatives/my family/my girlfriend/my boyfriend in Munich.

Yes, my husband and I have planned to spend the weekend skiing in Northern Italy. It should be quite fun.

And you?

I'll be at home this weekend taking care of things around the house.

I've been travelling a lot lately, so I thought I'd relax at home this weekend and perhaps do a bit of gardening.

On Monday

It was fantastic, thanks for asking.

We spent the whole weekend at a water-park resort in the South of France. It was a lot of fun.

Yes, the weather was really nice. We spent a lot of time outdoors.

We spent a lot of time doing odd jobs around the house and in the garden.

There was a lot to be done!

Fine, thanks. And yours?

Careful: You might be treading on thin ice!

Unfortunately, because asking about someone's weekend is so easy to do, the topic is often used too often. If you're facing one of the following situations, consider using a different small-talk theme:

1. When you believe your conversation partner may likely be asked this question a lot in the course of the day, or may be in a position where he or she poses the "How was your weekend?" question a lot.

People who do a lot of telephone work with a set number of customers, for example, may not greet the weekend theme with enthusiasm – mostly because they use it so often themselves. For them, it may sound more like a tool than friendly conversation.

2. Colleagues you know casually who work in the same office as you.

Using the weekend small-talk theme every week with people in your office – especially while walking around large, open work areas – may lead people to brand you as a dolt. This is because every office environment usually has someone who walks around asking others about their weekends simply so they can talk about their own. The theme is a special favourite of such individuals because it requires absolutely no creativity or knowledge about the other person to be useful. And because everyone knows this is one of the cold, hard facts of office life, you'll look like one of these "characters" and may be branded as being one yourself.



► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

• to streamline	rationalisieren; hier: elegant gestalten
• odd job	anfallende Arbeit
• to pose	ausgeben; hier: stellen
• to be branded as	markiert; hier: abgestempelt werden
• dolt	Depp

Wie war Ihr Urlaub?

Asking someone about a past or upcoming holiday is an excellent small-talk technique for building personal rapport during the initial-contact stage or with colleagues you speak with regularly.

Surprisingly, many people feel tongue-tied after they've asked where their conversation partner spent his or her holiday. Without being prepared with a number of follow-on questions that show you are truly listening and interested, the rest of a holiday conversation can become quickly mundane.

Here is a collection of holiday-related small-talk questions that will help you be ready with the right questions during your next conversation.

Getting the conversation going

Holidays in the past

Weren't you on holiday last month?

What did you do for your summer holiday?

Where did you take your summer holiday this year?

Did you take any vacation time during the Memorial Day holiday weekend? (for US colleagues)

Tip!

In the US and Canada, the word *holiday* refers to an actual day designated as a non-working day for everyone (like Thanksgiving or Christmas). Americans and Canadians use the word *vacation* instead of *holiday* to avoid confusion: *Weren't you on vacation last month?* *When did you take your last vacation?*

Holidays in the future

Have you got any upcoming holiday/vacation plans?

Won't you be on holiday next month?

Will you be taking a summer holiday this year? What have you planned?

Where will you be taking your summer holiday this year?

Will you be taking any time off during the July 4th holiday weekend? (for US colleagues)

Follow-on questions

Oh! Do you do a lot of skiing/hiking/swimming/diving?

Isn't Edinburgh known for its ... ?

Is that something you do every year?

Really? That's an unusual destination. What led you to decide to go there?

Oh, that's interesting!

Have you done that before?

In the past

What did you do?

Where did you go?

How long were you there?

Did you have any memorable moments?

How was the weather? Isn't it really snowy/hot/rainy/humid there that time of year?

That's quite a distance. How was the trip?

Did you find time to see the Eiffel Tower?

What was your impression of the city/people/restaurants?

Did you visit anyone there, or was your trip purely for sightseeing/sport?

What would you say was the highpoint of your trip?

Would you go back again?

Does that mean you returned completely relaxed and ready for hard work?



Rapport-building tip

When making holiday small talk, keep the conversation focused on your partner. Avoid the temptation to jump in with statements like "Yes, my husband and I were just there too. We had a great time. We ..." Such statements give your conversation partner the feeling you are asking questions only to find a way to talk about yourself. Talk about your own holiday experiences only if you are asked. Even then, keep it short, and then ask more questions about the other person's experiences.

In the future

What will you be doing?

Where will you be going?

How long will you be away?

That's quite a distance. How will you be getting there?

What do you plan to do while you are there?

Will you be visiting anyone there, or will your trip be purely for sightseeing/sport?

What do you believe will be the highpoint of the trip?

What part of the trip are you looking forward to most?



Tying up the conversation

One of the most important aspects of tying up a holiday conversation is to let your conversation partner know that what he or she said sounded very interesting:

That sounds really fantastic. Maybe I should consider going there sometime.

That sounds really exciting. I'll have to give you a call again when you're back to find out how your trip was.

I have to admit I'm quite jealous. ...

... Your holiday sounds like it was really something special!

... Your holiday plans sound really unique and exciting!

Have a good time!



Tip!

It's easy for people to fall into the habit of sitting around at lunch complaining about the weather, taxes, illnesses and other negative issues. Such subjects can make the work environment depressing. On the other hand, everyone is passionate about their holidays and puts a lot of time into planning them. It's hard to pick a more positive subject to discuss.

Next time you see a conversation heading down the path of negativity, try asking a colleague about a past holiday under the guise of asking for tips for your next holiday. Get to the details. This approach also allows you to make holiday small talk even when it's clear there were no recent holidays and are none soon to come.

► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

• mundane	alltäglich, gewöhnlich (nicht mondän!)
• guise	Vorwand

Und wie geht's der Familie?

Look anywhere on the Internet for information about how to make small talk and you'll often find friendly advice stating that questions about family are easy, polite and always well-received.

Such information is naive at best and dangerous at worst. Here's why:

- In many cultures, discussions about family have no place in a business context.
- Divorce, death, protracted illness and a long list of other unpleasant family situations are a reality for many people, who – for understandable reasons – may be sensitive about being asked family questions.
- The assumption of a cultural “norm” may be insulting to those who choose to lead their lives in other ways. Examples include those who never want to be married, those involved in same-sex marriages or those who are atheistic.
- Those who have been long and unsuccessfully searching for their ultimate partner or trying to have children may feel slightly attacked when asked about their family.

Our advice: making small talk about family with business colleagues should be reserved for conversations with people you have come to know better over time, and who have first offered you information about their family in some way. In this case, asking about someone's family shows that you remember what they have said and that you care about them as a person. In this case, making small talk about family is a powerful way to strengthen relationships.

Family small talk rules

Rule Number One

If you don't know anything about your conversation partner's family status, don't pry. Stick to other small-talk subjects. However, you have every right to make statements about your family. If your conversation partner picks up the thread, you can continue with Rule Number Two.

Here are a few examples:

(At a tradeshow. You say:) Yes, well, the travel was a bit hairly. You see, I brought my family along. My wife and our two small children are at the hotel now. We'll be doing the tourist thing over the weekend.

(When asked about your holiday. You say:) It was great! My husband and I sent our teenage sons to visit their grandmother and we spent the whole weekend skiing in Italy.

Following such a statement, your conversation partner may ask you Rule Number Two questions that keep the ball rolling.

Tip!

If your conversation partner does not take the bait and ask you about family issues, it may be that he wishes to avoid the subject, or it may be that he simply hasn't thought about family as a discussion point. If you've mentioned something about your family and he doesn't take the bait, it's best to switch to another small talk theme.

Rule Number Two

If your conversation partner has just alluded to something about his or her family, feel free to make small talk on the mentioned area, and feel free to continue expanding the discussion as far as your conversation partner opens up. If your partner has mentioned his family in the past, it's okay to follow up with questions now, but only if you know him fairly well – a death or illness could make such questions unwelcome.

Warning!

When making small talk about family, never ask questions outside the scope your conversation partner has defined through previous statements. For example, if he mentioned that he has two small children, ask about their ages and sex, but don't ask about his wife!

Useful Phrases

Last time we spoke, ...

... you mentioned that your wife ...

... you mentioned that your children ...

How has that been going?

And how old are your children?

How did you meet your husband?

How did you and your family spend the holidays?

Didn't you say your son was graduating this year?

(If it has been mentioned that a husband or wife has returned from a business trip) What does he/she do? Where does he/she work?



(You know the person well)
And how is your family doing?

(You spoke about the kids last time)
And how are your children?

(After a statement that a child has started going to school and enjoys it) That's great!
What's his favourite subject so far?

Going in this direction, the questions you need to ask are not difficult. Simply use what your conversation partner has just said – including the words he has used – to ask for more information. Example:

Yes, I had a nice summer holiday, thanks for asking. I spent a week in London, where my daughter was graduating from university. You could ask:

Which university did your daughter graduate from?

What did your daughter study?

But not:

And did your wife enjoy the trip as well?

Tip!

The top small talk topics continue to be weather, sports, hobbies, current events, culture, vacations, work-related subjects like computers or industry, seminars and events, nature and – most especially – things you have in common with other people who are present, including the immediate environment. Taboo subjects are illness, death, religion, race relations, politics and negative statements about anyone currently present.

► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

• protracted	langwierig
• to pry	hebeln; hier: herausquetschen
• hairly	haarig; hier: schwierig, brenzlig
• to take the bait	den Köder schlucken
• to allude to	anspielen; hier: ins Gespräch bringen, erwähnen

Wie ist das Wetter?

As an ice breaker for small talk with strangers or acquaintances over the phone, weather is an ideal, low-risk conversation starter that will never leave you grasping for the right words.

How is the weather?

How's the weather there (today)?

How's the weather in Leeds these days?

The short answer to these questions will always be an adjective. In most cases, you can simply add a -y to any weather-related noun:

Noun	Adjective	Verb
sun	sunny	shining
rain	rainy	raining
drizzle (fine rain)	drizzly	drizzling
storm	stormy	storming
snow	snowy	snowing
ice	icy	freezing
chill	chilly	chilling
frost	frosty	freezing
wind	windy	blowing
breeze	breezy	blowing lightly
cloud	cloudy	clouding up
fog	foggy	fogged in

Other weather-related adjectives are:

humid, muggy (*feucht, schwül*)

dry (*trocken*)

overcast (*bewölkt*)

variable (*wechselhaft*)

brisk, crisp (*frisch*)

biting (*beißend*)

gloomy (*trüb, düster*)

scorching (*knallheiß*)

How is the weather in Leeds?

Extended answers use the following patterns:

It's been hot/cold/snowy lately.

It's been pouring/quite rainy for the last week, but things are starting to clear now.

It's been frightfully cold this month, but the sun is still shining.

It's rather chilly/hot/stormy today.

And how is the weather in Berlin?

I hope it's been drier?

It's 10 below, but with the wind chill factor, it feels like minus 30.

It's 22 degrees Celsius/Fahrenheit today.

Incorrect: *It's 22 degrees warm today.*

Asking for opinions

How do you like the weather we're having?

How are you enjoying the summer/winter?

What do you think of the heat wave we've been having?

Have you been having a hard winter this year?

How do you like the snow?

I saw on the news that you've ...

... had a lot of flooding in your area.

... been having a heat wave.

Have you been affected?

Beautiful weather we're having, isn't it?

Possible answers:

I like it a lot.

So so.

Harder than most.

Not any harder than usual.

It's been quite variable.

Today's a real scorcher.

We've been having a lot of thunderstorms.

It's been very nice here lately.

How's the weather been there?

It hasn't been that serious in our neighbourhood.

I don't remember it being this hot/cold in years!

Yes, it's been rather serious and it seems that there's no end in sight.

We've gotten through it relatively unscathed.

We've been needing the rain for a long time. It's a nice change.

Bragging about the weather

Small talk is, of course, an opportunity to kick-off a conversation with a bit of bragging, which is sure to get your conversation partner talking.

It's been so beautiful here lately.

One perfect day after another.

The temperatures have been very pleasant.

Every day this summer has been a beach day.

We've been having the most beautiful autumn/spring. It's been sunny, dry and breezy for weeks now.

Complaining about the weather

Complaining is human nature, especially when it comes to complaining about the weather. But as with other forms of small talk in a business context, complaining sets a negative tone and can leave a negative impression behind. This doesn't mean you can't complain about the weather - this is a basic human right! The trick to complaining without the negative impact is to couch your complaint as a sarcastic response:

I hear it's been hot there.

Yes, it's been so hot that the aeroplanes in Frankfurt have been having trouble taking off.

Yes, let's just say we hope the air conditioning holds out.

I hear you've been having a lot of rain this spring.

Yes, it has been quite inconvenient. Last week we had to use a boat to take out the trash.

We're looking forward to a milder summer.



► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

• to grasp for	greifen nach
• to pour	gießen, schütten
• unscathed	unversehrt, unbeschädigt
• to brag	angeben
• to couch	formulieren

Sport Smalltalk

It's a fact of life: people like to do business with friends. Unfortunately, when it comes to working with business colleagues in the US or UK, developing a friend-like relationship may seem like an insurmountable challenge. Luckily it's really no different than developing a relationship with your next-door neighbour. It starts (and often ends!) with small talk.

In the Western World, the topic of sports is a common interest that many share. Asking your conversation partner about his or her sports interests or about recent sporting events is a good way to start and hold a good conversation without ever having to get into personal territory. Choosing sports as a topic for small talk has a number of advantages:

- Most sports enthusiasts consider sports to be a matter of international interest – people won't be surprised to hear you share the same interests even though you're far away
- Most people attend sporting events with their best friends – communicating on this topic thus leaves a "like a good friend" impression
- Talking sports is easy – you don't need to be brilliant or pressure yourself into thinking up witty small talk conversations; simply asking about someone's interests is enough to be successful. You only need to be nice!

Making small talk about sports

Like any other small talk, you're either the one starting the conversation or responding.

If you're on the responding side, things are easier. Because you're in Germany, chances are your partner will only ask about your interest in sporting events that are truly international: the Tour de France for example, or the Berlin Marathon.

If you're the conversation starter, it's helpful to do a bit of research before your conversation. A quick visit to a Web site providing information about a specific sporting event (a sponsor's site or national news service) will usually provide you with plenty of raw material for your chat.

To help make things easier, we've assembled a few of the most common phrases people use to make sports small talk. On the next page you'll find a calendar of the most important sporting events that will

be of interest to most of the people in the UK and in the US.

Before your next international conversation, take a moment to review the calendar and a few of the starter phrases to make sure you're prepared to build your friendly relationship a bit deeper!

And remember: as with all small talk, your goal is to keep the conversation going. Avoid short answers that don't say anything about yourself, and focus on questions that get the other person to talk about himself!

Tip!

It helps to make sure you're always prepared to talk about something having to do with sports, even if you're not a sports enthusiast. Indicating that you have no interest in sports may lead people to believe you're not much fun, or not interested in life! Pick something you can talk about: skiing, jogging, watching the Snooker championships on television, etc.

Initiating the conversation

Starters

Are you interested in [SportName]?

Have you been following (the) [Event-Name] the last few days?

I noticed this morning that (the) [Event-Name] will be taking place/starting tomorrow/next week/next month. Do you follow the games/[SportName]?

I know next to nothing about [Sport-Name]. Do you follow it? What interests you about it?

Getting Deeper

Who do you think will win?

Who are you hoping will win?

What did you think of that play by [Athlete]?

That [action] by [Athlete] last night was really something.

Oh really?

Are you a die-hard [SportName] fan?

Do you go to the games or watch them on television?

Do you do much/play [SportName] yourself?

Where did you learn to ...?

How often do you ...?

Is [SportName] popular in your area?



No? What is the most popular sport in your area?

What do you think of [SportName]?

Have you seen how [Country] plays?

They're really quite good.

What sports are you interested in?

Responses

In the conversation

Well, I thought that decision was pretty unfair.

I thought the situation was hopeless, but they managed to pull it off in the end!

We knew it was all over when ...

The whole place flipped out/went silent. We couldn't believe it!

[SportName] is my favourite sport.

I play it or watch it every chance I get.

In fact my family/my friends and I have tickets to the upcoming match/game between ... and ...

We buy season tickets every year.

When you have to say No

Well, I don't really follow [SportName], my main interest is [SportName].

Is there something exciting going on now? What?

[SportName] isn't very popular here, but many people watch it on television.

I follow the games every year, but I'm afraid I don't know much about the players/the team's history.

► VOKABELN ZUM TEXT

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • insurmountable | unüberwindlich |
| • witty | geistreich |
| • die-hard | eingefleischt |
| • to pull something off | etwas schaffen trotz Schwierigkeiten |