

How To Start A Conversation In English

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND:

With friends, you can use informal English expressions like these:

What's up?

How's it going?

The correct answer to "What's up?" is "Not much." You can then add a detail about what's happening in your life at the moment. If someone says "How's it going?" you can answer "Good" or "Not so good" and then say why.

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH A COLLEAGUE:

In the office, you use slightly more formal English, such as these common expressions:

Hi, John. How are you doing?

How's your day going?

We're sure having a busy/slow day today.

Have you heard the news about _____?

(on Friday): Have you got any plans for the weekend?

(on Monday): How was your weekend?

You can talk about projects you're working on, or about hobbies you have outside work. Current national and international news is also a good topic of conversation.

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND WHO YOU HAVEN'T SEEN IN A LONG TIME:

Here are some common expressions to start a conversation with someone you see after a long separation:

Hi Paula! How have you been?

Long time no see!

So, what have you been up to lately?

How's your family?

Are you still working at ABC Company?

In this case, you can ask about news in your friend's work, study, family, and hobbies. The friend will probably ask you about recent developments in your own life, too.

STARTING A CONVERSATION AT A PARTY OR WEDDING:

I don't think we've met – I'm Shayna.

Are you from New York?

So, how do you know Mary?

Have you tried the chocolate cake? It's delicious!

If you're at a party or wedding, you can start a conversation by asking how the person knows the host of the party (or the people getting married). You can also comment about the food and drinks, or about the music.

STARTING A CONVERSATION AT A CONFERENCE OR WORK EVENT:

I don't think we've met – I'm Shayna.

So, where are you from?

What did you think of the speaker?

That was an excellent workshop – I learned a lot. How about you?

The expression "I don't think we've met" can be used in professional situations too. You can ask about the person's job, what company they are from, and their opinions about the conference events.

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE YOU HAVE JUST BEEN INTRODUCED TO:

Nice to meet you!

How do you two know each other?

So, what do you do for a living? (= what is your job?)

What are you studying?

How long have you been (a journalist / doing yoga / interested in music)?

How did you get into it?

Imagine you have a friend, Nora, who introduces you to her friend Ryan. You can ask about how they know each other, and about Ryan's job. If Nora says Ryan is a student, you can ask about his area of study and what year of college he's in. If Nora introduces Ryan as a journalist, or a friend from yoga class, or a musician, you can ask about how long he has done that activity, or how he first got interested in it. His answer will then provide material to continue the conversation.

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE YOU MEET OUTSIDE:

Its a beautiful day, isn't it?

It looks like it's going to rain/snow.

Can you believe all this rain/snow we've been having?

Sure is a hot/cold one today!

Your dog is so cute! What's his name?

If you're in a park, on the street, etc., the most common way to start a conversation is by talking about the weather.

STARTING A CONVERSATION WITH A STRANGER IN OTHER SITUATIONS:

The secret to starting a conversation with someone you don't know is to make a comment about the current social context. Here are a few examples of how to do this:

At an art gallery: "That's an interesting painting. What do you think of it?"

At a bar: "This is a great song – I love Latin music. How about you?"

At a sports game: "Wow, that was a great play! So, who's your favorite player?"

At a cafe: "Boy, do I need a coffee!"

At a concert or event: "What a great turnout! Have you ever been here before?"

At a playground: "My kids are sure full of energy today!"

As in the example of the cafe and playground, you don't need to ask a direct question. You can simply make a comment to the other person, and this is like an invitation for the other person to comment, too. This can then begin a conversation.