

Small talk, big difference

Study abroad: prepare, try and review | A2-B1 | Adults and older teens

1 Where could a small question lead?

Look at the pictures. What could each person ask? Which exchange would be easiest for you?



1 The bus to the museum



2 Buying fruit



3 Dinner with a housemate



4 Joining a local event



5 Finding a place to meet



6 Trying something new

2 Ask, check and keep talking

Ask: Could you tell me which bus goes to the museum?

Check: Sorry, did you say thirteen or thirty?

Ask for help: Could you say that again, please?

Continue: Have you been there? / What was it like?

Use Could you + verb for a polite request: Could you repeat that?

After which bus, use statement order: which bus goes, not which bus does go.

3 Choose the useful words

Complete with: again · say · tell · like. Check before you speak.

1. Could you _____ me where the bus stop is?
2. Sorry, did you _____ thirteen or thirty?
3. Could you say that _____, please?
4. You tried the pottery class! What was it _____?

Now take turns. Say one request. Your partner gives a short, invented answer.

Have a go. Keep talking.

Short exchanges, useful questions and fresh conversations

4 Listen: the wrong destination

Listen to your teacher or the recording, if available. Do not read the script.

First: Does Maya want a bus or a boat?

Again: 1. Which bus does she need? 2. When does it leave?

3. Where is the stop? 4. What makes them laugh?

5 The picture challenge

1. A chooses a picture from page 1. B takes the matching reply card from the teacher. Keep the reply card hidden from A.

2. A asks for the information they need. B answers from the card.

3. A checks one detail and asks one more question. B answers or invents a sensible reply.

4. Swap roles and choose a different picture. Try three pictures each.

A needs to find out: 1 bus number and time; 2 price of bananas; 3 dinner time; 4 event day and cost; 5 cafe location; 6 class time and what to bring.

Example: A: How much are the bananas? B: One pound forty a kilo.
A: Sorry, did you say one forty? B: Yes. A: Do you sell apples too?

6 Take the conversation somewhere new

Ask and answer. Choose questions you like. Follow an interesting answer with Why?, What happened? or Can you give me an example?

1. Where do you already use English outside lessons?
2. What would you ask a new housemate on your first evening?
3. Which activity would you like to try? What would you ask first?
4. When did you last mishear a word or number? What happened?
5. What makes someone easy to talk to?
6. Would you rather explore a new place alone or with someone? Why?
7. What food could you recommend to a visitor? How would you describe it?
8. What small favour might you ask a neighbour for?
9. How do you start a conversation with a new colleague or classmate?
10. What helps when you cannot remember a word?
11. What would you show a visitor in your area? What might they ask?
12. Which small English conversation would you like to try next?

Finish by telling your partner one useful thing you learnt about them.

Teacher notes and answers

40-45 minutes | A2-B1 | Pairs, small groups or one-to-one online

Before class

Aim: start a short everyday exchange, check unclear information and ask a follow-up.

Share: student pages 1-2 only. Keep this page back. Cut up page 4 or send the responder one card privately. In one-to-one lessons, the teacher holds the cards. No recording or outside trip is required.

A quick route

Pictures, 5 min: elicit possible openings; accept different ideas. These pictures give contexts, not proof of a person's background or language ability.

Language and check, 6 min: read the short models, do task 3 and check together. Model a friendly clarification rather than just a louder repetition.

Listen, 4 min: read the dialogue twice at a natural, clear pace. Allow a short pair check between readings. Optional stage: omit it for a 35-40-minute route.

Picture challenge, 12 min: demonstrate one exchange. Each learner asks about three pictures and responds to three. The responder keeps their card hidden. No speed scoring: one successful round includes an opening, an accurate detail check and a follow-up. Note useful language and two points to improve.

Finish with speaking, 13-18 min: use task 6. Choose four or more questions and follow answers, rather than racing through all twelve. Briefly review the two language points before learners continue with a fresh question.

Answers and support

Task 3: 1 tell; 2 say; 3 again; 4 like.

Listening: a bus; 1 number 13; 2 in ten minutes; 3 across the road, outside the bakery; 4 the mistaken idea of taking a boat to a museum.

Accept: natural alternatives such as Could you repeat that? / Do you mean...? Picture questions and final conversation have no single answer. Do not demand the exact model wording. Bus and price details are fictional.

Support: leave page 1 visible. For stronger learners, cover the language box. Online, screen-share the pictures; send only the responder's current card. No breakout rooms needed for one-to-one work.

Optional listening script: Maya and the driver

Maya: Excuse me. Does this bus go to the museum?

Driver: No, this one goes to the market. You need the thirteen.

Maya: Sorry, did you say thirty?

Driver: Thirteen. One-three.

Maya: Thanks. And where do I catch it?

Driver: Across the road, outside the bakery.

Maya: Could you say that last bit again, please?

Driver: Outside the bakery. It leaves in ten minutes.

Maya: Great. Have you been to the museum?

Driver: Yes. The old boats are lovely.

Maya: Boats? For a moment I thought you said I needed a boat!

Driver: Just a bus. The boats stay in the museum!

Reply cards: keep them hidden

Give the responder one matching card. Swap roles after each exchange.



1 Museum bus

Bus 13. It leaves in ten minutes.
The stop is across the road, outside the bakery.
If asked: the old boats in the museum are worth seeing.



2 Fruit shop

Bananas: £1.40 a kilo.
Apples: £2.20 a kilo.
If asked: you also sell oranges, at £1.80 a kilo.



3 Dinner at home

Dinner is at 7.30 tonight.
You are making vegetable soup.
If asked: your housemate can help by cutting bread.



4 Local event

The walking group meets on Thursday at 6 pm.
It is free. Meet outside the town hall.
If asked: the walk takes about one hour.



5 Meeting a friend

The cafe is next to the station.
Meet at 11.15 on Saturday.
If asked: there are tables outside as well as inside.



6 Pottery class

The class starts at 10.30 on Sunday.
Bring an apron. Materials are included.
If asked: beginners are welcome. The class lasts two hours.

Optional outside practice: choose one suitable exchange, prepare an opening, then try it. Next lesson, report what happened and one expression you used. A classroom exchange is an equally valid alternative.