



FFCC Podcast Transcript:

Tips on how to start a conversation with a stranger

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Faster Fluency Conversation Club Podcast: Tips on how to start a conversation with a stranger

Welcome to the Faster Fluency Conversation Club podcast by Business English with Christina. Joining the club is a great way for you to improve your fluency and confidence in English, meet people from all over the world and have fun while talking about real-world topics. We hold one-hour conversations on Zoom nine times a week, Monday to Saturday, and our podcast listeners receive a 50% discount on the first month of membership with the discount code FFCC50. Are you looking to improve your English speaking ability? Come and join us today.

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Transcript

Christina (00:02):

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Christina (00:39):

Tips on how to start a conversation with a stranger. Hey, this is Christina, and we're back for another episode of the Faster Fluency Conversation Club podcast. And today I'm with Andrew. And Andrew, how are you doing today?

Andrew (00:53):

I'm good, I'm good. And you?

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Christina (00:54):

Yep. Doing, doing well. Doing well. I'm, uh, awesome. Back, back. I'm doing awesome. Exactly. I'm, I'm recovering from a marathon, so I don't know if that's awesome or not, but really, but I'm, uh, yes, so indeed, indeed. Yeah. Right.

Andrew (01:08):

That's great. That's wonderful.

Christina (01:09):

Yeah, no, thanks. Thanks. Yeah. We're gonna talk about what you were doing there later on in the conversation in case you guys were listening and you're like, why is Andrew doing that? Um, we're gonna talk about that because our topic today is just on how <laugh>, why we're gonna talk about how to do that correctly, how to start a conversation with a stranger and, and maybe actually one of those things, I dunno, Andrew, let's get, let's look at what you were doing right there. As I was talking about how I was doing Well, I

Andrew (01:41):

Was, I was, I was prompting the conversation, so Right. Every time you said something, I said words like, well, the English, UK English would say, really? Oh, really? Oh, really like that. Right. And the Americans, Americans will tend to say, awesome. Great. Super wonderful. Right? Yeah. All these things that make things sound very positive, the English would probably say lovely. Oh, that's great. Oh, really? Wow. Wow. That's another one. Okay. So these are, these are prompts. You're prompting people to continue. You want them to continue talking about, so you say to them, you know, if they say, for example, yes, I went paragliding the other day. You go, wow, that's great. Um, and they will continue then with it's great. So you have to, you're creating a positive atmosphere,

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Christina (02:33):

Right? Exactly. Exactly. And it's also a way of showing that you're listening and that you're following the conversation. Um, because a lot of the one time, I would say something that I have noticed often is, you know, if I'm talking about my weekend or whatever, and I'm, you know, with a client who is learning English as I'm talking, they're just sitting there silently not saying anything. And it's a little, I would say destabilizing, perhaps. Yes. Maybe for a native speaker, because they're disturbing. They're wondering, yeah. It's, it's, are they listening to me? Are they understanding me? Am I boring them to death? Should I change the topic? So that is actually,

Andrew (03:13):

So you need to prompt people encouraged to show that you, you're listening to them, you know, it's, it's a kinda active listening, um, thing.

Christina (03:22):

Exactly. Right. Exactly. Now, what about, so that's, maybe that's kinda, once you get the conversation started and you get the conversation going, um, but what about, you want to start a conversation with a stranger? How would you break the ice? Any tips on how to break the ice with something

Andrew (03:39):

Breaking the ice? Well, yes. Cause often there is ice between you and you have to break it. So how would you break it? There are different ways of doing it. So if, for example, you're in a conference and you want to, there's something you need to know, you could always ask for information. Right? Right. If, if the person, you, you can assume the person has been there before, and you say, um, when does the, um, lecture start? Right? What time does the conference begin? Do you know where, um, oh, what time is it? You

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know, you ask for information like that, and that is a way of breaking the ice and starting, that's one way of doing it. Yeah. Um, you can also pay a compliment. This is something that people do, you know, you can, but it has to be appropriate. You have to be careful. For example, you wouldn't say to somebody, oh, I like your lipstick, or, um, particularly if it's a man on a woman. Right. It wouldn't, it wouldn't sound great. It would be inappropriate, so,

Christina (04:39):

Right. Exactly. Yes. Say

Andrew (04:40):

Something a, a woman could say to another woman, oh, I like your hair, or I like your clothes, or, I like your, but in general, you would avoid things about appearance. And you might say something like, for example, oh, you did a really good lecture, uh, the other day. Or, um, I saw your, on your professional profile. You, you, you, you have, you've written five books. That's really awesome. I really like it know. Right. Um, things like that, you know, you can say things, I've heard of your reputation. You, you are, you're very well known.

Christina (05:11):

You know? Right, exactly. Right. So yeah. It's, it's paying a compliment is a, a good, a good icebreaker, but again, you wanna Yeah. Make sure that it's not like inappropriate. Yes. Um, and like you said, commenting on maybe their physical appearance might be inappropriate. Yes. Um, but you, yeah. I mean, you could comment like, oh, I, I like your earrings, or I like your scarf, or I like your purse, or whatever. Um, yeah, that would be fine. But yeah. And,

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Andrew (05:38):

You know, you can ask for information, for example, about, um, about them, about, you know. Yeah. Um, so, oh, uh, so, um, what do you, what do you generally do at weekends, you know? Right. Um, what do you do in your spare time? But of course, you have to be careful with this. If you get very personal, um, you could end up creating problems. Right. You, you could make people feel uncomfortable.

Christina (06:04):

Right. So what

Andrew (06:05):

You want when you're starting a conversation is to get people

Christina (06:09):

E Exactly. You wanna make somebody feel good and comfortable talking to you, not, not to make them feel a little like hesitant or Yes.

Andrew (06:17):

Otherwise they'll clam.

Christina (06:19):

Exactly. They'll just,

Andrew (06:20):

And the conversation will thin.

Christina (06:22):

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Yeah, exactly. They'll

Andrew (06:23):

Clam up as an expression, like a clam, which is a, a sea creature on rocks and clams up.

Christina (06:31):

Right, exactly. We don't, we don't want them to clam up. We want them to open up for the conversation. Um, and I would say maybe also, uh, maybe a final, final tip on conversations, just based on experience working with clients, is when someone asks you something like, how was your weekend? Or how was, if you're at a conference, you know, oh, how was the, the plenary talk you need, you should elaborate on your answers. You know, don't just say it was good and leave it at that because the other person is expecting you to, to give at least one extra detail. Like, oh, it was good. The, uh, you know, I went hiking in the mountains this weekend, or the, the plenary was really good. She, uh, she talked about some concepts that I hadn't thought of before.

Andrew (07:17):

And, and then you create possibilities of shared experience. Exactly. You, you, if, if you're elaborating on what, uh, you said, you know, you give a short, very often it just leaves things there where they're, and there's no, the person can't hook into it and start talking again, you know, talking about their experience. So it's very important Yes,

Christina (07:39):

Exactly.

Andrew (07:40):

Show that you're interested and that, uh, and that you, you like talking, but you don't wanna talk. Exactly.

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Christina (07:46):

Right. Exactly. And I think that's a good place to end this episode. Mm-hmm.
<affirmative>, speaking of, uh, not talking too much, we don't wanna go on too long, but
yeah, some very good tips there on how to start and then how to continue.

Andrew (08:00):

I'll just add couple of s quickly, very quickly. Um, you could add, okay. You could also ask
for an opinion, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, what did you think of the conference?
Do you like this conference hall? You know? Right. Um, is, is, you know, or you can ask
them about things that you know about them. For example, if, if they live in Madrid,

Christina (08:20):

Right?

Andrew (08:21):

What's the weather like at the moment in Madrid?

Christina (08:23):

Right? Yeah.

Andrew (08:25):

You have to avoid, you know, other topics. So I think that's the most important thing.

Christina (08:30):

Yeah. That, no, that sounds like, sounds like a good, uh, final thought there. And thank
you, Andrew for that. And we'll uh, see you in just a few seconds in the vocabulary
episode.

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Andrew (08:42):

Okay.

Christina (08:43):

All right. See ya.

Andrew (08:44):

See you later.

Christina (08:48):

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Vocabulary

To prompt: To give a suggestion or a cue that encourages someone to take a particular action or respond in a certain way. It can be a verbal or nonverbal prompt.

To break the ice: To initiate a conversation or social interaction in a situation where people are unfamiliar with each other or feel awkward. It involves starting a friendly and casual conversation to ease tension and create a comfortable atmosphere.

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To pay a compliment: To express admiration or praise towards someone for their personal qualities, actions, or accomplishments. It involves acknowledging and highlighting the positive aspects of someone's character or behavior.

To get personal: To ask or talk about someone's private or intimate matters that they may not feel comfortable sharing with others. It can also refer to being too intrusive or probing in a conversation.

To clam up (to close up): To suddenly become quiet or stop talking in a situation where one was previously talking or expected to speak. It can be due to nervousness, discomfort, or a desire to keep certain information private.

To elaborate (on your answers): To provide more details or information about a particular topic or answer. It involves expanding on a previous response to provide a more complete or thorough explanation.

Vocabulary Transcript

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Christina (00:39):

The vocabulary for our conversation on tips on how to start a conversation with a stranger. All right, I am back with Andrew, and we're going to dive into the vocabulary that you heard in our conversation about starting conversations with a stranger. Andrew, you wanna read the list of vocabulary? Yeah. That we're going to talk about?

Andrew (01:00):

So the first one is prompt to prompt. The second one is to break the ice. The third one is to pay a compliment. Fourth one is to get personal to clam up is another one. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> opposite of that is to open up. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and then to elaborate. Ok. Right. So those are the ones that we looked at.

Christina (01:21):

Yeah. Sounds good. Um, alright. And let's see. I'll start by defining the first one to prompt. Um, I would say to prompt is like, we, like we heard in the conversation when I was telling you about my, um, marathon and Madrid and Andrew was giving these prompts of like, oh, really? Oh, awesome. Et cetera. So it's this idea of giving someone like a little cue, a little extra something to help them to continue to encourage them to continue the conversation.

Andrew (01:53):

I would add to that. Yeah. Yeah. If you look at tv, you'll see that politicians when they're talking have a teleprompter.

Christina (02:03):

Right, exactly.

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Andrew (02:04):

It's something that prompts them when they, when they're not sure about what they're supposed to say. Right. They're given a prompt. And on stage in the old days, you had a prompter. Mm. You had a little box on the stage, um, in the theater. Right, right. Where you had a little man sitting there with the, with the text mm-hmm. <affirmative> and if actor forgot his lines would him. Right,

Christina (02:29):

Right. Exactly.

Andrew (02:30):

You would say a word, the audience wouldn't hear it, but the, the actor would hear it and then be able to continue. So that's exactly prompting.

Christina (02:38):

Ok. Very good. Very good. A little historic, historic, uh, story information there. What about, let's see the next one to break the ice. Can you define that one? Yes.

Andrew (02:47):

To break the ice is to, you know, at the beginning of a conversation went with a stranger. You are, you dunno each other, you are a bit mistrustful, you're not certain mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And so this opens up the conversation, melts the ice, the ice between you, you know, which keeps it all where it's cold. You need to warm it up so that if it melts and you can start walking. So

Christina (03:11):

This is exactly,

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Andrew (03:12):

So you have ice breakers, you know

Christina (03:14):

Exactly

Andrew (03:15):

Techniques. Right.

Christina (03:16):

For breaking the ice between, uh, two strangers so that they can feel comfortable in the conversation. Exactly,

Andrew (03:21):

Yes. It's used a lot in training. We talked about ice break. Yeah, definitely. At the beginning of a training session to get people to meet each other and to talk.

Christina (03:29):

Exactly. Right. Okay, let's see. I'll take the next one, which is to pay a compliment. So this one is interesting because we use the verb to pay with the noun a compliment. This is a collocation or an expression that we often use to pay a compliment, which basically means to say something nice to someone about, like we said, their accomplishments, their um, reputation. A presentation they gave could be about the something that they're wearing as long as the compliment is appropriate. Uh, but we say to pay a compliment to someone. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Alright, so what about to get personal or to get too personal? Andrew

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Andrew (04:11):

Is a compli, by the way, here's a compliment that works. Right. Uh, uh Oh, you don't, you, you haven't aged a bit. You don't look any older. <laugh>.

Christina (04:21):

Well, yeah. If you, maybe if you haven't seen them in a, in a long time or something. Yeah.

Andrew (04:25):

That's not a complete stranger,

Christina (04:27):

Right? Nodding. Yeah, exactly. Don't use that one with a stranger. Um, str stranger one would be like, I know I like your purse <laugh>, or I like your shoes. That would work. <laugh>.

Andrew (04:37):

Yes. Except that a man would not be saying that to a woman.

Christina (04:41):

Prob probably not. Cuz a man is not going to like high heel shoes generally, or unless he could,

Andrew (04:47):

Unless he's flirting.

Christina (04:48):

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No, I, I don't, if someone just kind of innocently said like, oh, I like your shoes. I think that's pretty innocent. Something like, I like your lipstick. That's a little too personal. That's what we said

Andrew (04:58):

<laugh>.

Christina (04:58):

But I would say use your best judgment and, uh, it's, uh, yes, the intention and the way you say it. What about, okay. Yeah. To get personal. We were, you were going to define that one for us.

Andrew (05:09):

Right. So getting personal is **when you ask questions that are very intrusive**, right? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. So intrusive means you intrude on the person, you know?

Christina (05:18):

Right. Um,

Andrew (05:19):

Um, for example, you know, if I, if I said to somebody, oh, um, are you with someone at the moment? Do you have a, do you have a

Christina (05:28):

A you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend? Yeah.

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Andrew (05:30):

Yes. Uh, you might not wanna do that with a stranger. Yeah. Unless you're very young and your university <laugh>. I dunno. But otherwise probably not a idea.

Christina (05:43):

Right. Exactly. Yeah.

Andrew (05:45):

Too, too many personal questions.

Christina (05:47):

Personal questions. Exactly. Yeah. That's it. They generally things about like money. Yeah. Age. Yeah. Things like that. How

Andrew (05:56):

Much do you earn? There's, there's, there's something that's rather intrusive. Yeah. It's getting personal. Exactly. We all know how to do this. We have to do.

Christina (06:04):

Yeah. Just to be careful about that. Uh, all right, I'll take the next one, which is to clam up. Um, so this is basically a, a another way to say, to close up, which is also another way of saying to become closed off in a conversation. Of course we said you want someone to open up and to engage in the conversation if they clam up. It's the opposite of that. It's like they're becoming more silent. They're giving one word answers. And if you're

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asking very personal questions that might cause the person to clam up, to close up or to, you know, not want to participate in the conversation,

Andrew (06:45):

You know, it comes from shellfish. Yeah. It's stuck on rocks, you know? Right. And if you touch it, it clams up. Exactly. So you have to, you have to approach it very carefully without making, without scaring it.

Christina (07:03):

Yes. That's, that's a good metaphor. Approach the conversation without scaring the other person. Right. Because

Andrew (07:09):

When a clam clams up, you cannot open.

Christina (07:11):

Yeah. No, it's impossible. Um, alright. And then the final one is to elaborate or to elaborate on your answers. Andrew, do you want to define that one for us?

Andrew (07:22):

Yes. Okay. So to elaborate on your answers is to, is to continue talking about, you know, you give a short answer, but then you continue and you give more details. So that's elaborate. Ok. Exactly. It's very important to do. You need to elaborate.

Christina (07:38):

Exactly. Right. And not just give one word answers. All right. So just a recap. I'll read those expressions again for you to prompt, to break the ice, to pay a compliment, to get

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personal, to clam up and to elaborate on your answers. And that's the vocabulary for this week's episode. All right, Andrew. Thanks very much, and uh, we'll talk to you soon.

Andrew ([08:08](#)):

Okay. Bye-bye then.

Christina ([08:11](#)):

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topic of conversation each week. And you'll be able to practice confidently if you'd like to join the club. The link for more details is in the show notes for this podcast. And we hope to see you in the Faster Fluency Conversation Club.