



Starting conversations in business Roleplays and phrases

Choose one of the situations below. With a partner, start a conversation and introduce yourself, then roleplay the rest of the conversation. Then take turns doing the same with your choice of topics below.

- Start a conversation with someone you don't know who is attending the same conference or trade fair
- Start a conversation by the water cooler, in the cafeteria or in the lift (= elevator)
- Bump into someone by the water cooler, in the cafeteria, in the street or in the lift
- Knock on someone's office door
- Walk into a booth at a trade fair
- Meet someone at the airport
- Press the button of an intercom
- Walk up to the reception desk
- Come out to reception to meet someone who is waiting to see you
- Meet someone you've had previous contact with but never met
- Meet someone from an organisation you know but haven't dealt with before
- Meet someone from an organisation that you've never heard of
- Meet a person you don't know from an organisation that you've dealt with before
- Arrive at a bar or restaurant where you have arranged to meet people
- Bump into someone at a bar or restaurant
- Arrive at the landmark where you have arranged to meet before you go somewhere together

Which of the situations above are realistic for you? Which side of the conversation would you usually be on?

What language could you use to do those things?

Compare your ideas with the list on the next page and pick at least one from each section that you'd like to use in the future.

How could you introduce by phone or email? How similar or different are they, to each other and to introducing yourself face to face?

How can you start and end an email more generally? Is there any way of making those phrases friendlier (without necessarily making them more informal)?

Do the same for phrases to start and end phone calls. What are the similarities and differences with emailing?

What other social language can you use in telephoning and emailing?



Suggested answers

Start a conversation with someone you don't know who is attending the same conference or trade fair

- Is anyone sitting here?
- I see you went to the session on...
- Is this the right room for...?
- What did you think about...?

Start a conversation by the water cooler, in the cafeteria or in the lift (= elevator)

- Which floor?
- Up or down?
- Room for a little one?
- Pretty busy, isn't it?

Bump into someone by the water cooler, in the cafeteria, in the street or in the lift

- Have you finished for the day?
- Did you see the match on Saturday?

Knock on someone's office door

- Do you have a moment?
- Sorry to interrupt, but...
- I can see you're very busy but...

Walk into a booth at a trade fair

- Can you tell me some more about...?
- Do you have a catalogue of...?
- Please let me know if there's anything you'd like me to explain.
- Is your work connected to...
- Is there anything you are particularly interested in?
- What you are looking at now is particularly interesting because...

Meet someone at the airport

- You must be John Smith.
- How was your flight?
- Can I help you with your bags?
- Shall we catch a taxi, or would you like to freshen up first?

Press the button of an intercom

- Hello. I'm here to see...
- Is that... Ltd/ PLC/ Corp?

Walk up to the reception desk

- I have an appointment with...
- I was hoping to speak to...
- I'm Alex Case from British Council. I believe... is expecting me.



Come out to reception to meet someone

- Sorry to keep you waiting.
- Welcome to...
- Thanks for coming here/ all this way.
- Did you have any trouble finding us?/ Was the map okay?
- This way, please.
- Thanks for inviting me.
- This is a nice office/ building/ area. (How long have you been here?)

Meet someone you've had previous contact with but never met

- We've emailed a few times, but... / It's so nice to finally meet face to face.

Meet someone from an organisation you know but haven't dealt with before

- Your company's (really/ quite) famous.

Meet someone from an organisation that you've never heard of

- I might have heard the name, but...
- I'm afraid I don't know much about your/ that industry.
- I'm not sure I've heard of it. How do you spell it?/ Does it do much business in...?

Meet a person you don't know from an organisation that you've dealt with before

- I've met your colleague Walter Mitty a few times.
- We've been doing business with you for a few years.

Arrive at a bar or restaurant where you have arranged to meet people

- What do you think of the place?
- Sorry I'm late. Have you already ordered?
- You didn't need to wait for me before you ordered.
- You got the best table.

Bump into someone at a bar or restaurant

- Would you like to join us?
- Do you come here often?
- I haven't seen you in here before.

Arrive at the landmark where you have arranged to meet before you go somewhere together

- Have you been waiting long?

Starting emails

- My name is... and I...
- I'm writing to you about/ concerning...
- With reference to your email/ your phone call/ our conversation.../ Re:...
- Thank you for your letter dated 17 June 2011.
- Thank you for your email yesterday.
- How are you?/ How's it going?/ How are things?
- I hope you had a good weekend/ break.
- Sorry to write again so soon, but...
- I heard on the news that... over there. How are things now?/ I hope you are all okay.
- This is just a quick note to say...
- I have to leave in two minutes, but I just wanted to let you know that...
- It was nice to speak to you/ meet you (yesterday/ at the conference).

Ending emails

- I look forward to hearing from you soon/ meeting you soon.
- See you./ CU.
- See you then/ on Monday/ tomorrow/ this evening.
Cheers/ Thanks/ Thank you in advance.
- Thanks again.
- Once again,...
- Have a good weekend/ evening/ holiday.

Starting phone calls

- This is... from...
- I'm calling/ phoning from...
- Thanks for calling (me back).
- You asked me to phone...
- I don't know if you remember me but we met at...
- I promised to call you...

Ending phone calls

- Thanks (again) for calling.
- I've got someone on another line.
- I have a meeting in a couple of minutes.
- Someone's just come over to my desk and it looks like they need to ask me something.
- I'll phone again this afternoon.