

# How to make small talk

In this lesson you will learn how to make conversation with people you meet socially.

## Starter

- Which of the following social events would you enjoy attending? Which would you try to avoid?
  - a golf tournament with a client
  - a reunion of the people you went to school or college with
  - the celebrations of the 25th anniversary of your best client
  - the house-warming party of your boss
- If you would avoid any events in 1, what would you do or say to get out of going?



## Expressions



- 22.1
- Gordon Evans works for an American company that designs new IT systems. Axen is one of his best clients and he attends the event. Listen to five conversations he has with different people. Who is he talking to? Write the number of the conversation next to the corresponding person.
    - \_\_\_\_\_ one of his suppliers
    - \_\_\_\_\_ someone he meets for the first time
    - \_\_\_\_\_ a friend from the same line of business
    - \_\_\_\_\_ someone who worked with him before
    - \_\_\_\_\_ someone he recognizes from the past

## Speaking

- You have just attended a conference. Drinks are now being served. What could you say to the other person in the following situations?
  - You have been introduced but you cannot remember their name.
  - You need to end the conversation.
  - You think you recognize the person but you are not sure. It must have been a long time ago.
  - The other person keeps on calling you by the wrong name.
  - The other person's glass is empty.
  - You would like to sit down and invite the other person to join you.

## Language box

There are several meanings of *used to*.

*Used to* + infinitive indicates a past habit. It also explains something that existed or happened in the past but which is different now. This structure only refers to the past:

I *used to* live just outside Paris.  
(= I don't live there now)

There *didn't use to be* so many problems.  
(= there are lots of problems now)

*To be used to* + gerund / noun / pronoun expresses that somebody has experience of something and this is not unusual for them:

He's *used to* speaking in public.  
(= he has experience of this)

She's *used to* American coffee now but she couldn't stand it at first. (= she regularly drinks American coffee)

## Hint

Phrases or expressions beginning with the word **How** are frequently used when making small talk:

**How's life / business / the family?** (general interest)

**How are things? / How's it going? / How are you doing?** (startling the conversation)

**How about a drink / lunch tomorrow / dinner sometime?** (inviting)  
These expressions are all quite informal.

- 22.1 o 2 Complete the sentences with an appropriate question tag. Then listen again to check.

- 1 I mean, you fly back every month, \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 You're not with Axen, \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 I think we've met before, \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 You don't work with Axen, \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Nice offices, \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 Oh, it's not a new building, \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 Save me a place at your table, \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 It is getting a bit crowded here, \_\_\_\_\_
- 9 I think it was last September in Philadelphia, \_\_\_\_\_

- 22.1 o 3 Look at the words below. Listen again and say how they are used.

Example: life - How's life in our New York office then?

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1        | 4        |
| finding  | excuse   |
| miss     | meet     |
| 2        | 5        |
| catch    | treating |
| 3        | since    |
| recall   |          |
| actually |          |

## Writing

- 1 Two people receive the invitation from Axen in Expressions. Their email replies are mixed up below. Read the different lines of the two emails, one accepting and the other declining the invitation, and rewrite the two emails in the correct order.

Dear Ms Harris,

- 1 attending the event to represent our company.
  - 2 Derek Wilson will also be accompanying me.
  - 3 able to attend. However, Margaret Evans will be
  - 4 I was very pleased to receive your invitation
  - 5 to confirm that I will be attending the event and that
  - 6 Unfortunately, due to a prior engagement, I will not be
  - 7 opening of your new Pittsburgh offices. I would like
  - 8 to the official inauguration of your new Pittsburgh offices.
  - 9 Thank you for your kind invitation to the
- Best regards,

- 2 You have received the same invitation. Axen is an important client. Unfortunately, you can't go. Write an email explaining why and giving the names of two people from your company who will be going in your place.

## Look

Look at listening script 22.1 on pages 130-131. Find more examples of *used to*.

To *get used to* + gerund / noun / pronoun expresses the process of adapting to a new situation:

I can't get used to having dinner so early.  
(= it is still difficult for me to adjust)

They got used to the euro very quickly.  
(= they became familiar with the new currency very quickly)

To *be / get used to doing* something can express the past, present, or future:

It was difficult for him because he wasn't used to making his own decisions.

He's going to get used to our way of doing things. (= this will be familiar to him in the future)

## Lesson record

3 new words from this lesson

3 useful phrases from this lesson

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1 ..... | 1 ..... |
| 2 ..... | 2 ..... |
| 3 ..... | 3 ..... |

Things to remember

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....