

## How to make a small talk in Chinese

### Part 1

### Small Talk with Colleagues or Friends

Apart from family, people who interact with us the most are our colleagues and friends. When chatting with close colleagues and friends, we usually start a casual chat in these three ways.

#### I. Compliments

##### Examples:

Nǐ pífu zěnmē zhème hǎo?

(1) 你 皮肤 怎么 这么 好?

Why do you have such good skin?

Nǐ zuìjìn shìbúshì shòu le?

(2) 你 最近 是不是 瘦 了?

You've lost weight, haven't you?

##### Tip:

Chinese girls usually think the thinner they are, the prettier they are. If you tell a girl that she has lost weight, she will be very happy and think it is a compliment.

Nǐ jīntiān chuān zhè tiáo qúnzi zhēn piàoliang. Nǐ zài nǎr mǎi de?

(3) 你 今天 穿 这 条 裙子 真 漂亮。你 在 哪儿 买 的?

You look so good in that dress today. Where did you get it?

Nǐ jīntiān chuān zhème shuài, wǎnshàng shìbúshì yǒu yuēhuì?

(4) 你 今天 穿 这么 帅, 晚上 是不是 有 约会?

You look so handsome today. Do you have a date tonight?

#### II. Something specific

##### i. Point out something new

##### Examples:

Nǐ jiǎn tóufa le ya?

(1) 你 剪 头发 了 呀?

You cut your hair?

Huàn xīn fàxíng la!

(2) 换 新 发型 啦!

You've got a new haircut.

Nǐ jīntiān chuān xīn xiézi la!

(3) 你 今天 穿 新 鞋子 啦!

You're wearing new shoes today!

Nǐ qù zuò zhǐjia la!

(4) 你 去 做 指甲 啦!

You got your nails done!

## ii. Ask something specific

**When your colleague or friend is eating, you can ask:**

Nǐ jīntiān chī de shì shénme?

(1) 你 今天 吃 的 是 什么?

What are you eating?

**When your colleague or friend is looking at his phone, you can ask:**

Nǐ zài wán shénme yóuxì?

(2) 你 在 玩 什么 游戏?

What game are you playing?

Nǐ zài kàn shénme diànshìjù?

(3) 你 在 看 什么 电视剧?

What TV show are you watching?

**When the holiday is coming up, you can ask:**

Jiàqī nǐ dǎsuàn qù nǎr wánr?

(4) 假期 你 打算 去 哪儿 玩儿?

Where are you going during the holiday?

## iii. Discuss a specific topic

**We can also start a conversation by discussing a specific topic. But these topics are usually light-hearted and positive. Generally we will put 听说 (hear of) in front of a specific topic.**

### Examples:

Tīngshuō Máo Búyì zhè zhōumò huì lái Shēnzhèn kāi yǎnchànghuì .

- (1) 听说 毛 不易 这 周末 会 来 深圳 开 演唱会。

I've heard that Mao Buyi is going to have a concert in Shenzhen.

Tīngshuō Xiǎo Wáng xià ge yuè jiù yào jié hūn le.

- (2) 听说 小 王 下 个月 就 要 结 婚 了。

I've heard that Xiao Wang is going to get married next month.

### III. Concern

On some specific occasions, we also start a conversation by expressing our concern.

For example:

1. You arrive first when meeting your friends or colleagues, when they arrive, you can say something like this:

Lùshang dǔ ma?

- (1) 路上 堵 吗?

Was there a traffic jam?

Nǐ shì zěnmē guòlai de?

- (2) 你 是 怎么 过来 的?

How did you come here?

Nǐ lěngbulěng?

- (3) 你 冷 不 冷?

Are you cold?

2. If you haven't been in touch with your colleague or friend for a while, you can also express your concern to start a conversation when you meet.

Hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn! Zuìjìn zěnmeyàng?

- (1) 好 久 不 见! 最近 怎么样?

Long time no see! How's it going recently?

Gōngzuò zěnmeyàng?

- (2) 工 作 怎么样?

How's the work going?

**Or you can say something to show your concern for each other's family.**

Jiārén dōu hǎo ba?

(3) 家人 都 好吧?

**How's your family?**

Nǐ fùmǔ shēntǐ dōu hǎo ba?

(4) 你 父母 身体 都 好吧?

**How are your parents?**

## Part 2

### Small Talk with Somebody You Know

**For people who are not usually in our circle such as a teacher, a boss, a neighbor, or someone you've only met a few times, we usually start a small talk in these two ways.**

#### I. Just say hello

**Examples:**

Lǎoshī hǎo.

(1) 老师 好。

**Hello, teacher.**

Lǎobǎn, zǎo.

(2) 老板, 早。

**Morning, sir.**

Wǎnshang hǎo.

(3) 晚上 好。

**Good evening.**

#### II. State the obvious

**We can ask some questions we already know the answers to, so they won't have to give serious answers and only need to give short responses.**

**Examples:**

Nǐ chī le ma?

(1) 你 吃 了 吗?

Have you eaten?

**Tip:**

When someone asks “你吃了吗(have you eaten)”, we simply answer “吃了(yes)” or “没吃(no)”.

You don't need to say what you ate specifically.

When we meet someone we know on our way to work, you can say:

Qù shàng bān a?

(2) 去 上 班 啊?

Are you going to work?

When you meet someone you know shopping at the supermarket, you can say:

Mǎi dōngxi a?

(3) 买 东 西 啊?

Are you getting groceries?

Nǐ yě lái mǎi dōngxi a?

(4) 你 也 来 买 东 西 啊?

Are you getting groceries, too?

When you meet students on their way to school, you can say:

Qù shàng xué a?

(5) 去 上 学 啊?

Are you going to school?

**Notice:**

When chatting with the older generations, be aware that they like to ask some about our privacy.

**Examples:**

Nǐ měi ge yuè zhèng duōshao qián?

(1) 你 每 个 月 挣 多 少 钱?

How much money do you make every month?

Nǐ jīnnián duō dà le?

(2) 你 今年 多 大 了?

How old are you?

Nǐ yǒu méiyǒu nán péngyou?

(3) 你 有 没 有 男 朋 友?

Do you have a boyfriend?

Nǐ jié hūn le ma?

(4) 你 结 婚 了 吗?

Are you married?

**These questions might make us uncomfortable or embarrassed. But they don't mean to invade our privacy. It's just that they are used to asking these questions. So if you are asked such questions, just respond briefly and politely.**

## Part 3

### Small Talk with Strangers

**When we are outside, we sometimes talk to strangers. When talking to strangers, we don't talk about anything private. We can start talk in these two ways.**

#### I. Talk about surroundings

**Examples:**

**When you meet a stranger in the park, you can say something like:**

Tiānqì zhēn hǎo a!

(1) 天 气 真 好 啊!

It's a nice day!

**If you meet a stranger with a child, you can say:**

Wā, nǐ nǚ'ér zhēn kě'ài!

(2) 哇, 你 女 儿 真 可 爱!

Wow, your daughter is so cute!

Nǐ xiǎohái zhēn tīnghuà.

(3) 你 小孩 真 听话。

Your baby is so good!

## II. Ask casual questions

### Examples:

**When you are waiting in line, we can say to a stranger:**

Nǐ shì jǐ hào?

(1) 你 是几号?

What number are you?

Nǐ děngle duō jiǔ le?

(2) 你 等了 多 久 了?

How long have you been waiting?

**When you are traveling by bus, you can say to the stranger next to you:**

Nǐ yě shì qù Běijīng lǚyóu de ma?

(3) 你 也 是 去 北京 旅游 的 吗?

Are you traveling to Beijing, too?

Tīng nǐ kǒuyīn, nǐ shì Húnán rén ba?

(4) 听 你 口音, 你 是 湖南 人 吧?

Judging from your accent, you're from Hunan, right?