

A Guide to Making Small Talk in Germany | Meet the Germans

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=539n0ahI0Ts>
transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/germanys2.pdf>

Hey, how you doing?

Yeah, I'm fine, thanks.

How are the kids?

They're fine.

Oh, great.

Yeah, we must catch up some time.

Call me.

Small talk.

The Germans don't even have their own word for it.

A German-English dictionary describes it as: oberflächliche konversation, or superficial conversation.

Ouch!

German do get very perplexed when English speakers greet them in the street with a "How's it going?" and then walk on by without actually expecting an answer.

But that doesn't mean that Germans don't have their own version of small talk.

The key difference is that when Germans engage in chit-chat. They want facts. They want numbers. They want statistics.

Say you arrive somewhere by car.

Elsewhere, people might casually ask how the journey was and not really care about the answer.

But a German will not let you get away that easily.

They'll ask how long the drive took and how many roadworks you came across.

They'll ask which route you took and expect you to answer with accurate road names and even motorway exits.

If the journey was long enough they may even whip out one of their favorite questions, "How much did it cost to fill up your tank?"

It's just a thing here.

When Germans return from holiday they will be eager to tell you about three things: the beaches, the food and the gas prices.

You should always do some basic research before entering a social situation in Germany.

Be prepared to talk about news and politics.

But you should also have some numbers up your sleeve like: How many inhabitants does your home town have?

Oh, and if you get on to the topic of where you live, your German conversation partner will want measurements.

As in, how big is your apartment – in square meters.

For bonus points, be ready with the average price per square meter of living space in your area of the city.

They'll lap that up.

OK, let's see how good the Germans are at German small talk.

How much does gas cost around here?

1.33 euros per liter for diesel.

1.52 euros for premium

At the moment, around 1.4 euros?

It's fluctuating right now, around 1.5 for a liter of premium.

How big is your home?

60 square meters, my flat ... um, 73.6 square meters, its got two and a half room and a balcony, 160 square meters, about 200 square meters, just over 70 square meters.

How many people live in your town or city?

1 million, just over half a million, 12,000, 342,000, it's a little village, including us, it has 720 inhabitants!

There's another very important topic that you have to master in order to small talk in Germany.

As a Brit, I thought I had this topic down, but it turns out the Germans can give us a run for our money.

I'm talking about the weather.

Specifically, complaining about the weather.

It's too hot. Too cold. Too wet. Too snowy. It's too ... weathery.

The word for susceptibility to the weather is *wetterfühligkeit* and the Germans will blame the changing weather for all sorts of ailments.

And a final tip for German small talk: practice your draft chat.

In whatever context, be it a party or in the office, Germans absolutely love to talk about drafts and the various stages of airing a room.

A classic scene: one German walks into the room and says: “Oh, it’s sticky in here.” They decide it is time to give the room an airing.

Then, someone else will invariably walk in and say, “There’s a draft.”

They’ll immediately wrap a scarf pointedly around their neck, grumble about getting ill and close the window.

German windows even have a special airing position.

The hinge technology must be really strong to cope with constant opening and closing.

So you see, German small talk is easy, really.

Drop the niceties, know your numbers, and have a strong opinion on air circulation.

See you next time and auf Wiedersehen!