

CHAPTER 3 · BREAKING THE ICE

OPENERS FOR *every situation*

The hardest sentence is the first one. Have a few ready, and the rest gets easier.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Interactive version: attenglish.com/talk/3

PHRASE BOX SAY IT
NOTICE SOMETHING

This is a great venue, isn't it?
The food looks amazing.
Busy tonight, isn't it?

ASK ABOUT THE SITUATION

How do you know the hosts?
Is this your first time here?
What brings you here today?

ASK FOR HELP

Do you know where the coats go?
Any idea what time it starts?
Is this seat taken?

PICK YOUR OPENER BUILD

Different places need different first lines. Choose a situation and add something you can see around you.

Your first name

Something you can both see

Put it together and write your line

CLOSED OR INVITING? SORT

A closed opener can be answered with one word. An inviting one asks for more. Both have a place, but you need the inviting kind to keep going. Tick one column for each.

	Closed	Inviting
Do you like it here?		
What brings you here today?		
Nice party.		
How do you know the hosts?		
Are you a student?		
What's the best thing you've eaten here?		
Busy, isn't it?		
How did you get into running?		

WHICH OPENER FITS? CHOOSE

Four places, four first lines. Choose the one that would work best. Circle your answer.

1. You're at a friend's birthday drinks and know nobody else. Someone is standing alone by the snacks.

a) Can you move, please?

b) Hi, I'm Carlos. How do you know Laura?

c) Do you like crisps?

2. It's your first evening class. The person next to you is reading the course handout.

a) Is this your first week too?

b) What's your salary?

c) Nice handout.

3. You're in a long queue at the post office.

a) You're in my way.

b) This is taking ages, isn't it?

c) Where do you live?

4. A new person joins your five-a-side football team.

a) Hi, I'm Tunde. Have you played here before?

b) Are you any good?

c) Hello.

THE TEN-SECOND CHALLENGE PLAY

You'll get a situation and ten seconds to say an opener out loud. Don't plan it perfectly. Just start. Time yourself: 10 seconds each.

- ☐ You're at a wedding reception, standing next to someone at the bar.
- ☐ You're waiting for a bus that's late. Someone else is waiting too.
- ☐ You're at a work training day. Someone sits down next to you.
- ☐ Your neighbour is in their front garden planting flowers.
- ☐ You're at a language exchange evening and someone smiles at you.
- ☐ You're at the gym and don't know how a machine works.

SAY IT ALOUD SAY IT

Say your opener and its follow-up together, so the second line comes automatically. Tick a box each time you say it aloud.

Line	Said it
Hi, I don't think we've met. I'm Carlos. How do you know everyone here?	☐ ☐ ☐
This is taking a while, isn't it?	☐ ☐ ☐
My own line:	☐ ☐ ☐

Focus: Smile before you speak. People hear it in your voice.

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON REFLECT

Which situation do you find hardest to start a conversation in?

Write the opener you'll use there next time.

Think of someone who started a conversation with you well. What did they say?

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ☐ Notice something you can both see, and comment on it.
- ☐ Ask about the situation: how they know the host, why they're here.
- ☐ Asking for small help is a natural opener.
- ☐ Follow a closed opener with an open question.
- ☐ A simple opener works better than a clever one.