

CHAPTER 8 · KEEPING IT FLOWING

WHEN YOU *don't know the topic*

You don't need to know the subject. You need a few phrases that keep you in the conversation.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Interactive version: attenglish.com/talk/8

PHRASE BOX SAY IT
I DIDN'T HEAR

Sorry, I didn't catch that.
Could you say that again?
Sorry, it's a bit noisy in here.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND

What do you mean by ...?
Sorry, what's a ...?
How does that work?

I DON'T KNOW THE TOPIC

I don't know much about ..., but...
I've always wanted to understand
...
So what got you into it?

RESCUE PHRASES MATCH

Each rescue phrase has a job. Match each one to the moment you'd use it. Write the letter in the middle column.

Phrase	Letter	When you'd use it
1. Sorry, I didn't catch that.		A. They're speaking too fast.
2. What do you mean by 'gutted'?		B. You don't know one word.
3. Could you say that a bit more slowly?		C. You didn't hear clearly.
4. I don't know much about cricket, but how does it work?		D. You think you understood, but want to check.
5. So you mean the match was cancelled?		E. You don't know the topic at all.

ASK, DON'T HIDE CHOOSE

Four moments where you're lost. Choose the best way to stay in the conversation. Circle your answer.

1. A colleague says, "We need to touch base about the Q3 numbers." You don't know "touch base".

- ☐ a) Nod and say "Sure."
 ☐ b) Sorry, "touch base"? What does that mean exactly?
 ☐ c) Change the subject.

2. Your friend's partner talks quickly about his job in cyber security.

- ☐ a) Could you slow down a bit? I'm really interested, but I'm not an expert.
 ☐ b) That's boring.
 ☐ c) Stay silent.

3. At a party, everyone is talking about a TV show you've never seen.

- ☐ a) I haven't seen it yet. What's it about?
 ☐ b) I don't watch TV.
 ☐ c) Leave the group.

4. Someone says, "I was absolutely gutted." You aren't sure what "gutted" means.

- ☐ a) Laugh.
 ☐ b) Gutted? As in really disappointed?
 ☐ c) Say "Great!"

THE DINNER-PARTY CHALLENGE PLAY

You're at a dinner and the topic is something you know nothing about. Stay in the conversation. Write what you would say at each turn.

Greg: "...so I finally upgraded to carbon wheels, and on the climbs it's a different bike."

Greg: "They're much lighter, so you go uphill faster. Last month I did the Fred Whitton, which is about 180 kilometres."

Greg: "Ha, the Fred Whitton! It's a famous ride in the Lake District. Very hilly. Have you ever been up there?"

YOUR RESCUE CARD WRITE

Choose the rescue phrase you most need and write it in your own words. It goes into your Conversation Kit.

The situation where you usually go quiet

Your rescue phrase

SAY IT ALOUD SAY IT

Rescue phrases only help if they come out quickly. Practise until they're automatic. Tick a box each time you say it aloud.

Line	Said it
Sorry, I didn't quite catch that. Could you say it again?	☐ ☐ ☐
I don't know much about it, but how does it work?	☐ ☐ ☐
Sorry, what does that mean exactly?	☐ ☐ ☐
My own line:	☐ ☐ ☐

Focus: Say it calmly, not apologetically. It's a normal thing to ask.

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON REFLECT

What topic do you usually go quiet about?

Which rescue phrase will you use this week?

How do you feel when someone asks you to explain your favourite subject?

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ☐ Not knowing is fine. Silence isn't.
- ☐ “Sorry, I didn't catch that” is completely normal.
- ☐ Ask them to explain: people love talking about what they know.
- ☐ Repeat the word you didn't understand: “Sorry, a maiden over?”
- ☐ Steer to the person: “What got you into it?”