
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

How to chat someone up



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

I'm not a photographer, but I can picture me and you together.

I seem to have lost my phone number. Can I have yours?

Do you believe in love at first sight, or should I walk by again?

Is it hot in here or is it just you?

You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.

Finn

OK, right, thanks for those Neil! I'm Finn – and Neil has just said a few chat up lines. They weren't for me Neil were they?

Neil

No, they were just examples, Finn. Just examples.

Finn

That's a relief. Now, I'm no expert in chatting people up, of course. So I've just searched online and most websites say: don't use a chat-up line, like Neil just did. They're quite traditional – even quite **cheesy**, which means of bad quality, they're the kind of thing that makes you groan, like this. (Finn groans) That's a groan.

So maybe if you're very confident or if you say them in a funny way they might just work.

But otherwise, what can you say if you want to chat someone up? Can we teach you anything to help you chat people up in English? Let's listen to some examples.

So, we've got Neil here again, with Helen – let's see if he can do a better job this time. Let's imagine they're waiting at a bus stop. Does Neil do a good job?

Neil

Hi. Have you seen the 185 go by?

Helen

No, I haven't. I only just got here.

Neil

Right, OK. It's really hot, isn't it? It's hot today.

Helen

Yeah, it's a... lovely day.

Neil

Yeah. So, have you got a lighter?

Helen

No. I don't smoke.

Neil

No. Neither do I.

Helen

Right...

Neil

So, can I have your phone number?

Helen

No.

Neil

Oh, right.

Finn

OK, well that wasn't too good. It started well. Neil started by asking something about their surroundings. He **broke the ice**. That's a good phrase. To break the ice is to say or do something in a situation where people don't know each other – maybe the situation is a bit tense, or a bit cold, like ice, then you say something that helps people relax and talk to each other.

Neil

Hi. Have you seen the 185 go by?

Finn

Now, Neil continued with another line about their surroundings: "Is it hot today?" Now that's fine, but then after that it started to go a bit wrong. Listen again. What do you think he did wrong?

Neil

Yeah. So, have you got a lighter?

Helen

No. I don't smoke.

Neil

No. Neither do I.

Helen

Right...

Neil

So, can I have your phone number?

Helen

No.

Neil

Oh, right.

Finn

Yeah, Neil was a bit too direct. He should have probably made sure she was interested, or at least a little bit interested, before asking for Helen's number. So, sorry, no points for Neil there. If you want to chat someone up, you do need to be confident, but you also need to listen: both listen to what they say and listen their body language – the way they're sitting or looking at you. So, ask questions of course, but also listen.

Now, time for another example. Let's see if Catherine can do any better. She's just seen a very handsome man at a conference – that's Rob – and she wants to chat him up. It's lunch time and Rob is helping himself to a nice, free sandwich at this conference... Catherine goes across to speak to him. How does she do?

Catherine

Nice sandwiches?

Rob

You can't beat a free sandwich.

Catherine

You can't, can you? Have you tried the sushi? It's quite good you know.

Rob

Actually, no. It does look good.

Catherine

The salmon sashimi is incredible. But your cheese sandwich looks nice as well.

Rob

Oh, thanks very much.

Catherine

Anyway, how's the conference? Are you having a good one?

Rob

Yeah, yeah, not bad. I'm doing a presentation this afternoon.

Catherine

Oh what's it about, anything good?

Rob

Yeah, water pipes.

Catherine

Water pipes?! Fascinating, you'll have to tell me all about that. Can I join you while you have your cheese sandwich?

Rob

Yeah, yeah, OK then.

Catherine

Lovely.

Finn

Right – so Catherine did a few things there that helped keep Rob interested. She started by breaking the ice. Which is good. She commented on their surroundings – in this case, lunch. She said:

Catherine

Nice sandwiches?

Finn

And then she suggested something just a bit different, maybe to make herself sound interesting. She said: "I like the sushi" – and asked if he'd tried it:

Rob

You can't beat a free sandwich.

Catherine

You can't, can you? Have you tried the sushi? It's quite good you know.

Rob

Actually, no.

Finn

Now Rob didn't seem too interested, so Catherine asked another question, but nothing too personal:

Catherine

Anyway, how's the conference? Are you having a good one?

Finn

They're at a conference, so asking about a conference isn't too personal. And she showed interest in what Rob was saying:

Rob

Yeah, yeah, not bad. I'm doing a presentation this afternoon.

Catherine

Oh what's it about, anything good?

Rob

Yeah, water pipes.

Catherine

Water pipes?! Fascinating, you'll have to tell me all about that.

Finn

And then, when she was confident he was just a bit interested in her, she bravely asked an important question:

Catherine

Can I join you while you have your cheese sandwich?

Rob

Yeah, yeah, OK then.

Catherine

Lovely.

Finn

So, well done Catherine. And let's summarise some points from those two conversations. First, break the ice by commenting on something around you. And then, just ask a few questions, nothing too personal, and remember, do listen to what they say. And finally – don't be scared to ask a slightly more direct question at the end – it might be your only chance!

All these skills are important in normal conversation too, so don't worry if you're married or you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, or you just don't want to chat someone up! You don't need to chat someone up to use these skills, it's still good to know how to break the ice and how to listen well.

So there we go. The art of chatting someone up, as brought to you by BBC Learning English. Before I go, has anyone ever told you look like Angelina Jolie?