



Everyday Conversations:

Learning American English

**EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS: LEARNING AMERICAN ENGLISH
ENGLISH LEARNING EDITION**

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AE AMERICAN ENGLISH

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Introductions and Small Talk

Dialogue 1-1: Formal Greetings

JAMES: **Good morning,** Professor Austin, how are you doing?

PROFESSOR AUSTIN: Good morning, James. I am doing well. And you?

JAMES: I'm great, thank you. This is my friend Emma. She is thinking about applying to this college. She has a few questions. Would you mind telling us about the process, please?

PROFESSOR AUSTIN: Hello, Emma! It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm more than happy to speak with you. Please stop by my office next week.

EMMA: It's a pleasure to meet you, professor. Thank you so much for helping us.

PROFESSOR AUSTIN: **Don't mention it.** Hopefully, I will be able to answer your questions!



LANGUAGE NOTES

- The greetings **good morning/good afternoon/good evening** are used at different times of the day to greet people. “Good evening” is often used after 6 p.m. or generally when the sun has set.
- “Good night” is not a greeting: It is used when leaving a place or group of people. *Thank you and good night!/Good night, and see you tomorrow.*
- When people meet in the United States, it is customary for them to shake hands. A handshake should be firm and usually lasts for about two to three seconds — which allows enough time to say “Nice to meet you.”
- “**Don’t mention it**” is another way of saying “You’re welcome.” The phrase “You are welcome” is more formal. However, responses such as *Don’t mention it./No problem./Happy to help.* are informal ways of responding to a thank you.

Dialogue 1-2: Informal Greetings and Farewells



- JANE:** Hi, Helen! **How's it going?**
- HELEN:** Fine, thanks — and you?
- JANE:** Just fine. **Where are you off to?**
- HELEN:** **To the library.** I've got a history exam next week and need to start studying. Ugh.
- JANE:** **Oh, no.** Well, I'll see you later then. Good luck!
- HELEN:** Thanks. **See you later.**

LANGUAGE NOTES

- **"Hi"** is an informal way of saying "hello." Notice that the "i" sound in "hi" is extended, to show that Jane is very pleased to see Helen.
- **"How's it going?"** is an informal way of saying "How are you?"
- **"Fine, thanks—and you?"** Notice the rising intonation on "and you?" This shows that Helen is interested in what Jane has to say.
- **"Where are you off to?"** is an informal way of saying "Where are you going?" Notice the falling intonation since this is an information question, not a "yes/no" question.
- **"To the library."** Notice that Helen does not say "I'm going" here because that information was already established in the question "Where are you off to?"
- **"Oh, no"** is a way of saying "I sympathize with you" or "I understand you are not happy."
- **"See you later"** is an informal way of saying "goodbye."

Dialogue 1-3: Formal Introductions

MARGARET: Mr. Wilson, I'd like you to meet Dr. Edward Smith.

MR. WILSON: It's nice to meet you, Dr. Smith.

DR. SMITH: Pleasure to meet you, too.

MARGARET: Dr. Smith is an economist. He just finished writing a book on international trade.

MR. WILSON: Oh? That's my field, too. I work for the United Nations.

DR. SMITH: In the **Development Program**, by any chance?

MR. WILSON: Yes. How did you guess?

DR. SMITH: I've read your articles on technical assistance. They're excellent.



LANGUAGE NOTES

- **Mr. Wilson, I'd like you ...** Notice the rising intonation on "Mr. Wilson," which is used to address someone. Listen for the "d" in "I'd like." This means I would like, which is very different from I like. ("I'd like" means the same as "I would like" or "I want.")
- **Dr. Smith is an economist.** Notice the stress on "economist." This content word has new information, so it is emphasized. There are four syllables in "economist," with the stress on the second syllable (e-CON-o-mist).
- **He just finished writing ...** "just" means the very recent past. "Just" is usually used with a simple past verb because the action is complete. However, it can also be used with the present perfect (He's just finished writing ...).
- **Development program.** Since these two words make a compound noun, the main stress falls on "development."
- **By any chance?** Means the same as "possibly." Notice the rising intonation, which is used in yes/no questions to confirm that something is true.

Dialogue 1-4: Informal Introductions

JIM: **Who's** the tall woman next to Barbara?

CHARLES: That's her friend Mary. **Didn't you meet her** at Steve's party?

JIM: No, **I wasn't at Steve's party.**

CHARLES: Oh! Then let me introduce you to her now. **Mary, this is my friend Jim.**

MARY: Hi, Jim. **Nice to meet you.**

JIM: You, too. Would you like a drink?

MARY: **Sure,** let's go get one.



LANGUAGE NOTES

- **“Who’s”** is the contracted form of who is. It is pronounced the same way as “whose” (/ huwz/), but the meaning is different.
- **Didn’t you meet her ...?** Notice that this is a negative question. Charles thought that Jim had met Mary before. He is now surprised that Jim does not know Mary, and so he uses a negative question to show his surprise.
- **I wasn’t at Steve’s party.** Notice that the emphasis here is on “at” although prepositions normally have weak stress. In this case, “at” means “there” (I wasn’t there).
- **Mary, this is my friend Jim.** This is a friendly way to introduce two people. It’s common to follow this with “Jim, this is Mary.” In this case, Mary says “Hi, Jim” first.
- **Nice to meet you.** This is a typical response after you’ve been introduced to someone.
- **“Sure”** is often used in informal conversation to mean “yes.”

Dialogue 1.5: What Time Is It?



NATASHA: What time is it? We're going to be late!

TONY: **It's a quarter after seven.** We're on time. Don't panic.

NATASHA: But I thought we had to be at the restaurant by **7:30** for the surprise party. We'll never make it there with all this evening traffic.

TONY: Sure we will. **Rush hour** is almost over. Anyway, the party starts at 8:00. But I do need help with directions. Can you call the restaurant and ask them where we park our car?

LANGUAGE NOTES

- **It's a quarter after seven.** This phrase is one of the most common ways of stating this time. It means: "It's 15 minutes past 7:00." Another possibility here is to simply say: "It's seven fifteen." In general you can say: "It's a quarter past the hour." How do we know the time of day? Look for context clues: "evening traffic."
- In the dialog, Natasha and Tony are going to a surprise party. They need to be on time. Therefore there is an element of stress and urgency. When someone is stressed for time you can use expressions like: *Don't worry.* / *Don't stress.* / *We're fine.* / *We will be on time.*
- Natasha thinks the surprise party begins at **7:30**. There are two different ways to express this time. You may say simply "seven thirty" or "half past seven."
- **Rush hour** is the time of day—usually in the morning and evening—when traffic is heavy because of people commuting to and from their workplace by bus, by car, by subway, on foot, etc.

Dialogue 1-6: A Telephone Call

JOHN: Hi, Alice, it's John. How are you?

ALICE: Oh, hi, John! I was just thinking about you.

JOHN: That's nice. I was wondering if you'd like to go to a movie tonight.

ALICE: Sure, I'd love to! What's playing?

JOHN: I was thinking about that new comedy *Lights Out*. What do you think?

ALICE: Sounds great!

JOHN: OK, I'll pick you up around 7:30. The movie starts at 8:00.

ALICE: See you then. Bye!



LANGUAGE NOTES

- **Hi, Alice, it's John:** Hi, _____, it's _____ is a casual and friendly way to say hello on the phone. Although "it's" means "it is," it is used to mean "I am" here.
- **Oh, hi, John!** Notice the rising intonation here. Alice is excited to hear from John and is very pleased that he called her.
- **I was wondering if you'd like to ...** This is a polite and indirect way of asking "Do you want to ...?" John is nervous and does not want to appear too direct or bold. Notice how the question goes up at the end, which shows that he is not overly confident.
- **Sure! I'd love to** means "Yes, I would love to." Notice that Alice is very enthusiastic and friendly. She wants John to feel comfortable about asking her out on a date.
- **I was thinking about ... / What do you think?** Again, John does not want to appear too bold. He wants to give Alice a chance to suggest a movie.
- **Sounds great!** Is an informal way of saying "That is a good plan."
- **I'll pick you up** is an informal way of saying "I'll come to your house so that we can go together."

Dialogue 1-7: Can You Say That Again?



LUKE: Hello? Hi, Stephanie, how are things at the office?

STEPHANIE: Hi, Luke! How are you? Can you please stop and pick up extra paper for the computer printer?

LUKE: What did you say? Can you repeat that, please? Did you say to pick up ink for the printer? Sorry, the phone is **cutting out**.

STEPHANIE: Can you hear me now? No, I need more computer paper. Listen, I'll text you exactly what I need. Thanks, Luke.
Talk to you later.

LUKE: Thanks, Stephanie. Sorry, my phone has really bad **reception** here.

LANGUAGE NOTES

- There are a few ways to express a lack of understanding and to request additional information. The most common ones are stated, but you can also say "Excuse me" or simply "I can't hear you." In a more formal situation, try saying "I'm sorry?" or "I beg your pardon?" (with a rising intonation).
- When asking someone to clarify information try saying *Can you please repeat that?* / *Can you spell that for me?* / *Can you please write down the address for me?*
- **Cutting out** describes a difficulty in understanding a caller due to poor cellphone reception. If you are having trouble understanding the caller, you can also say *The line is breaking up* / *I am losing you*. If the phone call is disconnected because of poor reception, you can say *The call dropped*.
- **Talk to you later** is the equivalent in a phone conversation of "See you later" in a regular, face-to-face conversation.
- **Reception** here means the availability of cellular service, the possibility to receive and give calls on a cellphone. Cellphone reception can be limited in remote areas, inside large buildings or underground (in the subway, for instance).

Dialogue 1-8: Coincidences

MEG: Well, hello there, Julia! Long time no see!

JULIA: Meg! Hi! **What a** coincidence! I haven't seen you in ages! What are you doing here?

MEG: I just got a new job in the city, so I'm shopping for some clothes. Hey, what do you think of this shirt?

JULIA: Hmmmm ... well, you know how much I love blue. See? I've got the same shirt!

MEG: You **always did have good taste!** What a small world.



LANGUAGE NOTES

- **Well, hello there ...** Notice the emphasis on “hello,” which shows that Meg did not expect to see Julia.
- **Long time, no see!** This is a common expression used to say hello to someone you haven’t seen in a long time.
- **What a ___!** This exclamation shows a great degree of surprise, joy, disappointment, etc. (What a surprise to see you here! What a joy to have you with us! What a shame that you have to leave so soon! What a wonderful idea that is!)
- **You always did have good taste!** Notice the stress on “did,” which Meg uses to emphasize the fact that Julia DOES have good taste! Meg says it in a joking way because Julia likes the same thing that she does.
- **What a small world** is a common expression used to describe a chance meeting or other such coincidence.

Dialogue 1-9: Weather Report



JENNIFER: It's freezing outside! What happened to the weather report? I thought this **cold front** was **supposed to** pass.

GABRIELA: **Yeah**, I thought so too. **That's what I read online this morning.**

JENNIFER: I guess the **wind chill** is really **driving down** the temperature.

GABRIELA: Can we go inside? I feel like my toes are starting to go numb.

LANGUAGE NOTES

- A **"cold front"** means a large mass of cold air. It can be plural: There were multiple cold fronts this January.
- Here **"supposed to"** refers to something that is intended or expected to happen: I thought it was supposed to rain today. This phrase can be used for many situations: I thought the train was supposed to arrive at 9:00 a.m. sharp.
- **Yeah / Yup / Uh huh** are informal conversational cues used by native speakers in conversation. Each of these responses could be used here for "yes." Gabriela affirms what Jennifer is saying. The most polite way to affirm a response is to say "yes."
- Listen for the emphasis on **"That's what I read online this morning."** This useful phrase can be used with other verbs to convey information: *That's what I heard on the radio. / That's what I saw on TV. / That's what I read online.*
- **Chill / freezing / cold:** *These words describe cold weather. I feel the wind chill. / I feel the chill. / I am freezing. / I am cold.*
- **Wind chill** is the effect of the wind making the temperature feel colder on a person's skin. This is an uncountable noun. The temperature is 4 degrees, but with the wind chill it feels like -8. These phrases are used in weather reports as well.
- The phrase **"driving down"** means "forcing to be lower" and can be used in many situations. *An oversupply of new houses is driving down sales prices in the area.*

