

BBC Learning English

How to ...

chat someone up



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William: Hello there and welcome to another edition of How To – my name is William Kremer. Today, we're going to be finding out about how to chat someone up. What does that mean? Well, if you chat someone up you speak to somebody you don't know and you try to make them interested in you – in a romantic way! Maybe after you've chatted them up, they'll want to go on a date with you.

Now, before you ask – No, I'm definitely not an expert at this and I can't promise that you'll have any more luck with women or men after listening to this programme! But there are some conversational tactics which it's useful to highlight.

In English, there's an expression – *to break the ice*. This means, to start a conversation with someone you don't know - to break the ice. Let's listen to a conversation which you might hear in a bar or nightclub. How does this man break the ice with the woman?

Man: What are you drinking?

Woman: Oh I'm fine, thank you.

Man: Are you sure? You look like a vodka-and-orange type of girl.

Woman: Really? Thanks.

William: He broke the ice by offering to buy the woman a drink:

Man: What are you drinking?

William: 'What are you drinking?' is here an informal way of asking someone what drink they would like. He might also have said, 'Can I get you a drink?'

Unfortunately for this man, she refuses his offer - she says 'I'm fine thank you'. She also indicates that she doesn't like being called a 'vodka-and-orange type of girl'. Listen to her tone of voice when she says thanks – she doesn't say 'Really? Thanks!' but 'Really? Thanks.'

Man: What are you drinking?

Woman: Oh I'm fine, thank you.

Man: Are you sure? You look like a vodka-and-orange type of girl.

Woman: Really? Thanks.

William: Chatting people up is partly about recognising when they are not interested in you! On the *How To* webpage you'll find some listening exercises to help you practise this.

Breaking the ice is difficult... but chatting people up gets even harder. That's because you want to seem like a funny and pleasant person and you don't want to be too obvious - that's just really embarrassing. Also, it can be difficult for language learners to speak English in noisy bars and nightclubs.

But, there is some good news for language learners too. If you're visiting an English-speaking country, you quickly become used to speaking to strangers – to ask directions, to ask for clarification and advice. This can be really useful for breaking the ice! Listen to this conversation between Linda from China and Zach from the UK. They are sitting next to each other on a train from London to Newcastle. Oh, and I should mention that in the UK it's not unusual or strange for women to chat men up!

Linda: Excuse me, do you know if this train is going all the way to Newcastle?

Zach: Well I hope so!

Linda: Oh, are you going there too?

Zach: Yeah... it's gonna be a long journey, especially as I seem to have forgotten to buy a magazine or a newspaper.

Linda: Ah, but back in China, I once took a forty-eight hour train journey!

Zach: Forty-eight! Really?! That's a bit mad.

Linda: Yeah... China is so big, so it's not unusual to travel for forty-eight hours.

Zach: You forget really, don't you, how small the UK is.

Linda: Yeah compared to China it's tiny.

William: You might want to go back and listen to that conversation again. Linda broke the ice by checking that the train went all the way to Newcastle. Then she said something so interesting that Zach had to respond... she said that she once took a forty-eight hour train journey. Let's listen to the next part of their conversation now. You'll hear that Linda uses her different culture and language to make conversation with Zach...

Zach: So are you er... are you a student or something over here?

Linda: No, I'm just learning English at a language school. That's why my English is so terrible!

Zach: Oh I don't know about that. You sound like you're from London or something. I can understand you perfectly.

Linda: Oh thank you, but I think your English is better!

Zach: Well thank you very much, I've only been practising for thirty odd years. You should hear my Mandarin though....!

Linda: Oh - are you learning Mandarin?

Zach: No, I'm just kidding. Unless you could teach me in the four hours before we get to Newcastle!

Linda: Maybe just 'hello' and 'goodbye'...

Zach: Oh I know that already. Er, hang on it's er ha... ni....Nihau!

Linda: You see, you can speak Mandarin! That's very good!

William: Hmm... Zach's Mandarin isn't that good, but Linda is paying him a nice compliment!

Did you notice, though, that she hasn't introduced herself? That's because she doesn't want it to be obvious that she's interested in Zach – she doesn't want to put too much pressure on the conversation at this stage.

You can listen to the whole of that conversation again by going to the *How To* web page on BBC Learning English dot com. And we'll hear more from Linda and Zach in another episode of *How To* – which will focus on how to ask someone out. Till then, good bye!