How to ... greet people formally

Quiz

1) I haven't seen you for ____!
   a. ages
   b. age
   c. age

2) What are you ______ to?
   a. off
   b. up
   c. out

3) Your hair ______ great!
   a. look
   b. looks
   c. looking
Answers

1) a
2) b
3) b
Transcript

Jackie
Hello. Welcome to How To with bbclearningenglish.com. I’m Jackie Dalton. In previous programmes, we’ve looked at how to greet people and introduce yourself, with phrases like, Hey, how are you? and, I’d like to introduce myself. But what can you say in conversations after the initial greeting?

You may often find you want to say something more to keep the conversation going, but you don’t quite know what to say. In this programme we’re going to look at some handy language and topics of conversation that you might use. Let’s start with our first one. Matt and Jane greet each other. What does Jane say after the initial greeting?

EXAMPLE

Jane
Alright Matt! How’s it going?

Matt
Yeah, no trouble. How about you – alright?

Jane
Yeah, not bad! I haven’t seen you for ages!

Matt
No, no – I’ve been busy haven’t I!

Jackie
Jane says, ‘I haven’t seen you for ages!’ which means, ‘I haven’t seen you for a very long time!’

EXAMPLE

Jane
I haven’t seen you for ages!

Jackie
A nice phrase to use when seeing someone after a long time. You could also say things like: It’s been a long time! or, I can’t believe it’s been so long!
Now, for our next area of conversation: what does Neil ask Carrie after they’ve both greeted each other?

**EXAMPLE**

**Neil**
Hello, Carrie! You alright?

**Carrie**
Oh, hi Neil! Yeah, I’m fine thanks. How are you?

**Neil**
Great, what’ve you been up to?

**Jackie**
Did you get that? He said, What’ve you been up to? – quite an informal phrase, which means: What have you been doing? Obviously, he’s not expecting full details of everything Carrie has been doing, but it’s a friendly way of making conversation. Carrie responds to his question with quite a vague answer.

**EXAMPLE**

**Neil**
Great, what’ve you been up to?

**Carrie**
This and that – you know!

**Jackie**
This and that, Carrie says, which means various different things. It doesn’t really answer Neil’s question, but as I mentioned before, Neil wasn’t expecting a detailed description of everything she’d been doing; they’re just chatting in a friendly way. We’ll hear that phrase again in this next dialogue. In this one, instead of asking, What have you been up to? referring to the recent past, the question is: What are you up to? meaning, What are you doing now?

**EXAMPLE**

**Matt**
Hey Jane, how’re you doing?
Jane
Good thanks, and you?

Matt
Yeah – not bad, not bad. What are you up to?

Jane
Oh, this and that. Just the usual! What about you?

Jackie
So again, Jane responds with this and that and then she uses the phrase just the usual – a way of saying nothing new or different from what she normally does. Oh, this and that. Just the usual!

EXAMPLE

Matt
What are you up to?

Jane
Oh, this and that. Just the usual! What about you?

Jackie
So a reminder of the language so far: we've had, I haven't seen you for ages! What are you up to? What have you been up to? This and that, Just the usual.

Let’s move on to more phrases and topics of conversation you might use. What does Neil ask Carrie this time, after he’s asked her how she is?

EXAMPLE

Neil
Alright Carrie! How are you?

Carrie
Yeah, I’m fine Neil. How you going?

Neil
Yeah, very well. What are you doing around here?
Carrie
Oh, I was just popping into the shop down the road there.

Jackie
What are you doing round here? – a nice informal and conversational question you can ask when you see someone somewhere you weren’t expecting to see them. Carrie responds by saying she was just popping into a shop, which is an informal way of saying going to a shop.

EXAMPLE

Neil
What are you doing around here?

Carrie
Oh, I was just popping into the shop down the road there.

Jackie
Sometimes people comment on each other’s appearance, though usually only if they are talking to someone they know well.

EXAMPLE

Abigail
Hi Sandra! How are you?

Sandra
I’m good thanks!

Abigail
Your hair looks great!

Sandra
Oh, thank you! And I love your dress!

Jackie
Another thing people often do is talk about their surroundings.

EXAMPLES
I really like this pub.
It’s a lovely hotel, isn’t it?
Jackie
Transport and how people got to wherever they are is also a popular one.

EXAMPLES
Hi, lovely to see you. Did you come here by car?
Hi John!
Matt! Good to see you! How was the journey?

Jackie
And of course, there’s one topic of conversation we haven’t looked at yet but which we can’t possibly forget to mention is that very British favourite:

EXAMPLES
It’s lovely weather today, isn’t it?
What awful weather we’re having!
Isn’t all this sunshine great!
It’s turned very cold suddenly, hasn’t it?

Jackie
Just a taste of some of the many, many things there are to say about the weather: always a nice, safe topic!
And now, time for a recap of the phrases and topics of conversation we looked at.
You could talk about how long it’s been since you last saw the person:
I haven’t seen you for ages!
You can ask them what they’ve been doing or what they are doing:
What’ve you been up to?
What are you up to?
What are you doing around here?
And a couple of the responses we looked at:
Oh, this and that.
Just the usual!
You could comment on your surroundings:
This house is gorgeous!
Or ask the person if the journey to meet you was ok:
How was the traffic?
You can talk about the weather:
It’s a lovely day, today.
And with people you know well, you could also say something nice about their appearance:
Your hair looks great!
And that's all for this week's How To, but don't forget to keep practising your English with bbclearningenglish.com.