
Yvonne: Hello, I'm Yvonne Archer and this is "How to..." from bbclearningenglish.com where we feature some of the most useful everyday English.

When a group of friends speak different languages, but speak in English when they're together, sometimes, the conversation simply doesn't flow and it comes to a stop. But it is possible to extend a conversation even with a limited vocabulary and have some fun.

TEASER

If you breathe in really sharply (demo) like that, that shows that you're really surprised or you're really shocked at what you've been told.

Yvonne: Native speakers make use of linking words as well as various sounds to keep a conversation going and to show interest in what someone is saying. And these sounds can certainly help to keep a conversation lively! Here's how Carrie and I extended our conversation just as it seemed to be ending. We were sharing some office gossip – so the topic wasn't important or official and was very informal. You'll notice that we used very few words and 'ooh' and 'ummmm' sounds are just as important. What do you think those sounds tell us?

INSERT 1

CARRIE: Well, you see, it pays to be in the office sometimes.

YVONNE: Ooh, ooh, ooh,

CARRIE: Yes, yes, yes

YVONNE: I've got a bit of gossip for you

CARRIE: Go on, go on, go on...

YVONNE: Guess who's seeing who?

CARRIE: In the office?

YVONNE: In the office.

CARRIE: Ummmmm – give us a clue...

Yvonne: 'Ooh' sounds can be used to show that you've just remembered something really exciting and worth talking about...

INSERT 2

CARRIE: Well, you see, it pays to be in the office sometimes.

YVONNE: Ooh, ooh, ooh,

Yvonne: The 'ummm' sound that Carrie used indicated that she was taking some time to think of an answer to my question...

INSERT 3

CARRIE: Ummmmm – give us a clue...

Yvonne: So we've heard two small sounds which made our conversation fun and exciting – and helped us extend it. Here's another chance to hear that conversation about two people in our office. This time, listen out for how many times I say 'ooh', and how many times Carrie says the word 'yes' and the short phrase 'go on'...

RPT INSERT 1

CARRIE: Well, you see, it pays to be in the office sometimes.

YVONNE: Ooh, ooh, ooh,

CARRIE: Yes, yes, yes

YVONNE: I've got a bit of gossip for you

CARRIE: Go on, go on, go on...

YVONNE: Guess who's seeing who?

CARRIE: In the office?

YVONNE: In the office.

CARRIE: Ummmmm – give us a clue...

Yvonne: I said 'ooh' three times and very quickly – 'ohh, ooh, ooh' and Carrie did the same with 'yes' and 'go on' to encourage me to carry on talking. So three is a good number!

You're listening to "How to..." from bbclearningenglish.com and we're looking at ways to extend a conversation and make it more interesting by using various sounds.

As our conversation continued, I let Carrie know that I couldn't tell her the names of the people we were talking about. That was a secret. But listen to the sound she made to show her frustration – to indicate that she wasn't pleased:

INSERT 4

CARRIE: Who is it?

YVONNE: I can't say.

CARRIE: Oh you....Arrrrgh!

YVONNE: I've been sworn to secrecy.

CARRIE: You can't tell me half a story and not tell me who's getting engaged or going out.

YVONNE: Calm down, calm down.

CARRIE: Argh! Ummm - can I guess?

YVONNE: I'm just making you aware of the situation...

Yvonne: Carrie said 'Arrrrgh' when she first realised that I wasn't going to tell her what she wanted to know.

INSERT 5

CARRIE: Arrrrgh!

YVONNE: I've been sworn to secrecy....

Yvonne: And then she made a shorter, softer version of the same sound to show that she was still frustrated but again said 'ummm' because this time, she was thinking of a way to get those names from me...

INSERT 6

CARRIE: Argh! Ummm - can I guess?

YVONNE: I'm just making you aware of the situation...

Yvonne: Well, I kept my secret and Carrie is still trying to guess who the people are!

At first, those types of sounds we've heard might feel strange to use. But you probably already use them when speaking in your own language, so why not have some fun and try a few out when you're next having a conversation in English? Use them to show your interest, to help make the conversation exciting, and to encourage someone to continue with the conversation.

Now it's worth mentioning gestures and facial expressions, even though we can't see them here! Here are some that the team at BBC Learning English sometimes use to extend a conversation:

INSERT 7

If you shake your head slowly, as if you're saying 'no' when somebody is telling you something sad, that makes it look as though you're sympathetic...

If you smile from time to time, that can be encouraging...

Don't smile too often because the person you're listening to might wonder whether you actually understand what they're saying.

Yvonne: Now, have fun listening out for some more of those sounds when you're at the shops, when you're on a bus – in fact, anywhere where people are speaking English. And look out for some of those gestures. I'm sure you'll have fun trying them out!