

120 Making conversation

Many words and phrases are used in English to ease the flow of conversation. These techniques are often called organizing, backchanneling, or stalling.

See also:
More linking words 112
Hedging 119

120.1 INFORMAL ORGANIZING WORDS

A number of general words can be used to move from one topic to another in conversational English.



"Right" gets attention before saying something important.

Right, let's get started...



"OK" acknowledges that the other speaker has been heard.

... **OK**, and are you happy with your choice?



"So" indicates that a conclusion is being reached.

... **So**, I think we agree overall.

120.2 BACKCHANNELING

When listening to another speaker, it's common to use words to show you agree and are paying attention. This is known as backchanneling.



I'm thinking about doing a course.

Really?

My company has funding...

Wow!

...and I'm really tempted to apply.

OK.

I've just moved house and my commute is very long.

Uh-huh.

The problem is, I don't have much spare time.

Oh right.

The scheme is very competitive. I'll have to see what happens.

Of course.



120.3 STALLING TECHNIQUES

If extra time is needed to think about a difficult question before answering it, a response can be started with a stalling phrase to indicate that the question is being considered.

Would you be happy to work weekends?

Well, I do have two children.



What are your strengths?

Good question. I have excellent computer skills.



Why should we hire you?

Let's see... I think my experience would be very useful.



FURTHER EXAMPLES

So, I'm thinking of quitting my job.

You know, that might be a bad idea.



I mean, the change would be good.

Sort of, but you've always wanted to work where you are now.



Now, I didn't think of it that way.

I kind of think in the long run you'd be much happier staying where you are.

