



## LESSON THREE

# SMALL TALK

### PREVIEW AND PREPARATION

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*Look up the meaning of any unfamiliar words or phrases in the preview table.*

making small talk  
running (a little) late  
take some time  
take advantage of  
go ahead of us  
have to offer  
finish up with  
see a doctor  
in a hurry/not in any hurry  
in the way of  
How long have you been waiting?  
Have you been seeing Dr. Thorpe for a long time?  
I just got here.  
I just moved into town recently.  
I'm running a little late.  
We're not in any rush.  
You can go ahead of us if you'd like.  
It'll take some time for me to...  
I hope he doesn't take too long with...  
Are you sure you don't want to...  
I think you'll find the weather a lot milder out here.  
I much prefer getting rain in the winter rather than snow.  
This city has so much to offer in the way of outdoor activities.  
You don't say.  
I must say.  
It's a shame.

# LISTENING PRACTICE

How many people were there in the clinic?

- a. Four people.
- b. More than four people.

Did Ray and Susan know each other?

- a. Yes.
- b. No.

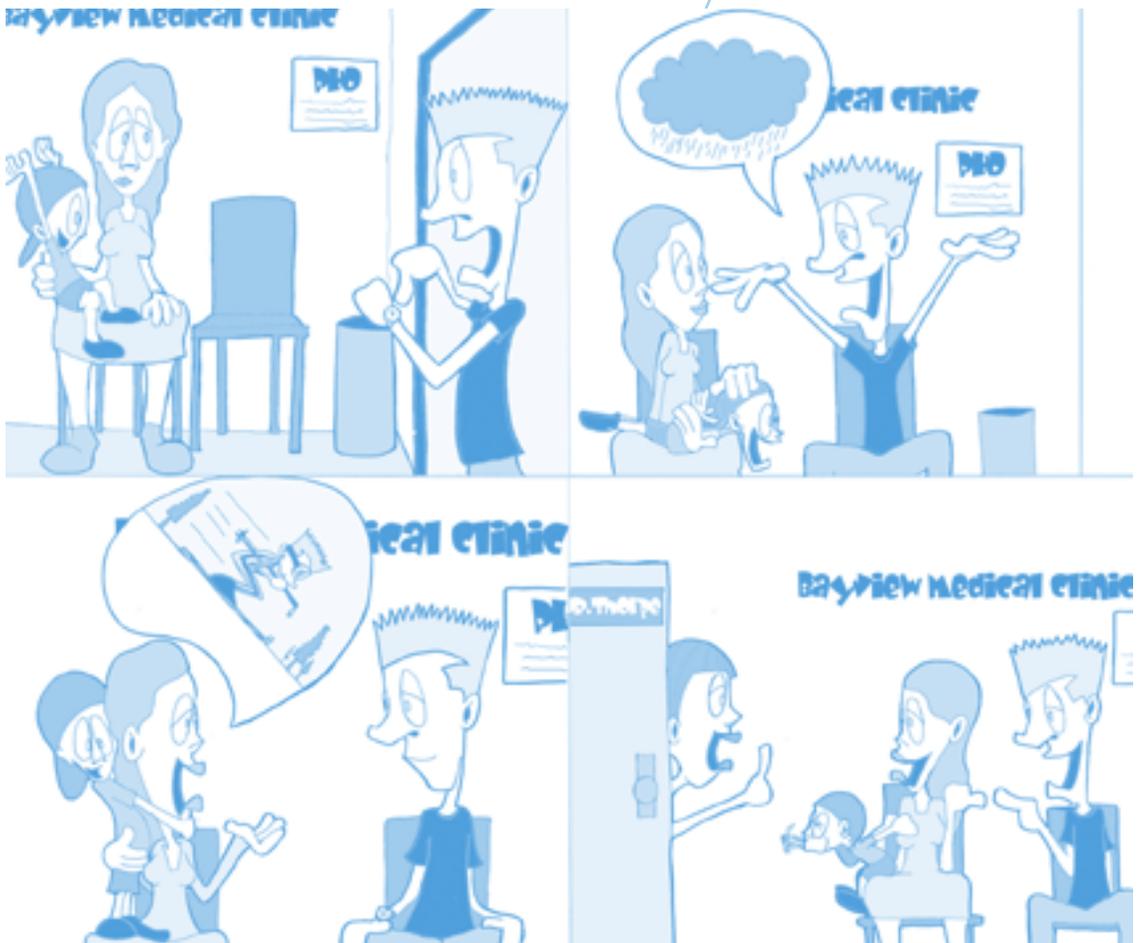
What happened to Dr. Thorpe?

- a. He was late.
- b. He was busy.

What did Susan suggest to Ray?

- a. That Ray could see Dr. Thorpe before her.
- b. That she could see Dr. Thorpe before Ray.

*Listen to the audio program and try to answer these questions.*



## IN THE WAITING ROOM

*Small talk is a form of social chitchat used to greet people you know or have just met. In small talk one only talks about things people share in common such as the weather or a favorite sports team. Things that are too personal or controversial are generally not discussed, nor does a small talk conversation get into too much detail on any one topic.*

*Dialogue between Ray (R) and Susan (S) in the waiting room.*

- R: Excuse me. How long have you been waiting? 1
- S: Not long. I just got here.
- R: Oh, I see. I'm running a little late, myself. I hope Dr. Thorpe doesn't take too long with whomever he's seeing right now.
- S: You can go ahead of us if you'd like. We're not in any hurry. 5
- R: No, no. I couldn't do that. Is this your son?
- S: Yes, this is Jeremy. My name is Susan.
- R: How do you do? I'm Ray.
- S: Have you been seeing Dr. Thorpe for a long time?
- R: Me? No. I just moved into town recently, with my folks, 10  
from Toronto.
- S: Toronto? You don't say! Well, I think you'll find the weather a lot milder out here.
- R: I must say, it will take some time for me to get used to all the rain. 15
- S: Myself, I much prefer getting rain in the winter rather than snow.
- R: It's a shame. This city has so much to offer in the way of outdoor activities, but so often you can't take advantage of them because of the rain.
- S: Do you like to ski? 20
- R: Yes. One can never ski too much.
- S: My brother is a ski instructor on Mount Whistler. Whenever it's raining down here, it's snowing up there.
- R: That's good news.
- S: Oh, that must be Dr. Thorpe finishing up with his patient. 25  
Are you sure you don't want to go ahead of us?
- R: Yes, I'm sure. Thank you. I'll be fine. It was nice to meet you!
- S: Nice to meet you too! Have a good day!

# STUDY GUIDE

1. *How long have you been waiting?*

We can also say “Have you been waiting long?” Both questions are used when we want to ask someone who is still **waiting** in line how long they’ve been there. If it were already Susan’s turn and she were about to walk in to see Dr. Thorpe, Ray would have asked “How long have you **waited**?” or “How long did you have to wait?” Compare with “Have you been **seeing** Dr. Thorpe for a long time?”

2. *I’m running a little late myself.*

This means Ray was running behind his schedule for that day and he was in a rush. He might have arrived late for his appointment with Dr. Thorpe in the first place, but that’s not the point here. The point he was trying to make in this case was that if he had to wait long, he might be late for his other appointments.

3. *You can go ahead of us.*

Susan heard that Ray was in a rush, so she offered to let him go ahead of her and her son. Other ways to say this are: You can go first. You can take my place. You can go in front of me. We can trade places in line.

4. *I just moved into town recently, with my folks, from Toronto.*

“Moved into town” means he was from another city. It’s a common expression. The use of “town” doesn’t necessarily mean where he moved to is literally a “town.” It could also be a big city. If someone wants to emphasize that he just moved from the country or a smaller town to a big city, he might say “I just moved to the city recently.”

5. *One can never ski too much.*

This is an expression about something the person likes a lot. Other examples are: You can never watch too many movies. Kids can never have too much ice cream. We can never have too much money. There can never be too many holidays.

6. *Whenever it’s raining down here, it’s snowing up there.*

From the dialogue, this was something Susan learned from her brother. Since Ray just complained about too much rain, Susan tried to make him feel better by telling him that whenever it was raining in the city, he could go up to the mountain and ski.

7. *Yes, I’m sure. Thank you. I’ll be fine.*

“Yes, I’m sure” is in response to Susan’s question “Are you sure you don’t want to go ahead of us?” The full meaning of it is “Yes, I’m sure I don’t want to go ahead of you.” The answer could also be “No, thanks! I’ll be fine.” Meaning “No, I don’t want to go in front of you.” To avoid confusion, it’s better to say “Yes, I’m sure. Thank you” in this context.

8. *It was nice to meet you!*

This is mostly used at the end of a meeting between two strangers. The word “meet” means “to know someone for the first time.” For people who already know each other, usually at the end of their get together, they will say “It was nice **seeing** you” instead, or “It was nice to see you.”

# COMPREHENSION PRACTICE

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- R: I'm running a little late myself.*  
What did Ray mean?

  - He was late for Dr. Thorpe's appointment.
  - He will probably be late for his next appointment.
  - He came here running.
- S: Have you been seeing Dr. Thorpe for a long time?*  
Why did Susan ask this question?

  - She was just making small talk.
  - She wanted to find out if Dr. Thorpe is any good.
  - She wanted to know if Ray has been sick for a long time.
- R: One can never ski too much.*  
What did Ray mean by telling Susan this?

  - He loves to ski.
  - He skies too much.
  - Susan shouldn't ski too much.
- S: Whenever it's raining down here, it's snowing up there.*  
What was Susan trying to say?

  - She was very proud of her brother.
  - She was proving Ray was wrong about the weather.
  - She was telling Ray he could go skiing even if it's raining in the city.

## HOW SHOULD I SAY IT?

- I just got home and you are home already.*

  - How long are you home?
  - How long were you home?
  - How long have you been home?
- I just got home and you are waiting for a friend to call.*

  - How long have you been waiting?
  - How long have you waited?
  - How long did you wait?
- I just got home and you told me my friend just called me.*

  - How long did he call?
  - How long has he called?
  - When did he call?
- I am on my way home. You want to see a movie. I want to go with you.*

  - I came home now. Can you wait?
  - I am coming home now. Can you wait?
  - I have been coming home now. Can you wait?

## IN OTHER WORDS

Referring back to the dialogue. Check the statement(s) that expresses the same meaning. There may be more than one answer.

1. *You can go ahead of us, if you'd like.*
  - a. You can go first, if you want.
  - b. You should go straight ahead.
  - c. Please walk faster.
2. *No, I couldn't do that.*
  - a. No, I wouldn't do that.
  - b. No, I wasn't able to do that.
  - c. No. I'm fine.
3. *Toronto? You don't say.*
  - a. Toronto? Really?
  - b. Toronto? How weird!
  - c. Toronto? It's impossible.
4. *I must say.*
  - a. I have to say.
  - b. You have to know.
  - c. I must be saying something.
5. *It will take some time for me to get used to all the rain.*
  - a. It will be some time before I get used to the rain.
  - b. It will be some time before it rains.
  - c. It will not rain too soon.
6. *You can't take advantage of them.*
  - a. You shouldn't be using them.
  - b. You can't make use of them.
  - c. They are not in use.
7. *Dr. Thorpe is finishing up with his patient.*
  - a. Dr. Thorpe is running late.
  - b. Dr. Thorpe is going out.
  - c. Dr. Thorpe is almost done.

## IN ANOTHER CONTEXT

Practice the following sentence patterns by reading them aloud to the class.  
Try to make one new sentence for each pattern using your own words.

Are you sure

you don't want to  
you want to

go ahead of us?  
come with me to the party?  
buy the tickets online?  
tell me what's going on?

It will take some time for me

to get used to  
to know  
to fill out  
to finish up

all  
half of  
most of  
the rest of

the rain.  
the streets.  
the forms.  
the work.

The city

This school

The club

He

has so much to offer in the way of

outdoor activities.  
student clubs.  
social life.  
musical talent.

I much prefer

getting rain  
having fun  
going home  
going to bed

in the winter  
on the weekends  
after work  
early

rather than

(getting) snow.  
studying.  
going to the movies.  
staying up late.

That must be

Dr. Thorpe  
the postman  
the coach  
my dad

finishing up with his patient.  
delivering the package.  
starting the game.  
checking on me.

# CONVERSATION PRACTICE

*Practice small talk in a given situation and write down what you have learned about the person you just talked to.*

- STEP 1** — Understand the situation and prepare for small talk.  
You have two minutes to prepare.

*Situation:*

1. You are waiting for a bus at a bus stop to go...
2. Weather – it’s a good sunny day after a long rainy week, you feel...
3. Traffic – It’s rush hour traffic and your bus seems to...
4. Vacations and holidays – It’s one week before spring break. Your plans are...
5. National events and issues – An election is coming; posters are everywhere, you feel...

- STEP 2** — Choose a partner to practice small talk with.  
You have three minutes for small talk.

- STEP 3** — After your small talk, write down what you have learned about your partner.

*Your Partner Said:*

*Yes/No*

1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____

- STEP 4** — Verify each other’s sheet. Check a “Y” for things you have said.  
Each “Y” gets one point.

How many points did you get above? \_\_\_\_\_ Points.

This represents how good you are at listening.

How many points did you give to your partner? \_\_\_\_\_ Points.

This represents how good you are at speaking.