

# Sorry, I Didn't Catch That | Small Talk in English, Episode 4

English learning resource · EN

## Full episode script · English

275 lines

**Study task:** Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

I once hid in a bathroom for eight minutes.

At a party?

At a wedding.

Trapped in a conversation about insurance.

Twenty-five minutes of insurance.

And you could not get out.

So I said I needed the bathroom, and I stayed in there.

Doing what?

Looking at my own face.

Waiting.

And then?

And then I came out, and he was standing by the door.

No.

He said, where were we?

Here is my question.

Why did you not simply say you were going?

Because I did not know how.

And you are fluent.

I am fluent, and I hid in a bathroom.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox, the podcast that trains your English while you live your real life.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.



This is the fourth conversation in our series about small talk in English.

We have started a conversation.

We have kept it going.

We have made it real.

And today, the four things that actually happen in a real conversation.

The four things nobody teaches you.

You do not understand something.

The room is too loud.

There is a group of four people already talking.

And at some point, you have to leave.

Let us start with the big one.

The one that stops people for years.

You did not understand.

You did not understand, and now there is a silence, and the other person is looking at you.

And what do most people do?

They nod.

They nod.

And they smile, and they say yeah, and they hope the conversation moves on.

And here is the thing about nodding.

It works once.

And then they ask you a question about the thing you did not understand.

And now you are two sentences deep into a conversation you are not in.

So let us fix it properly, because there is a scale.

Give me the scale.

At the top, the shortest one.

Sorry?

One word.

And it is not rude at all.

It is not rude, and this matters, because many of our listeners were taught to say what.



And what sounds abrupt.

Sorry sounds like a question.

What sounds like an accusation.

Next level.

Sorry, I did not catch that.

To catch something.

If you did not catch it, the sound did not reach you properly.

It is not a confession that your English failed.

That is a beautiful distinction.

It is the most useful word in this episode.

And the next level?

This is the one I want you to actually use.

Be specific about what you missed.

Not I do not understand.

When you can, be specific rather than saying I do not understand.

Because that gives the other person more to work with.

They do not know what to repeat, so they repeat everything, usually louder.

Which does not help.

Which never helps.

Instead.

I did not catch the name.

I did not get the last bit.

Sorry, which day did you say?

You are telling them exactly what to fix.

And the whole thing takes one second instead of thirty.

And the full version, when you really need it?

Would you mind saying that again, a bit slower?

And one thing about permission.

Asking somebody to repeat does not make you look bad at English.



It makes you look interested.

It says, what you are saying matters enough that I want to get it right.

And the people who nod?

They are communicating something too.

They may be signalling, I am lost, even when they do not mean to.

Right.

Second thing.

The room.

Oh, the room.

A bar, a party, a canteen at lunchtime, a building site, a bus.

And you understand nothing, and you decide your English has gone backwards overnight.

It has not gone backwards.

It is physics.

Say more about that.

Native speakers do not hear well in a loud bar either.

Nobody does.

The sound is simply not there.

So why do they manage?

Because they are guessing better.

They know the words that are probably coming, so their brain fills the gaps.

And we have fewer words to guess with.

It is not your ears.

You just have a smaller guessing library, and that grows.

So what do we do tonight, in the actual bar?

Three things.

Move.

Get your back to a wall, or stand at the edge of the room.

The middle of a room is the worst place in it.

Second, confirm what you did get.



So you are saying the train was cancelled?

Which keeps you in the conversation while you check.

And third, the kind one.

Blame the room.

It is so loud in here, say that again?

And now it is the room's fault, not yours.

And the room really is at fault.

And accept something.

What?

You do not need one hundred per cent.

Seventy per cent is a conversation.

Ninety per cent is a very good night out.

A hundred per cent is an exam, and you are not in one.

Third thing.

The group.

Four people, standing in a circle, already laughing at something.

And you are holding a drink, two metres away.

And you are waiting for a gap.

And the gap never comes.

Groups often have only very short gaps.

That is what makes them groups.

So what do you do?

Two parts, and the first is your feet.

My feet?

Do not stand behind somebody.

Stand at the edge of the circle, where somebody can see you without turning their whole body.

Because a circle with a person behind it will close.

A circle with a person at the edge will open.

And the second part?



You speak before the gap.

Sorry to jump in, did you say you were from Krakow?

To jump in.

To join a conversation that has already started.

And the rude version is to butt in.

Over the top of somebody.

And here is the trick that makes jumping in safe.

Ask about something you just heard.

Because now you are not interrupting.

You are listening out loud.

Now, the generous version.

The thing nobody teaches, and the most powerful thing in this episode.

Let somebody else in.

Yes.

You are in the group now.

And there is somebody standing just outside it, holding a drink, waiting for a gap that is not coming.

And you remember exactly how that feels, because it was you nine minutes ago.

So you turn slightly, and you make room, and you say.

Have you two met?

And you do not need to know anything about them.

You can literally find out their name two seconds before you say it.

And if you do this, you become the person everybody wants at a party.

Not the funniest.

Not the best English in the room.

The person who makes room.

And the fourth thing.

Leaving.

Which we have covered before on this show, so quickly, as a reminder.

A good exit has three parts, and most people only use one.



Give me the three.

One, point at the door.

I should get going.

Two, say the encounter was worth it.

It was really good to meet you.

Three, name the future.

See you next week?

And if you only use part one?

It sounds like escape.

Because it is escape.

And if you only use part two, you do not move.

Then you are still in the insurance conversation.

Do not say that word again.

And one variant, which is the kindest sentence in the English language.

Which one?

I should let you go.

You give them the exit.

You hand it to them.

And nobody has ever been offended by being released.

So.

Juan.

Two scenes, and both in the same month.

The welcome party for his course, first.

Did he survive?

He used all four.

He asked a girl to repeat something twice, he blamed a speaker that was too loud, and he jumped into a group by asking about a film he had heard them mention.

And the exit?

Three parts, and he says he could hear himself doing it, like a man following a recipe.

But that is not the part you want to tell me.



No.

Near the end of the night, he was in a group, and there was a man standing just outside it, holding a drink, waiting.

Oh.

And Juan asked him his name, and then turned to the group and said, have you met Andrei?

He had known him for four seconds.

Four seconds.

And Andrei is now the person he studies with on Tuesdays.

And the second scene?

The second scene is the job.

He got the job?

He got the job.

A café near the station, weekends and two evenings.

Tell me about the interview.

Halfway through, the manager asked him something about availability, the coffee machine was going, and he did not catch the end of it.

And he nodded.

He did not nod.

He said, sorry, I did not catch the last bit.

And?

And he got the job.

Because of his English?

Not because of his English.

Weeks later, the manager told him why.

Why?

She said, half the people I interview nod when they have not understood me.

And in a café.

And in a café, somebody who nods instead of asking can get an order wrong.

Right.

Three sentences.



Listen, and repeat in the pause.

Sentence one, the specific repair.

Sorry, I did not catch the last bit.

Would you mind saying it again?

Sentence two, joining a group.

Sorry to jump in, did you say you were from Krakow?

And sentence three, the generous one.

Have you two met?

This is Andrei.

All three again.

Sorry, I did not catch the last bit.

Would you mind saying it again?

Sorry to jump in, did you say you were from Krakow?

Have you two met?

This is Andrei.

Notice that none of the three are apologies for your English.

Not one.

Sorry to jump in is manners, not shame.

And our sentence of the day.

Ready?

You do not need to understand every word.

You need to stay in the room.

You do not need to understand every word.

You need to stay in the room.

One more time, with us.

You do not need to understand every word.

You need to stay in the room.

So here is your task this week.

One repair.



When you do not catch something, do not nod.

Say what you missed, specifically.

The name.

The last bit.

Which day.

And if you manage a second thing, make room for somebody.

Four words.

Have you two met?

Next time, something different.

Something we have been building towards for four episodes.

For four conversations, we have been telling you about somebody.

Juan, from Barcelona, in Wolverhampton.

The bus stop in the rain.

The fourteen questions.

The three days ill in bed.

Next time, he is here.

And he tells it himself.

Everything from today, the transcript, the vocabulary, and the three sentences, is waiting for you at [yourenglishtoolbox.com](http://yourenglishtoolbox.com).

With translations, flashcards and downloadable PDFs, completely free.

Thank you for spending this time with us.

And this week, do not nod.

See you in the next one.

