

Good and taboo questions and topics games

Look below and choose the five most useful questions below and five least useful questions (in terms of being taboo or not really starting a conversation) for situations in which you might really meet foreign people.

- (Have you) been busy?
- Are you (originally) from (around) here?/ Where are you from?
- Are you married?
- Are you new here?
- Are you okay?
- Are you thinking of changing jobs?
- Can I help you?
- Can you cook?
- Did you get much done this week?
- Did you have a good weekend?
- Did you have any trouble getting here?
- Did you hear the weather forecast (for today/ tonight/ this weekend/...)?
- Did you see the match (last night)?
- Did you see/ hear about...?
- Do you do any sports?
- Do you drink?
- Do you follow (the news/ football/ any team/ any Spanish teams/...)?
- Do you have (any) children?
- Do you have any plans for the weekend?
- Do you know/ work with (name of person)?
- Do you live/ work near here?
- Do you mind if I sit here?
- Do you need any help?
- Do you smoke?
- Great/ Terrible weather, isn't it?/ How's the weather (outside now)?
- Have you ever been to (place)?
- Have you heard from (name) recently?/ How is (name)?
- How are you (today)?
- How are you feeling?
- How are your family?
- How long have you been... ing...?
- How much do you earn?/ How much money do you make?
- How old are you?
- How was your flight?
- How was your journey?
- How was your trip?
- How was your week?/ How has your week been?
- How was your weekend?
- How's business?
- How's work?
- How's your family?
- How's your love life?
- Is it going to rain/ snow (do you think)?
- Is it your first time here?

- Is there anywhere good to eat around here?
- Is this your first time in (name of place where you are)?
- That sounds like a difficult/ hard/ tough job!
- That's a nice... How much did it cost?
- That's a nice... Where did you buy it?
- What (exactly) do you do?
- What are you doing here?
- What are you working on (at the moment)?
- What does your company do?
- What is it like, working for...?
- What's your favourite food?
- Where is your family from?
- Who do you work for?
- You look stressed/ tired.
- You're looking good/ healthy/ tanned/ well. Have you...?

Try some of the questions with your partner, then discuss if you've changed your mind about how suitable any of the questions are.

Do the same, but this time extending the conversations.

Do the same from the beginning of the conversation, dropping the questions in.

What topics are generally good and bad for conversation with someone who you don't know (well)?

Without looking below, rank the topics which your teacher gives you from 1 point (= easy topic even with strangers) to 5 points (= very difficult or completely taboo topics), without showing your cards to each other if possible. The topics on one card are all supposed to have the same ranking. Note that some topics mean mentioning those things about yourself rather than asking the other person.

The topics are ranked by how British people traditionally feel about those things. Does that change your mind about the ranking?

Check your rankings then discuss any surprises and cultural differences that you find, including what you know about other countries.

Discuss some of the 1 point topics, then do the same moving up the points level.

Taboo topics challenge game

Choose a number of points that you want to try for and your partner will ask you a question about a topic of that level. They will then reward you points up to that maximum (e.g. zero, one, two or three points for a three-point question) depending on your answer.

Useful phrases

I'd rather not answer that (if you don't mind).

I'm sorry, that's rather personal.

I'm afraid we don't really talk about that in my culture.

Rank and discuss the easy and taboo topics game

- (Recent) movies and TV programmes
 - America
 - Cars (e.g. something on the TV show Top Gear)
 - Celebrities (= famous people)
 - Complaints about a place you both work or live
 - Complaints about politicians
 - Complaints about transport
 - Drinking
 - Favourite sportsmen
 - First names
 - Football
 - Free time/ Hobbies
 - Hometowns
 - Hotels
 - How busy you are
 - International news stories
 - People who you both know
 - Pets
 - Places you have and haven't lived/ visited
 - Precise job title and what exactly you do (= details about your jobs)
 - Sightseeing in this/ your area
 - The room or building which you are in
 - The weather
 - Travel (e.g. to the place you are now, commuting, or travel abroad)
 - Your bad points
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- Airports/ Airlines
 - Allergies
 - Bargains/ How much you saved (for example in the summer sales)
 - Books
 - China
 - Complaints about your children and husbands/ wives
 - Cooking/ Food
 - Crime
 - DIY
 - Exercise/ Sports
 - Gardening
 - Gay people who you know
 - Holidays
 - Relationships between your countries and their closest neighbours
 - Relationships between your countries and their former colonies
 - Which school/ university you went to
 - Smoking
 - Sports teams which you support
 - Start a conversation with a taxi driver
 - Start a conversation with the bar staff (if you are sitting at the bar)
 - Vegetarianism (= not eating meat)
 - Which newspaper (or newspaper's website) you read
 - Young people nowadays

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- Age
 - Climate change
 - Complaints about the police
 - Dieting
 - Domestic news (= news about your own countries)
 - Fashion
 - How good-looking (or not) men and women are in your countries
 - Property prices in your country/ area
 - Publically owned broadcasters (BBC, ABC, NPR, NHK, etc.)
 - Scandals/ Negative news involving your companies
 - Seasonal changes
 - Start a conversation at the bar with another customer
 - Start a conversation at a bus stop
 - Suggest splitting the bill
 - The food that you are both eating
 - The history of your countries
 - Where you buy your clothes
 - WWI/ WWII
 - The death penalty
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- Banking
- Baseball
- Censorship
- Complain about the food to a waiter
- Great things about your country
- Dating
- Discussing business/ Negotiating during drinks after work
- How you really feel
- Independence movements in parts of the country (e.g. Scottish independence)
- Personal investments
- Personal achievements
- Political extremism in your countries (= far right and extreme left)
- Poverty (= poor people)
- Previous political leaders of your countries (Tony Blair etc.)
- Stand up and introduce yourself
- Start a conversation on the bus or train
- The 2008 financial crisis
- The royal family
- The sex industry (hostess bars, “massage parlours”, etc.)
- Unions/ Industrial action
- What areas you live in
- What your houses cost
- Which political parties you are against

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- Animal rights
 - Body weight
 - Complaints about the other person’s country or area
 - Complement each other
 - Expensive things you have paid for
 - Gay marriage
 - Health problems/ Medical problems you have had
 - Immigration
 - Marital state (= married, single, divorced, etc.)
 - Nationalism/ Patriotism
 - Nuclear power
 - Parenting (= different ways to bring up your children)
 - Plans to have (more) children
 - Race
 - Religion
 - Salary/ Bonus
 - Sexism
 - Social class (working class, middle class, etc.)
 - Start a conversation with someone sitting at the next table in a bar or restaurant
 - Terrorism/ The war on terror
 - Trade pacts your countries belong to or could join (e.g. the EU)
 - Welfare payments (unemployment benefit etc.)
 - Which political parties you support
 - Your personal experience of the sex industry (strip shows etc.)