Sounding fluent and confident in a few words

Here are some useful ways to keep the conversation going. The "secret" is that you don't actually need many words to do this!

**1. Show interest in the other speaker**

You don't need to say much. Often just one word is needed to show you are interested and listening. Try "Really?" (with a rising intonation), "Right" or "Sure". You could even show you are listening with a non-word such as "Mmm" or Uh-huh".

"I hate watching junk on TV."

"Right."

**2. Use a short phrase to show your feelings**

For example, "How awful", "Oh no!", "You're joking", "What a pity" etc.

"My neighbor had a car accident yesterday."

"Oh no!"

"Yes, but thankfully he wasn't hurt."

"Mmm."

**3. Ask a short question**

You can use an auxiliary verb to make a short question which will encourage the other speaker to keep talking:

"We tried out the new Chinese restaurant last night."

"Did you?"

"I'm going to Barbados next week on vacation."

"Are you? Lucky you!"

"It's snowing again."

"Is it?"

**4. Repeat what the other person said**

Do this especially if the other person has said something surprising.

"He won $200 on the lottery."

"$200!"

"I'm going to Barbados next week."

"Barbados!"

Other ways to avoid silence

Here are some more tips to help you say something – even if you haven't understood the other person or there's nothing else to say.

**If you don't understand**

"Sorry, I don't understand."

"Sorry, could you repeat that?"

"Sorry? I didn't get that."

**If you don't know the word**

"I can't find the word I'm looking for…"

"I'm not sure that this is the right word, but…"

"What I want to say is…"

**If you can't find the word immediately**

You don't want to be completely silent, but you need time to find the words.

"Well…"

"OK…"

"So…"

You can even make some "noises"

"Hmmm…"

"Uh-huh"

"Umm…"

**Agreeing with the other person**

You want to show that you agree, but you don't have anything else to say.

"Yeah."

"Right."

**Changing the subject**

Everyone in the conversation has given an opinion, and now you want to talk about something else.

"Anyway,…"

"Well, as I was saying…"

"So, back to …"

"So, we were saying …"

Rephrase

Sometimes we say things that other people don't understand, or we give the wrong impression. Here are some expressions you can use to say something again.

"What I meant to say was…"

"Let me rephrase that…"

"Let me put this another way…"

"Perhaps I'm not making myself clear…"

**Go back to the beginning**

If you're explaining something, and you realize that the other person doesn't understand, you can use the following phrases:

"If we go back to the beginning…"

"The basic idea is…"

"One way of looking at it is…"

"Another way of looking at it is…"