

B2

PHONE & VIDEO CALLS

DIALOG · 4 MIN.

Why Calling a Colleague “Sympathetic” May Not Mean “Sympathisch” · Podcast

A compliment backfires: why "sympathetic" does not mean "sympathisch" — and what to say instead.

Listen to the episode +
comprehension test:

<https://www.englisch-lehrer.com/podcasts/why-calling-a-colleague-sympathetic-may-not-mean-sympathisch>

NAME

DATE

BRICK 1 · LEARN THE KEY PHRASES

● ○ ○

Read the eight phrases with meaning and example. You will hear all of them in the episode.

ENGLISH	DEUTSCH	EXAMPLE
a false friend	ein falscher Freund (Wortpaar mit täuschend ähnlicher Form)	<i>'Bekommen' and 'become' is the most famous false friend for Germans.</i>
likeable	sympathisch	<i>Our new project manager is very competent and likeable.</i>
to feel sorry for someone	jemanden bemitleiden / Mitleid haben	<i>I feel sorry for the colleagues who have to work this weekend.</i>
a compliment	ein Kompliment	<i>She paid him a compliment on his clear presentation.</i>
first impression	erster Eindruck	<i>On video calls, the first impression is made in seconds.</i>
to come across as	wirken als / rüberkommen als	<i>Without small talk, you can come across as cold in English meetings.</i>
to break the ice	das Eis brechen	<i>A little small talk before the agenda breaks the ice.</i>
small talk	Smalltalk / kurzes lockeres Gespräch	<i>Two minutes of small talk makes the rest of the call easier.</i>

BRICK 2 · FILL THE GAPS



Complete the missing word from the conversation.

likeable

sympathetic

pity

sorry

break the ice

cut the ice

make the ice

start the ice

01 The word you want is ' _____ ', or simply 'pleasant'.

02 Here's a simple rule for your next call: _____ with a bit of small talk first.

BRICK 3 · TRUE OR FALSE?



Tick one. T = true, F = false.

01 Jens wanted to give Emma a compliment.

T ☐ F ☐

02 Emma says the other colleagues on the call were offended.

T ☐ F ☐

BRICK 4 · ORDER



Number the steps of the conversation (1–5).

01 ☐ Emma advises small talk first and compliments at the end

02 ☐ Emma calls him back to explain the word

03 ☐ Emma gives the correct word: "likeable"

04 ☐ Jens used the word "sympathetic" in yesterday's video call

05 ☐ Emma explains the real meaning of "sympathetic"

BRICK 5 · YOUR VERSION



Write two sentences of your own using phrases from Brick 1.

.....

.....

.....

MINI-CHECK – CAN I DO THIS YET?

☐ I can announce a delay politely.

☐ I can propose an alternative.

☐ I can promise written confirmation.

Listened twice and ticked everything? Then you are ready for the real conversation.

Cut-out flashcards

× Cut out, fold on the line – English in front, German on the back. Or practise digitally:

<https://www.englisch-lehrer.com/podcasts/why-calling-a-colleague-sympathetic-may-not-mean-sympathisch>

a false friend

'Bekommen' and 'become' is the most famous false friend for Germans.

ein falscher Freund (Wortpaar mit täuschend ähnlicher Form)

likeable

Our new project manager is very competent and likeable.

sympathisch

to feel sorry for someone

I feel sorry for the colleagues who have to work this weekend.

jemanden bemitleiden / Mitleid haben

a compliment

She paid him a compliment on his clear presentation.

ein Kompliment

first impression

On video calls, the first impression is made in seconds.

erster Eindruck

to come across as

Without small talk, you can come across as cold in English meetings.

wirken als / rüberkommen als

to break the ice

A little small talk before the agenda breaks the ice.

das Eis brechen

small talk

Two minutes of small talk makes the rest of the call easier.

Smalltalk / kurzes lockeres Gespräch

Answer key

Check only when you have finished. Every answer comes with the **why**.

BRICK 2 · FILL THE GAPS

01 **likeable**

"Sympathisch" is "likeable". "Sympathetic" is the trap: it means "mitfühlend" and does not belong in a compliment.

02 **break the ice**

"To break the ice" is the fixed phrase — the other combinations do not exist in English.

BRICK 3 · TRUE OR FALSE?

01 **True**

True — Jens says he wanted to give Emma a compliment when he called her sympathetic.

02 **False**

False — she says nobody was offended; everyone understood what Jens meant.

BRICK 4 · ORDER

01 **1.** Jens used the word "sympathetic" in yesterday's video call

02 **2.** Emma calls him back to explain the word

03 **3.** Emma explains the real meaning of "sympathetic"

04 **4.** Emma gives the correct word: "likeable"

05 **5.** Emma advises small talk first and compliments at the end

KEEP PRACTISING LIVE

Want to practise these phrases in a real conversation?

Online lessons with real teachers — English training since 2004 · Berlin · Hanover · Online.

CALL US

+49 511 95733819