



32 Conversational Gambits

A **gambit** is a short phrase that helps you start, continue, or manage a conversation. Native English speakers use gambits without thinking — but for English students, these short phrases help you sound more like a native speaker.

Gambits help you:

- **Sound more natural**, even before you are fluent
- **Buy time** to think of your next sentence
- **Show you are listening** and engaged in the conversation
- **Ask for help** politely when you don't understand something

Sound more confident and comfortable speaking English in daily life, in social situations, and at work. Memorize some of these gambit phrases today!

Category 1: Casual & Conversational Gambits

For friends, neighbors, classmates, and everyday chatting

1. **"Hey, what's up?"**
 - "Hey, what's up? Long time no see!"
 - "What's up? You look happy today."
2. **"How's it going?"**
 - "How's it going? How was your weekend?"
 - "Hi, how's it going with the new job?"
3. **"Oh really?"**
 - "Oh really? I didn't know that!"
 - "Oh really? Tell me more about it."
4. **"No kidding!"**
 - "No kidding! That's a big surprise."
 - "No kidding, your English is really improving."



5. **"That's awesome!"**
 - "That's awesome! Congratulations on your new job."
 - "That's awesome, I'm so happy for you."
 6. **"Anyway..."**
 - "Anyway, I should get back to work."
 - "Anyway, what did you do last night?"
 7. **"Speaking of which..."**
 - "Speaking of which, did you try that restaurant?"
 - "Speaking of which, I saw your sister yesterday."
 8. **"Well, I better get going."**
 - "Well, I better get going, see you tomorrow."
 - "I better get going, my bus is coming."
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Category 2: Semi-Formal Gambits

For acquaintances, community events, parent-teacher meetings, customer service

1. **"Nice to meet you."**

"Nice to meet you, I've heard great things."

 - "It's nice to meet you finally."
2. **"How have you been?"**

"How have you been since we last spoke?"

 - "It's been a while — how have you been?"
3. **"That sounds great."**
 - "That sounds great, thank you for explaining."
 - "That sounds great, let's plan for that."
4. **"I see what you mean."**
 - "I see what you mean, that makes sense."
 - "Okay, I see what you mean now."



5. **"If you don't mind me asking..."**
 - "If you don't mind me asking, where are you from?"
 - "If you don't mind me asking, how old is she?"
 6. **"On another note..."**
 - "On another note, have you seen the schedule?"
 - "On another note, the weather is lovely today."
 7. **"That's a good point."**
 - "That's a good point, I hadn't considered that."
 - "That's a good point about the timing."
 8. **"It was nice talking with you."**
 - "It was nice talking with you, take care."
 - "It was nice talking with you, see you soon."
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Category 3: Workplace Gambits

For coworkers, supervisors, meetings, and professional emails

1. **"Do you have a minute?"**
 - "Do you have a minute to talk?"
 - "Excuse me, do you have a minute now?"
2. **"I just wanted to follow up on..."**
 - "I just wanted to follow up on my email."
 - "I wanted to follow up on our conversation."
3. **"Let's circle back to that."**
 - "Let's circle back to that after the break."
 - "We can circle back to that point later."
4. **"Could you walk me through this?"**
 - "Could you walk me through this process?"
 - "Can you walk me through the new steps?"



5. **"I'll get back to you on that."**
 - "I'll get back to you on that tomorrow."
 - "Let me check and get back to you."
 6. **"Just to confirm..."**
 - "Just to confirm, the meeting is at noon?"
 - "Just to confirm, you need this by Friday."
 7. **"Thanks for your patience."**
 - "Thanks for your patience while I learn this."
 - "Thank you for your patience with my English."
 8. **"Let me know if that works."**
 - "Let me know if that works for you."
 - "Please let me know if that time works."
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Category 4: Clarification, Stalling & Feedback Gambits

For asking someone to repeat, explaining yourself, or thinking of a reply

1. **"That's a good question."**
 - "That's a good question, let me think."
 - "That's a good question — I'm not sure."
2. **"Let me think about that."**
 - "Let me think about that for a second."
 - "Give me a moment, let me think about that."
3. **"Could you repeat that, please?"**
 - "Sorry, could you repeat that, please?"
 - "Could you repeat that a little slower, please?"
4. **"What I mean is..."**
 - "What I mean is, I need more time."
 - "What I mean is, it wasn't my fault."



5. **"Sorry, could you say that again?"**
 - "Sorry, could you say that again, please?"
 - "I missed that — could you say it again?"
 6. **"I'm not sure I follow."**
 - "I'm not sure I follow, can you explain?"
 - "Sorry, I'm not sure I follow you."
 7. **"In other words..."**
 - "In other words, we need to start over."
 - "In other words, the plan has changed."
 8. **"Thanks for the feedback."**
 - "Thanks for the feedback, I'll work on it."
 - "Thank you for the feedback, it helps a lot."
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Word list prepared for Douglas English Centre — www.douglasenglishcentre.com

Gambits are listed from high frequency (most commonly used) to lower frequency (less common) within each category. Frequency ranking is corpus-informed, based on patterns found in North American spoken English research (e.g., the Corpus of Contemporary American English, COCA).