

Chatterbox #222 – High school exams

Episode description

Senior year of high school is a stressful time. It is a time when many students have to make a lot of big decisions and choose a path for their life, whether it be going to college, getting a job, or taking a gap year. Either way, one of the final challenges of high school is taking the high school exams, whose results will ultimately determine whether and where you can go to college. In this episode, Andrew and Jeremy discuss what it is like to take the exams in their, and other, countries.

Fun fact

The first modern intelligence test, the IQ test, was invented in 1904 by Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon. They were tasked with making an exam that would help educators distinguish children with mental deficiencies from children with normal or average intelligence. These tests later led to more sophisticated tests and to the variety of standardized tests that we use today.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To click
- To write a test
- To specialize in [something]
- To choose a path
- To come to light
- Likely





Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English Podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hello, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Jeremy: And I'm Jeremy.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hey, Jeremy.

Jeremy: Hey, Andrew.

Andrew: How's it going?

Jeremy: It's going pretty well for me. How about yourself?

Andrew: Actually, I had an interesting experience happen to me about 2 weeks ago. I was riding the bus to work and there was nobody on the bus. I was the only one on the bus.

Jeremy: Wow, that is very strange in Korea.

Andrew: This was about 8 a.m. in the morning, and usually the bus is packed at this time. But there was no one and I couldn't understand why. Why is there no one on the bus? So strange, but kind of felt like I had a private limo to myself, you know, this big bus.

Jeremy: Yeah, yeah.

Andrew: As I was approaching my destination, we passed a high school and it was at that moment that it **clicked**, oh, today is the day Korean high school students **write the Korean SAT**. And I realized, oh they're **writing their test** today. And it's a big deal over here in Korea when the high school students **write this test**, the country kind of stops in the morning.

Jeremy: Yeah, planes.



- Andrew: Yeah, planes stop, companies allow their employees to come in later, the police even dictate traffic flow so that the students aren't late for the test. And that's why I was the only one on the bus, because everybody else stayed at home so that the students would have no problem getting to school to **write this exam**.
- Jeremy: Wow.
- Andrew: So this got me thinking about high school final exams. It's very serious over here in Korea, as maybe now our listeners can imagine. But, Jeremy, since you're from the USA and I'm from Canada, I thought we could talk about the final exams in our countries. How does that sound?
- Jeremy: Yeah, sounds like a good idea.
- Andrew: All right, so we'll do that today in this Chatterbox episode. But just before we start, I'd like to tell everyone that there is a study guide for this episode available for download on our website, Culips.com. So if you're interested in taking your English studies to the next level, getting a little bit more serious about English, then you wanna check out that study guide. Just visit Culips.com for all the details.
- Jeremy: So, hey, Andrew?
- Andrew: Yes?
- Jeremy: I noticed something interesting when you were telling that story. I noticed that you say **write a test**.
- Andrew: **Write a test**, mmhmm.
- Jeremy: In the US, we say take a test.
- Andrew: Take a test, **write a test**. Actually, both sound OK to me.
- Jeremy: Oh, really? OK. I don't think I've heard **to write a test** in the US. I haven't heard that before.
- Andrew: A Canadianism.
- Jeremy: In a previous episode, you mentioned that there are still a lot of expressions from England, sort of UK English, that are used in Canada. Is that correct?
- Andrew: That is absolutely correct, yes. So that might be a legacy of England, that we're holding on to **write a test**. But I use them interchangeably. I think I would also say take a test and I would call a student who was **writing a test** a test-taker.



- Jeremy: Not a test writer?
- Andrew: Not a test writer. No, a test writer would be the person who creates the test.
- Jeremy: Yes, yeah, same here.
- Andrew: Very interesting. So let's get into it a little bit, Jeremy. You're from the States. What do students in the States, high school students in the States, do before they graduate? What kind of test do they have to take?
- Jeremy: Well, we have a test called the SAT, which stands for Scholastic Aptitude Test, or sometimes called Scholastic Assessment Test.
- Andrew: OK. Scholastic means?
- Jeremy: Means like your academic ability, sort of, scholar.
- Andrew: Yeah, scholar, exactly.
- Jeremy: So the same root word as scholar. And it's meant to measure students' academic ability.
- Andrew: Right.
- Jeremy: And what about yours?
- Andrew: Well, in Canada, every province has a different system, so I can really only speak confidently about my province, which is British Columbia. And in British Columbia, we have what's called a provincial exam. There are several provincial exams that cover different subjects. So, for example, at the same time you don't cover all the subjects, you don't **write one test** that covers math, history, English, for example. You'll **write an English provincial exam**, so one test that is all about English. Then you'll **write a history provincial exam**, one exam that's all about history. And there are provincial exams for all of the senior-level subjects in high school, so all of the sciences, math, the social sciences, like psychology and geography and history, these all have provincial exams.
- Now, of course as a student I didn't have to write all of them. I think I had to **write five provincial exams** in the subjects that I choose to **specialize in** in high school. So when you're a senior in high school, maybe about grade 10 when you're around 15 years old, you have **to choose a path**. You can take a science-based path or a math-based path or a humanities-based path. I chose to study a humanities-based set of subjects. So the provincial exams that I ended up writing were English, English literature, geography, history, and I think that's it. I think those were the only exams that I had to write.



- Jeremy: So are these different, individual exams? Like you take them on separate days?
- Andrew: Exactly.
- Jeremy: Oh, wow.
- Andrew: So we don't have one exam day. We have a whole exam period.
- Jeremy: Oh, interesting.
- Andrew: And it will last about a week or 2 weeks. And you come into the school, **write the exam** for, I think you have a maximum period of 3 hours, **write the exam**, then go home, relax, rest for a little bit, and then go back a different day **to write another exam** for a different subject.
- Jeremy: Interesting. Wow, I did not know that.
- Andrew: Yeah, so these provincial exams are important for, well, graduating from high school because they're worth 40% of your final grade. So if you fail, that can have some pretty serious consequences, because if you didn't do very well overall, and then you fail the provincial exam, it might just mean that you fail the whole class and have to do it again the next year, which does happen from time to time.
- Jeremy: Wow, that would not be fun if that happened to me.
- Andrew: No, I agree. And also, it's important for entrance into universities. So when you apply to universities, they will want to know what your provincial exam score is. So they can be quite powerful, these exams. I remember being stressed out about having **to write them** and worried. But I also kind of liked it. Like, I thought it really brought the students together, I felt a kind of kinship with my fellow exam-takers. We were all in the same place at the same time, **writing the same exam**.
- Jeremy: In battle together.
- Andrew: Yeah, we all went through this similar experience. And not just me, all of the students in the province, so even my friends that were at different high schools, I remember after **writing the exam**, we hung out and talked about, "Oh, what did you write for that essay question?" "What did you say for this question?" That was fun.
- Jeremy: So how different do you think it is in Korea?



- Andrew: Well, in Korea, I don't know because I haven't **written the test**, exactly. I think that it's more of a standardized test with multiple choice responses. There are some multiple choice questions on the provincial exams in Canada, but there are a lot of essay questions and short response, paragraph response questions. So it's not necessarily knowing the facts, or there's not necessarily a test strategy. You really have to demonstrate that you know your stuff, that you know what you're talking about, because, I mean, if you have an essay question and you don't know how to respond to it, you can't guess, right? You can't just circle B.
- Jeremy: Yeah, exactly, you have to write something.
- Andrew: Right, so I think the study strategies really differ between the two countries.
- Jeremy: So is there any multiple choice on the provincial exams?
- Andrew: There is a short multiple choice section at the beginning, as far as I remember. Maybe 10 or 20 questions and then the rest are response, where you have to provide an answer yourself.
- Jeremy: Interesting. This all sounds very similar to the SAT test. But one major difference is, as far as I remember, the SAT score doesn't affect whether you graduate from high school or not. But it does affect whether you get into university or not. In fact, in America we say college.
- Andrew: Right.
- Jeremy: Although this is the incorrect term. College means a 2-year institution, but everywhere else in the world, they correctly say university, and I have learned to fix my speech so I don't say that anymore. But the organization that governs the SAT exam is called the College Board.
- Andrew: Oh, OK.
- Jeremy: So the SAT is more of a college entrance exam or an exam that measures your scholastic ability and gives you a score. And universities use that score in conjunction, in combination with your grades to determine whether you should be admitted to their university or not.
- Andrew: So what do you remember about your SAT? What subjects were covered?
- Jeremy: Yeah, it's been a while.
- Andrew: Been a while.
- Jeremy: I'm not that old, but it does seem like a long time ago. I remember most of it being multiple choice.



Andrew: OK.

Jeremy: I remember there was a quite lengthy section about vocabulary, with lots of difficult words, some of which, that I had never heard or seen before. I also remember there was a writing section, where you had to show your reasoning abilities. To show your critical thinking abilities. There was also a math section.

Andrew: Oh no.

Jeremy: But I don't remember much about what was on it. So it starts out with a reading comprehension section, with different passages from books or articles and questions about that texts, to check your comprehension. There's also a writing section, as well as some fill in the blanks and some vocabulary questions. And then there is a mathematic section and I remember that we were able to use calculators. But in the past, I don't think that was allowed.

Andrew: All right, so you caught a lucky break, being able to use a calculator.

Jeremy: Yeah, it made things a lot easier. For our listeners who don't know, I also lived in Korea for 4 years. I no longer live in Korea, but while I was there I learned a lot about the Suneung, the Korean college entrance exam, kinda like the SAT. And I don't think that Americans take the test as seriously as Korean students do. In Korea, it seems like your Suneung score determines your whole life path, but in the US, it seems less important, a little bit less important. It is still very important, but not quite so much as in Korea.

Andrew: There's been a scandal over here in Korea.

Jeremy: Oh no, really?

Andrew: Where a couple of high school students, two girls, actually, their father was an administrator at the same high school that they were attending. And he had accessed the safe and he broke into the safe and fed his daughters the correct test answers.

Jeremy: Oh my gosh.

Andrew: And when this scandal **came to light**, there was huge outrage, which really showed to me that, oh, this exam is serious, like people are angry that these girls and their father were cheating, to the extent that my Korean friends said that the father will **likely** go to jail and the girls will **likely** have to leave the country. Like, it's finished, life in Korea for them.

Jeremy: Oh my gosh, wow.



Andrew: So this showed me, like, wow, this is serious stuff, this exam. If this happened in Canada for the provincial exams, the girls would probably fail and the father probably be fired, but it would all blow over in a couple weeks. Their lives and their reputations wouldn't be ruined forever.

Jeremy: Yeah, that seems a bit too extreme to me, but I understand why in Korea it's so competitive that doing something like that is considered a heinous act. A very, very evil act, right?

Andrew: Yes, yeah, indeed. It's a serious, serious business. So don't cheat if you come over here and take a test, that's my advice.

I think we'll wrap it up here, but I am really quite curious about how our listeners graduated from high school, what type of exams they had to write before they graduated high school and went to university. So, guys, please tell us about your experience, I'd love to hear. You can send us an email at contact@Culips.com or you could reach us through our Facebook page, which is [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://www.facebook.com/CulipsPodcast). And for more information about our study guides or to listen to older Culips episodes, again all of that is on our website, Culips.com. So please remember to check it out. That is it for us today, we'll be back soon with another episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye, everyone.

Jeremy: Bye, everyone.

Detailed Explanations

To click Verb

To click has multiple meanings, but today's examples mean to become clear. When the answer to a problem that has been confusing or troubling you suddenly becomes clear and understandable, then it has **clicked** in your mind.

For example, a man is having trouble understanding a concept in his math class. He looks online for some help and, when he finds some useful information, it is like something **clicked** in his brain and he understands the math concept! This is also known as an ah-ha moment, because when a person finally understands something that has been troubling him, he tends to say, "Ah-ha, now I get it!"

Here are a couple more examples with **to click**:

Reggie:	When did you know you wanted to be a doctor?
Antonio:	As a college student, I took a trip and on the airplane the lady sitting beside me had a heart attack. There was nothing I could do to help her. At that moment, it just clicked that I wanted to become a doctor.
Reggie:	Ah, so you decided to become a doctor so that you wouldn't feel useless like that again? So that next time you could help someone if they were in trouble?
Antonio:	Yes, exactly.

Danny:	I hate math. I can never understand it. What is your secret, Maria?
Maria:	I don't know, it's just how my brain works. If I see a problem and I learn the steps one time, then it just immediately clicks in my mind. It's just logical.
Danny:	Well, I wish my brain clicked like that as well. At this rate, I'll never pass the test on Friday.
Maria:	Don't worry, I'll help you. You can pass this test for sure!

To write a test

Phrase

The term **to write a test** is just another way of saying to take a test. This phrase varies depending on which English-speaking country you reside in. In England and America, a person who sits down to prove their knowledge will take a test. However, in South Africa or Canada, it is also proper to use the phrase **to write a test**. In some places, one could also use the phrase to sit a test.

While students are said to take a test, to sit a test, or **to write a test**, teachers are the ones who give a test. For example, students are always hoping that their teacher gives them an easy test rather than a difficult one.

Here is one more example with **to write a test**:

Miguel:	Wanna hang out after school today?
Jarod:	No, man, I wish I could, but I have to write a test tomorrow. It's for Callahan's class. You know he always gives the hardest exams, so I really need to study.
Miguel:	Oh, yeah, no problem. We can hang out this weekend after you ace Callahan's test. Good luck, you can do it!
Jarod:	Thanks, bro. I'm gonna need all the luck I can get!



To specialize in [something]

Verb

To specialize in [something] is to be especially good at something due to extensive training or study. For example, there are many doctors in the world, but there are also many branches of medicine that each doctor can **specialize in**, such as pediatrics, orthopedics, plastic surgery, etc.

Here are a couple more examples with **to specialize in [something]**:

Ting:	What do you do?
Su-Wei:	Actually, I don't have a job currently; I'm working on my PhD.
Ting:	Oh, what do you specialize in ?
Su-Wei:	I'm studying linguistics, and I specialize in Ancient Greek . Learning ancient languages has always been a passion of mine.
Ting:	Wow, that's really interesting!

Dominic:	I always knew that I didn't want to go to college. I wanted to do something with my hands, so I decided to become a modern-day blacksmith.
Chad:	A blacksmith?
Dominic:	Yeah, you know, the guys who work with metal? I started training when I was 18. Now I specialize in metal sculpting.
Chad:	Are you successful?
Dominic:	Yeah, my sister helped me set up an Instagram account and my sculptures went viral. Soon I had dozens of people ordering sculptures from me daily. It's challenging work, but I really love it.



To choose a path

Verb phrase

To choose a path is to make a choice between two or more options in one's life. When **choosing a path**, one has to think carefully, because the path that one chooses will affect how one's life will unfold in the future.

In this episode, Andrew discusses the different paths that high school students must choose: the science-based path or the humanities-based path. Whichever path students choose will affect which classes they will take in high school, which majors they can pursue in college, and which careers they can have after graduating.

Here are a couple more examples with **to choose a path**:

Hillary:	What is the best advice you've heard in your life?
Carlotta:	The best advice I've ever received was from my English professor in university. He told us the worst mistake we could ever make in our life is to try and keep our options open.
Hillary:	Really? But isn't it good to keep your options open? Then if one thing fails, you can do something else.
Carlotta:	No, he told us that it is better to choose a path and put our whole effort into making that path a success. If we are always keeping our options open in fear of failure, then we can never truly succeed at anything.

Rowan:	Do you ever regret the path you chose in life?
Theodore:	No, I don't regret the path I chose . Have I had regrets in life? Of course I have. However, those regrets and failures helped make me stronger and shaped me into the man I am today.
Rowan:	I sometimes wish I could go back and change some things I've done.
Theodore:	Don't worry about what happened in the past, Rowan. You can't change it. You can only learn from it and figure out what path you will choose in the future. OK?
Rowan:	Yeah, I get it. Thanks for the advice.

To come to light Idiom

To come to light means to become publicly known. If a secret that has been kept hidden suddenly **comes to light**, the secret was discovered and it is no longer a secret; it is now public knowledge.

In this episode, Andrew tells a story about a cheating scandal that **came to light** in South Korea. A father who was an administrator in his daughters' school helped his daughters get high scores on their college entrance exams by giving them the answers. When his actions **came to light**—in other words, when the media found out—the public was outraged and demanded the father and his daughters be punished for their crime.

Here are a couple more examples with **to come to light**:

Reporter:	Breaking news. It has come to light that a very dangerous criminal escaped from Mountain View Prison late last night. Be sure to take precautions when walking alone at night and, if you have any information regarding this individual, be sure to contact the police immediately.
Sarah:	Wow, that's scary. I'm not leaving the house until they find him.
Morgan:	Oh, don't be such a scaredy-cat. What are the odds of you running into a criminal? Pretty low, I'd think.
Sarah:	Still. You can never be too cautious.

Rebecca:	Have you heard? The CEO of Fashionista magazine is threatening to sue the board members of her own company.
Tanya:	What? Why would she do that?
Rebecca:	It came to light that several of her board members were working together to promote people unfairly within the company to steal money from the company and undermine the CEO.
Tanya:	Wow, what a scandal. This cannot be good for Fashionista's magazine sales.
Rebecca:	Yeah, if the scandal doesn't bankrupt the company, the legal fees might.

Likely Adjective

If something is **likely**, it will probably happen or it is expected to happen. For example, if someone is **likely** to pass a test, it means he studied well and he expects that he will pass the test. To be **likely** is not a 100% guarantee that something will occur, but rather a high probability that something will occur.

Here are a few more examples with **likely**:

Radha: I heard on the news that it is **likely** to rain today. You should bring an umbrella.

Elanie: It's all right. I'll just wear my rain coat instead.

Min-June: You know Gina in Class 5? I heard that she will **likely** be chosen for the Study Abroad Scholarship. The results will be announced this Friday.

Hyun-Song: Really? I think Hae-Chul will be chosen. His English scores are amazing and he's first in the class.

Min-June: Well, we'll see. Whoever they choose, it will be one of those two. Mr. Hyun will choose the winner, and I heard Gina is his favourite student.

Mike: What are you doing tonight?

Jeff: I'm hanging out with some friends. We're **likely** to go to the bar and watch the basketball game.

Mike: Mind if I join you guys?

Jeff: Not at all! We're meeting at my house at 7:00. See ya later!

Quiz

1. What does it mean when something comes to light?

- a) it becomes easy to see
- b) it becomes easier
- c) it becomes known
- d) it becomes hot

2. What is something that a dentist would not specialize in?

- a) orthodontics
- b) oral surgery
- c) dermatology
- d) periodontics

3. Which word has a similar meaning as the word likely?

- a) probable
- b) similar
- c) exactly
- d) enjoyable

4. What is another name for when something clicks in your mind?

- a) Murphy's law
- b) ah-ha moment
- c) placebo effect
- d) Pavlov's theory

5. Which phrase does not describe a person testing their knowledge in an exam?

- a) to take a test
- b) to write a test
- c) to sit a test
- d) to give a test

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What kind of exam did you have to take before graduating high school?
2. Did you find your high school exams difficult or easy?
3. How important are the high school or college entrance exams in your country?
4. Is there anything that you specialize in? What is it?
5. How do you feel about the path you chose in life? What kind of path would you like to choose for your future?

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.c 3.a 4.b 5.d

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