

Chatterbox #253 – Answering listener questions: Part 1

Episode description

We love hearing from our listeners! We also love it when our listeners ask questions about how to improve their English. In Part 1 of this episode, Andrew and Kassy answer four listener questions. There are more answers to come in Part 2!

Fun fact

A new English word is added to the dictionary every 2 hours, with almost 4000 words added every year. For example, 2020's new words include stan, peoplekind, and carbon sink, among others.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Mouthful
- To coin
- Surface level
- Get down to business
- Ease into
- Thrilling conclusion



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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And you are tuned in to the Culips English Podcast.

Andrew: Welcome back to Culips, everyone. Today's episode is a Chatterbox episode. Chatterbox is the series where we have completely natural English conversations and we let you listen in. And we hope by tuning in here today, you'll be able to improve your English listening skills and add a couple of new words and expressions to your English vocabulary. Today, I'm joined by my cohost, Kassy. Kassy, hello.

Kassy: Hello.

Andrew: And we, together, are going to answer some emails from listeners. This is one of my favourite kinds of episodes, Kassy, answering listener emails.

Kassy: Yeah, I'm excited, too.

Andrew: So we have received a lot of good questions recently and I thought they would benefit, really, all of our listeners to hear the answers. So we'll go through, I don't know, maybe six or seven questions here today, Kassy, and we'll try to answer them as best as we can.

Andrew: But before we do that, I should let everyone know about the study guide for this episode. It's available on our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and it is a great study resource. It includes the transcript, as well as detailed vocabulary explanations, a comprehension quiz, and more. So we suggest that you follow along with the study guide while you listen today. So just visit Culips.com to give it a download.

Andrew: So, Kassy, our first email comes from Mario from Mexico, the Yucatán in Mexico. Mario wrote, "I would like you to talk about the word stick-to-itiveness." Stick-to-itiveness. He says, "I read that word while reading a motivational article and I'm not sure I understand the meaning. Is it that you need to be persistent or persevering? I'm not sure. Could you help me?"

Andrew: So, Kassy, this word stick-to-itiveness—

Kassy: That's a real **mouthful**.

Andrew: Stick-to-itiveness. Actually, it's the first time that I've heard this word, I think. And it sounds to me kind of like a new word or like a phrase that the author **coined** to talk about this topic of motivation.

Kassy: Yeah, I think I've heard it before, but it's not a common word. But I think English, native English, speakers, as soon as they hear it, they'll understand what it means.

Andrew: So let's break it down. Actually, we have this expression to stick to something, to stick to it. And this means to not quit, to keep going. All of our listeners are learning English and we always encourage them to stick to it. Don't quit studying English. Keep going, right? Stick to it. And when we add this ending, this -iveness ending, it kind of makes it a noun, right? We can modify English words with this ending to make nouns, like goodness, happiness. Kassy, help me out, what are some other ones?

Kassy: Joyfulness.

Andrew: Thoughtfulness.

Kassy: Thoughtfulness.

Andrew: Peacefulness.

Kassy: There's so many.

Andrew: Yeah, there's so many, the list could go on and on. So then, Kassy, how can we decode this word? What does it mean stick-to-itiveness?

Kassy: I think that Mario was spot on when he said that it has to do with persistence or perseverance, right? Um, like not giving up, to just keep on going.

Andrew: Exactly. So, stick-to-itiveness is just the quality of not quitting, of persevering or persisting. So good job, Mario, you decoded that word correctly.

Andrew: Kassy, do you want to read the second email for us?

Kassy: Sure. So the second email is from, sorry if I don't pronounce this correctly, Jomar from Manila, in the Philippines. He was writing to us to request the topic on small talk, talking with strangers. And he was wondering, what are some certain topics or subjects that we focus on when initiating small talk with people we don't know?

Andrew: It's a good question. And maybe we should break down what small talk is, because there may be some listeners that don't know what small talk is. So, Kassy, you know, when you meet somebody, could be somebody you know, or it could be a stranger, but you don't really get into a deep conversation. You just talk for a minute or two and then go your separate way.

Andrew: So, Kassy, maybe if I ran into you while I was on my way to work, you know, I would talk to you for a minute because it's rude to just pass by you without saying anything. But, you know, I'm in a rush, I have a plan, we can't have a long conversation. So we just talked for a minute, we call this small talk. Or maybe you're at the grocery store, and you chat for a moment with the clerk at the checkout counter while you are paying for your groceries. We could also call this small talk. It's just very light conversation about subjects that aren't serious.

Kassy: Yeah, so I think the opposite of small talk would be deep, meaningful conversation. But this is the opposite of that. So it's not deep conversation. It's very basic, general topics.

Andrew: Exactly. And there are some subjects that occur again and again and again in small talk. One of the most common is, at least in my opinion, the weather.

Kassy: How's the weather today? Yeah.

Andrew: It's such a beautiful day out there today or, oh my gosh, it's so hot, isn't it? Or it's freezing out here. You know, we always just make a comment about the weather. This is a really, really common small talk topic, especially in Canada, where I'm from, where the weather in the winter can be such a dominating force in people's lives.

Kassy: I think another topic that people usually talk about is work, because it's, you know, what we do 60 to 70% of our lives, waking lives.

Andrew: And it's usually just on a very **surface level**, right? Oh, Kassy, how's work going this week? I'm so busy, and you? Right?

Kassy: Yeah, we don't we don't complain much during our small talk. It's more like, oh, you know, not so great or, oh, it's going well.

Andrew: Right. It's just very **surface level** with no details added, right? Just the bare minimum comment like that. I think we also talk often about recent activities. So, Kassy, right before we started recording today, I asked you, what did you do today? What did you do today, right? And this is kind of, like, sometimes even though, Kassy, you and I are going to work on this project of recording this episode together, we need a little something to kind of warm up, right? It's almost like we do—even among friends, we do small talk before we **get down to business**.

Kassy: Yeah, we don't want to just jump into the work right away. We need to **ease into** it with some small talk.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So I asked you, what did you do today? And I think this is another common small talk question. What did you do today? However, that would be more specifically for people that you know, or I think it would be a little bit weird to ask that to a clerk at a grocery store who you don't know. However, a trend in Canada, at least, is that waiters and waitresses, servers, they'll ask you, so what are you gonna do later?

Kassy: Really?

Andrew: Yeah. What do you guys got going on later tonight? That happens to me a lot.

Kassy: I would be a little bit weirded out by that. I don't know.

Andrew: I also get weirded out by it, because usually I don't have any interesting answer. This is it. I'm here at the restaurant tonight, this is what I'm doing.

Kassy: I think one more thing to add. In Western culture, I think giving compliments is a little bit of a small talk too. Like, oh, wow, that outfit looks really nice. Or I like your shoes.

Andrew: Kassy, that's a really good point, we should talk about some things that are inappropriate for small talk, as well. And you mentioned compliments and complimenting somebody on their appearance. This can be OK, but you have to use your sense, right? You have to be careful. In some situations, that could be creepy for a guy to compliment a girl. You know, like, I'm a 36-year-old man. If I am talking to a high school student who's a female and I'm, like, oh, I love your dress or your hair looks good, it's gonna come across as creepy, so I should not do that.

Andrew: And what about talking about somebody's appearance if it's changed negatively since the last time you saw them, like if that person looks tired or sick, or like they've gained weight. Could we mention that to someone?

Kassy: No, those are all taboo topics, topics that should not be mentioned. Weight, age, appearance when it's kind of negative due to stress or depression or something like that.

Andrew: Exactly. Even if you're saying it from a place of caring, right? Like, oh, Kassy, you look so tired. Like, you don't have to record today, it's all right. You can just take a break, relax, right? That would come across as offensive, almost.

Kassy: Yeah, I'd be like, oh, you think I look ugly today? Ugh, Andrew.

Andrew: Exactly. So those are really terrible small talk topics, but if you stick to the weather, or maybe even sports. That's another popular one. Like, where I'm from, it's the hockey, hockey is a big sport. Most people tune in to watch a hockey game when they're on TV. So if, you know, the hockey team played last night, people will say, wow, did you see the game last night?

Kassy: Or did you catch the game last night?

Andrew: Did you catch the game last night? Yeah, talking about a recent sports result is also popular small talk topic. All right. Thank you for the question, Jomar.

Andrew: And now we will move on to France. Wow, we're really all over the place here today, Kassy. First Mexico, then the Philippines, now France.

Andrew: We have a question from Michel, I believe is the pronunciation. Michel has more of a comment for us, not necessarily a question, but I liked it, so I thought that we would mention it here. He said if I had one request, please keep on speaking about Canadian, American, and also South Korean culture. And sometimes South Korean culture does sneak into the show since we are based in South Korea, well, some of us, at least.

Andrew: He continued to say, despite globalization, I'm not really sure we understand the way people work from one country to another. And, yes, things are kind of crazy in the world right now, crazier than they have been for a long time. I do think there is a little bit of confusion and a little bit of misunderstanding out there. And I agree that the more that we can talk to each other, the more that we can share our culture with each other, the more that we can understand each other and get along and create a better society and better world for everyone. So I like that comment. Thank you, Michel!

Kassy: Yeah. I agree. I think also it's great conversation topics, right? Comparing your culture to someone else's. There's always lots of things to talk about and interesting content to bring up.

Andrew: Yeah. And I like it when I get to talk with you, Kassy, or Jeremy or Suzanne, actually, you guys are all Americans. And I'm always shocked at the small, little differences between Canadian culture and American culture. It's very educational for me, as well, to have these kinds of conversations. So I enjoy it when we do these kinds of cross-cultural talks. It's really cool.

Andrew: All right. Why don't we move on to the fourth email? Kassy, do you wanna read this one for us?

Kassy: Our next question comes from José, who is originally from Colombia, but he's currently living in Kitchener, Ontario. José is asking what are some, you know, common mistakes that you've noted in Spanish speakers who are learning English. He says that in his home country, he has a very wide vocabulary. But living in Canada, he can feel this kind of language block. He wants to express himself with this big, robust vocabulary, but he gets so frustrated from his lack of useful phrases or common words that we use in English-speaking countries.

Andrew: I understand that feeling. I also feel that way often when I'm speaking in Korean, I'm like, oh, people are going to think I'm stupid. I'm using the same words again and again. And when I speak in English, I can express myself fully and completely in whatever way I want. But in Korean, I'm limited to the words that I know. And, of course, that is a much smaller amount of words than I know in English, so it can feel frustrating.

Andrew: On his first question—because there's really two questions here—the first question is about any problems that Spanish speakers, specifically, encounter when learning English? Have you noticed anything from Spanish speakers before?

Kassy: I think the biggest thing I've noticed is just difference in pronunciation. Like, most Spanish speakers have a Spanish accent when they talk in English but, honestly, living in a global world, I don't think having a slight accent is really a big issue. How about you, Andrew?

Andrew: I also don't think that the Spanish accent is too difficult for English speakers to understand. I would encourage José to listen to an interview that I did with one of our listeners from Spain, Iván, because he talked specifically about some of the obstacles that he had to overcome as a Spanish speaker learning English. And I think he gave a lot of advice that's specific to Spanish-speaking English learners. So I would encourage José to go back and give that a listen.

Andrew: Also, be careful about cognates that are false friends. So there might be a Spanish word that has a very similar-looking word in English. And the meanings can actually be different, sometimes, between Spanish words and the English words. So it might be worth googling a list of what we call false friends between Spanish and English. That would be my advice.

Andrew: I also wanted to ask Jeremy what he thought about this question. Jeremy lives in California, where there are a lot of Spanish native speakers living, and he gets to listen to them speak English all the time, so he knows a lot about this topic. He's also a learner of the Spanish language, which can be insightful, I think. So a little while after I finished recording this episode with Kassy, I talked to Jeremy and I asked him what he thought. Here's what he had to say.

Jeremy: Well, for those who don't know, I have studied Spanish for a few years. I went to Mexico for a few months to do a homestay and to study Spanish. So I feel pretty comfortable speaking Spanish and having conversations. So given that that is my experience, I think I am qualified to give José some advice here.

Jeremy: My observation was that Spanish speakers use the present tense much more than native English speakers do. In Spanish, I know that things like “Te audio” or “Como ahora” or something like that, you use simple sentences like this to make a statement. I am eating right now or I am going to help you. “Te ayudo,” especially, is—I help you would be the English translation.

Jeremy: In English, we usually don't use the present tense in that situation. Instead, we would use the future tense, saying I'll help you. Or we might say something like here, let me help you. Let me help you. This is a much more common way of telling someone that we're going to help them. But I noticed in Spanish people usually say the equivalent of I help you, simple present tense.

Jeremy: In English, we usually use the simple present tense to make factual statements. So I could say I don't eat meat. I only eat fish. In these two sentences, the present tense, eat, is used. And it means that, in general, this is a fact about me. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow, this is true. Just like saying I am a man, I am from California, we use the simple present tense mainly for factual statements, not for things that we are actually doing or are going to do.

Jeremy: So, basically, just keep in mind that the simple present tense is used much more in Spanish than in English. So pay attention to how native English speakers use the present tense and copy what they do. Hope that helps.

Andrew: Everyone, this episode was quite long, so we decided to cut it into two parts. So we'll leave it at here for today. But coming up very soon we will release Part 2 and you will be able to hear the **thrilling conclusion** to this question and answers episode. So stay tuned for that.

Andrew: If you learn a lot with Culips and you enjoy listening to us, then please support us. You can do that by signing up and becoming a Culips member, by telling your friends who are learning English about us, by following us on social media, or by leaving us a comment and a nice review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.

Andrew: We'll be back soon with Part 2, and we'll talk to you then. Bye.

Kassy: See you later.

Detailed Explanations

Mouthful

Noun

When something is a **mouthful**, it is very long or difficult to say. This could be a word, name, or phrase. You can say that [something] is a **mouthful** or that [someone] said a **mouthful**. In this episode, Kassy says that stick-to-itiveness is a real **mouthful**. She means that this word is difficult to pronounce.

In the United States, **mouthful** has another meaning. It means to say a lot or to say something very important or meaningful. Many Americans will say, “[Someone] said a **mouthful**” as a way of agreeing with the person speaking. It’s another way of saying, “You can say that again.”

When you give someone a **mouthful**, you are talking or shouting in an angry, abusive, or critical way.

Here are a couple more examples with **mouthful**:

Salma: Hello there! My name is Salma.

Moacir: Hi! It’s nice to meet you. I’m Moacir.

Salma: Mocker?

Moacir: Ah, I know. It’s a bit of a **mouthful**. You can call me Moe.

Salma: OK, thanks! Welcome to the team, Moe.

Elton: This is the worst food I’ve ever eaten. It’s stale, wilted, and dry!

Luis: You said a **mouthful**!

Elton: I’m going to ask the server for a new plate—I can’t eat this. Do you want a new plate, too?

Luis: Yeah, this is inedible.

To coin

Verb

When used as a verb, **to coin** means to invent or create a new word, phrase, idea, or expression. You can say it when a new word, phrase, idea, or expression is used in that particular way for the very first time. You conjugate **to coin** like any other regular English verb: I **coin** a phrase, I **coined** an expression, she **coins** a word, etc. You can also use it as an adjective, such as in a newly **coined** expression.

In this episode, Andrew mentioned that stick-to-itiveness is a “phrase that the author **coined** to talk about this topic of motivation.” That means that the author created the phrase stick-to-itiveness.

This definition of **to coin** started back when people would make money off of words, phrases, or ideas. It meant to actually earn coins from a phrase or word. Now it has a more figurative sense.

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

Jonathan: How is twerk a word now? What is it, anyway?

Amos: It’s a dance move, I think. Something girls do? I don’t really know.

Jonathan: Who **coined** the term? I hope they got a trademark on it.

Amos: Ha, they’d be rich now if they did.

Talisha: I saw this guy swerving and weaving on the road yesterday. It was so dangerous. He couldn’t pick a lane and stay in it.

Zoey: So dangerous ... I hate it when people are sweaving around like that.

Talisha: Ha! Sweaving. Yes, that was it, exactly. You’ve **coined** a new word there.

Zoey: I wish I invented it! I would totally charge trademark fees. But it’s already been used before. I saw it online a while ago.

Surface level

Adjective

When something is **surface level**, it is trivial, unimportant, casual, or superficial. In this episode, Kassy and Andrew talk about small talk being **surface level**. That means that small talk topics are trivial, casual, and unimportant.

Other idioms and common English words used to mean **surface level** are **touched the surface**, **shallow**, and **empty**.

Here are a couple more examples with **surface level**:

Lawrence: Excuse me? Do you have any books that cover the history of wheels? I found this one, but it seems to only touch the surface. I'm looking for something a bit more in-depth.

Yoko: Hmm, that's a good question. You're right, that one is pretty **surface level** when it comes to wheels. It talks more about transportation as a whole and how it has developed over the years. Let me check the database to see if I can find something else for you.

Lawrence: Thank you, I really appreciate it.

Yoko: That's what librarians are for!

Bailey: I'm really bummed about my date last night.

Saskia: Really? Why? I thought you liked him.

Bailey: Well, I did. But all we did was talk about really boring things. Like, empty topics.

Saskia: Like the weather?

Bailey: Yeah. And the movie we saw, though even that was just **surface level**. I thought we'd talk about deeper things.

Saskia: Come on now, you can't really expect to talk about the meaning of life on the first date. You really like this guy, right? Give it a few dates and maybe then things will get more interesting.

Bailey: I guess ... OK, I'll give him another chance.

Get down to business

Idiom

To **get down to business** means to start doing the thing you need to do in the first place. This could be starting to work after making small talk with a colleague. It could also be changing the topic to the subject you need to discuss, rather than an unimportant topic.

When you **get down to business**, you're changing the tone from casual to professional.

In this episode, Andrew and Kassy mentioned that they make small talk before they get **down to business**. This means that when they first meet up, they spend time chatting about their lives before doing the task they need to do—recording the episode.

Here are a couple more examples with **get down to business**:

Ioana: And that's how my husband burned off his eyebrows.

Glenn: I guess he'll be more careful with the lighter fluid from now on!

Ioana: Definitely! Oh, look at the time! How did it get so late? We should really be **getting down to business**. I have an appointment in an hour I can't miss.

Glenn: You should have told me! OK, let's get this done.

Mrs. Lachlan: OK, class! That's enough fooling around. It's about time we **got down to business**.

Jesse: Aw, come on, Mrs. Lachlan. Just one more joke? I've got a good one!

Mrs. Lachlan: No, Jesse, I'm sorry. We just don't have time right now. Save it for tomorrow.

Jesse: You promise you'll let me tell it tomorrow?

Mrs. Lachlan: Sure, why not. Now, turn to page 132 in your textbooks.

Ease into

Phrasal verb

To **ease into [something]** means to become gently introduced or accustomed to something new. In this episode, Kassy mentions that she and Andrew don't jump right into the recording. Instead they "need to **ease into** it with some small talk." They gradually get into the right mindset for recording with a casual conversation.

You can also use this phrasal verb for physical things. You might **ease into** a chair. Or someone might **ease into** a bed. This would mean that they're physically lowering themselves slowly onto the object.

When you **ease someone into something**, you're helping them become familiar with it. For example, if a new person joins your team at work, you might help them **ease into their new role** by introducing them to everyone and showing them around.

Here are a couple more examples with **ease into**:

Annabelle: How's the new babysitter working out?

Zita: Oh, great! So far, anyway. We've decided to let him **ease into** it, rather than tossing all three kids at him at once. So he's been watching two kids at a time, for now, until they're comfortable with him and he's comfortable with them. Then we'll try all three for an hour or so.

Annabelle: Smart. Don't want to scare him off right away!

Zita: Exactly. Though we are really looking forward to the time when he's ready for all of them. Mommy needs a spa day.

Annabelle: Let me know when that is, and we'll have a ladies' day! Get all of us together for some brunch and massages.

Talako: Let me ask you this. Have your employees had problems with your new software? Have you found data entry errors that shouldn't be happening?

Gustav: Yes, that's a common problem, especially with our older staff.

Talako: I thought as much. What we're offering is a custom training program designed to **ease people into the technology** gradually and with confidence. We can reduce the number of errors your staff make on a daily basis and increase company efficiency.

Thrilling conclusion

Noun

A **thrilling conclusion** is an exciting ending. It describes the final parts of something, most commonly a story, series, or document. You'll often hear this used for TV series when they're promoting the season or series finale. It can also be used for podcasts, blog articles, movies, or anything that has a distinct end.

This episode is the first part of a series answering listeners' emails. That is why Andrew called Part 2 the **thrilling conclusion**.

Native English speakers might use **thrilling conclusion** in a sarcastic or ironic way. For example, someone might say that the next class is the **thrilling conclusion** to the day. This means that the next class isn't actually all that exciting—it may in fact be boring—but at least the school day will be over.

Here are a couple more examples with **thrilling conclusion**:

Marit: According to the professor, next week will be the last segment for ancient Egyptian artifacts.

Chantel: Yes, finally. The **thrilling conclusion** to all that dusty, old stuff!

Marit: Hey! That's not very nice. I like learning about this. And it's more than just dusty and old!

Chantel: But you do admit that it is dusty and old?

Marit: Well, sure. I mean, how could it not be dusty? Egypt is mostly desert.

Solon: I watched the game last night. Were you as shocked as I was by the **thrilling conclusion**?

Rainer: Wait! No! Don't tell me! I haven't watched it yet.

Solon: Why not?

Rainer: I had to run errands last night and couldn't get home in time. I've recorded it, though, so no spoilers, please!

Quiz

1. What does get down to business mean?

- a) stop working
- b) start working
- c) continue working
- d) start relaxing

2. Which of the following means that a phrase, name, or word is very long or difficult to say?

- a) earful
- b) eyeful
- c) mouthful
- d) handful

3. What is another way of saying that I gradually got used to my new apartment?

- a) I eased around my new apartment.
- b) I relaxed down in my new apartment.
- c) I tensed up while in my new apartment.
- d) I eased into my new apartment.

4. What does it mean if someone coined a phrase?

- a) she invented or created a new phrase
- b) she made a coin with a phrase on it
- c) she paid a coin so she could use a phrase
- d) she used the word coin in a phrase

5. Which of the following means that the series has an exciting ending?

- a) it has a stirring close
- b) it has a thrilling conclusion
- c) it has a boring conclusion
- d) it has a thrilling stop

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Which English words do you find are a mouthful and why?
2. What is your favourite recently coined term and why?
3. What are some surface level topics you can use next time you need to make small talk with someone?
4. Kassy and Andrew ease into their recordings by having some small talk before getting down to business. What do you do to ease yourself into work?
5. What was the last TV show you watched that had a thrilling conclusion? Why was it thrilling?

Quiz Answers

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

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