

Chatterbox #291 – Decision paralysis

Episode description

Making decisions isn't always easy, especially these days, when there are so many options for us to pick from. If you've ever felt stuck when faced with choices, you're not alone! This sensation is called *decision paralysis* and many people face it, including Culips hosts Andrew and Anna. Listen in as they talk about this sensation and how they work through it.

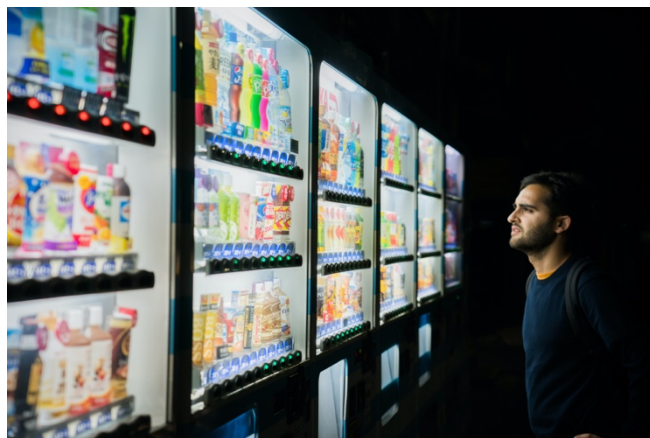
Culips' Chatterbox series is designed for intermediate and advanced English learners. All Chatterbox episodes feature natural conversations between two native English speakers. Listening to these audio lessons helps to improve your grammar, vocabulary, and listening skills so that you can build your fluency. You'll be able to speak English naturally with Culips, and you might even learn something interesting along the way.

Fun fact

Studies show that *decision paralysis*, also known as choice paralysis or analysis paralysis, often leads to procrastination. Those who experience this become so overwhelmed with the options available that they avoid making a decision, and instead do something else.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To let the world pass you by
- In the heat of the moment
- On a whim
- Click of a finger
- Put one's finger on it
- Grass is always greener



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: Hey there, everyone, it's Andrew here. Last year, I had a goal of reading 10 novels in Korean, my second language. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to meet my goal. And I only ended up reading six books. There are many reasons why I think I wasn't able to reach this goal, and most of them are probably familiar to a lot of you. Things like getting busy, having life get in the way, feeling unmotivated, being tired, procrastinating too much, losing sight of the big picture, or generally just being lazy. These all played a part in preventing me from reaching my goal. But there was another thing that had an effect on how much I read last year and it wasn't immediately evident to me. But now that I've had some time to think about my reading habits from last year, I realized that decision paralysis is partially responsible for my failure. Let me explain.

Decision paralysis is the idea that having a lot of options available to us can be overwhelming. The word paralysis—let me say that again slowly because it's a difficult word to say—paralysis. This word means unable to move. So, for example, someone might have paralysis in their legs after being in a car accident. In that situation, the person would be unable to walk or move their legs, right? Due to the accident. We could also talk about political paralysis, where nothing happens in a country—no new laws, no decisions made, no progress, because the political parties spend more time fighting against each other than actually working together, for example. Maybe you can think of some countries that operate like that. So, this word, paralysis, then is all about being stuck, about not moving. As you can imagine, decision paralysis is when you can't make decisions. You have options, but you can't make a selection. And although having many options might seem awesome, in fact, it can be a negative thing because it makes it too difficult to actually make a choice.

So, what happened to me last year during my reading challenge is that I spent too much time choosing what books to read. I'd finish a book and instead of carrying that momentum, and that motivation from finishing the book into starting a new book, I'd instead turn to the internet and look for the next book to read. And this was a bad idea because it took me down the rabbit hole of spending time online. I'd browse through online bookstores, I'd read book reviews, I downloaded and read samples from e-books that I found online. I'd watch YouTubers, also known as booktubers, review some of their favourite books. I'd even watch interviews with authors or listen to interviews with authors and podcasts. So, when it came time to find the next book to read, I just spent way too much time looking for the best book ever. And I actually spent not very much time reading. In my quest to read I ended up just wasting time. If instead, I had just picked any old book randomly off a best sellers list, for example, and then started reading it without worrying about whether it was the perfect book for me or not, I would have had more time to read.

And most likely, I would have read more books and maybe even I would have achieved my reading goal of finishing 10 books last year.

In today's Chatterbox episode, we're going to explore decision paralysis in more detail. And a little later on, I'll be joined by my cohost, Anna, and we'll chat about this topic together. If you're new to our Chatterbox series or not sure what it's about, let me explain. Chatterbox is the Culips series for intermediate and advanced level English learners, where we talk about compelling topics, trending current events, or hot issues. Chatterbox is designed to help you improve your English listening and speaking and help you reach your English goals. There's a transcript and study guide for this episode on our website, Culips.com. C-U-L-I-P-S.com. For all Culips Members. Please visit the website to learn about how you can become a member and to join the Culips community.

So, the idea we're talking about today is decision paralysis and inability to make choices.

Sheena Lyengar: My name is Sheena Lyengar, and I'm a professor at the Columbia Business School.

Andrew: Professor Lyengar, is an academic who has thought a lot about this topic. She wrote a popular book called *The Art of Choosing* and has made two appearances at TED, where she talked about making choices.

Sheena Lyengar: I have spent, I guess now almost 30 years, studying choice. Why do people want choice? What are the effects of giving people choices? And what can we do to improve people's experiences with both choosing as well as the outcomes of their choice.

Andrew: In an interview about choice making, Dr. Lyengar described the exact problem I encountered when trying to find the perfect book to read.

Sheena Lyengar: When we have a lot of choice, we can't handle it because we then get mired in all these details, which then distracts us from our larger goals.

Andrew: And in one of her TED talks, she said.

Sheena Lyengar: When someone can't see how one choice is unlike another, or when there are too many choices to compare and contrast, the process of choosing can be confusing and frustrating. Instead of making better choices we become overwhelmed by choice, sometimes even afraid of it. Choice no longer offers opportunities but imposes constraints. It's not a marker of liberation but of suffocation by meaningless minutia.

Andrew: When we have nearly unlimited choices, making a decision can be really difficult. And instead of giving us new opportunities, it can actually paralyze and restrict us. I really liked the last sentence by Dr. Lyengar, when she said that choice is "not a marker of liberation" but a "suffocation by meaningless minutia."

Sheena Lyengar: It's not a marker of liberation but of suffocation by meaningless minutia.

Andrew: OK, let's break that down. It's a little bit complicated. The word *suffocation* means dying because there's no air to breathe. And the word *minutia* means the very small details. So basically, what Dr. Lyengar is saying here is that when we have unlimited choices, we get so caught up in this meaningless minutia, in the small, small details that we end up suffocating, or in other words, doing nothing.

This is very similar to what writer and psychologist Barry Schwartz has called the paradox of choice. Have you heard this word before, paradox? Paradox. A *paradox* describes a person or a situation that has two opposite features, which makes it seem really weird. For example, it's a paradox that smartphones were designed to save us time and help make life easier but in fact, we end up wasting a lot of time and working more or feeling more stressed out because of smartphones. Or we could say that a shy person who likes to have conversations with other people is a paradox. In the case of the topic that we're talking about today—the paradox of choice—well, this is the idea that having many choices can make you better off, it's good to have choices, right? But all these choices can cause you to freeze and do nothing, which in the end actually makes you worse off. Let's hear from Barry Schwartz himself about it.

Barry Schwartz: All this choice has two effects, two negative effects on people. One effect, paradoxically, is that it produces paralysis rather than liberation.

Andrew: Schwartz goes as far to say that having too many choices can even affect how happy we feel.

Barry Schwartz: Adding options to people's lives can't help but increase the expectations people have about how good those options will be, and what that's going to produce is less satisfaction with results even when they're good results.

Andrew: So maybe that's another reason for me not to spend so much time looking for the perfect book to read. When there are so many choices available, it's likely that I may feel like there's always a better option. That really sums up the issue into three nice words, doesn't it? A better option.

Patrick McGinnis: FOBO stands for fear of a better option.

Andrew: Someone who spent a lot of time thinking and writing about better options is the writer, Patrick McGinnis. You've probably heard the expression FOMO before. If you're a long-time listener of Culips, you'll know that we talked about it on Culips before as well. FOMO. The fear of missing out. McGinnis is the guy who coined that expression. To *coin* something means to be the first person to use a new word or expression. So, in other words then, McGinnis created the term. FOMO, as I said, is the fear of missing out and it describes the stress or anxiety you may feel when you see other people doing fun things

on social media. So for example, if you pop open your Instagram, and you notice a friend eating at an amazing restaurant, and another friend, having fun at a concert, and maybe a coworker traveling the world, you see all these pictures, but you're just at home, lying in your bed, scrolling through social media, scrolling through Instagram. Maybe in that moment, you'd feel kind of like a loser or that you're not living life to the fullest. You might feel like you're just **letting the world pass you by**. That's what FOMO is.

But McGinnis actually coined another term, it's not quite as popular as FOMO but it relates to our topic of conversation today. The term is FOBO. F-O-B-O. Or the fear of better options. FOBO relates to all the things that we've been talking about today so far. When you have many options to choose from, it can be hard to make a decision about which one to choose, because you're afraid of making the wrong choice. Let's listen to McGinnis explain it.

Patrick McGinnis: It's a fear that when you're making a decision, that if you choose something, something better might come along. So, you know, for example, you're ordering food at the restaurant, and you order that dish, and what if somebody at your table gets something that looks better. Or say you're going on Netflix, and you're trying to pick a movie, you keep searching and searching for the perfect movie, right? And I think we all do that there's 7000 potential choices on Netflix. And so FOBO is something that comes from living in a very—in age where we have so much choice, you go on the internet, you can buy anything you want, you can download anything you want. And so, as a result, it makes it difficult for us to just choose one thing, because we don't want to make the wrong choice. You don't do anything, you're paralyzed.

Andrew: Hey, Anna.

Anna: Hi, Andrew.

Andrew: I guess we could start, Anna, by maybe talking about your decision-making style. How do you generally go about making decisions?

Anna: I would say that it's a bit of a mixed bag. Sometimes I think I make good decisions and sometimes I make decisions **in the heat of the moment** that are perhaps not the best thing to do. So, I think I can be a little bit erratic, but I genuinely base my decisions—I'm very much risk averse, so I'm always kind of weighing up the different options. And to be honest, it can take me quite a long time to make a decision and one of my goals: this year actually has to be more decisive, which is basically better at making decisions or, you know, just choosing one thing and just sticking with it rather than kind of spending all this time thinking about just be like, OK, I've had to think about the options, what is best? OK, let's go for it. If it doesn't work, it's OK. I can always fix it later. So trying to have more of that type of attitude, which is quite difficult to put into practice, I have to be honest. What about you, Andrew?

Andrew: I try to make decisions quickly. I guess it really depends on what type of decisions we're talking about, right? If it's small things, then I try to just make them quickly, you know, what are we going to eat for dinner? Are we going to have chicken or turkey, I don't care, let's just eat whatever one, like flip a coin, right? But I guess for bigger life decisions, you know, like to get married or to not get married? To live in apartment A or to live in apartment B. To live in Korea or to live in Canada. Those I spend more time on and I like to just let ideas marinate in my head for a long time before I make a decision. So, I kind of put no deadline on a decision. Or if I know there's a deadline that I have to make a decision by, then I try to start thinking about it well in advance. I start to get the wheels rolling in my head, weighing the pros and cons, and trying to see things from all perspectives before I actually make the decision. I hate being rushed into things. Like, I don't like to have to make a decision very quickly, especially a significant one. So, I tried to give it a lot of time. I think the brain is pretty remarkable at doing a lot of calculating in the background. And, you know, when I'm sleeping or walking around or just doing my daily everyday things. If I have a big decision to make, I kind of think that my brain is calculating the pros and cons of that decision for me, subconsciously. So, if I give it enough time to do the calculation, then I think that helps me come to a conclusion when it's time to make a decision.

Anna: Nice. Yeah. I never thought about that before. But yeah, your brain is always just like, you know, doing little mini pros and cons lists in your head and kind of balancing like, is this going to be good for me? Or maybe this is not the best thing to do right now. I think like anything, making good decisions takes practice, you know, the more decisions that you have to make the kind of better you get at doing it. I mean, I have, oh, and just to be clear, as well, I'm not spending like five hours choosing what I'm going to wear in the morning, 'cause I know I said it takes me a long time to make decisions. But what I meant to say was, you know, big decisions, life decisions, but well, then again, this morning, when I was getting dressed, I was like, oh, do I wear the white jumper or the brown one? The black jeans, or the blue jeans? And you're like, oh, god, just put on a pair of trousers, Anna, and just get on with it. So, I mean, I do sometimes, you know, on these low-stake decisions, you know, what to eat for lunch, what to wear in the morning, sometimes I take too long doing those things as well.

But I have a huge amount of respect for people that take big decisions on a daily basis. You know, I work with people who are, you know, taking big decisions, you know, big decisions about people about companies about budgets, and, you know, and it's a big responsibility with decisions because once you've made a decision, you know, that's, you've got to stick by that. And, you know, that's the decision I made. And that's, that's why I did it. And you've kind of got to take responsibility for that decision. So, I have a lot of respect for people who have to make difficult decisions a lot.

But as I said, I think with practice, you can get better at it. But big decisions about your personal life, I never like to do those things **on a whim** never exactly as you said, I never like to rush those things, because they could have a big impact on your life and—and your enjoyment. I don't know. It just can have a big impact on you. So, I do like to think those

things through a lot but on the other hand, nothing's forever. Everything is temporary. So even if something doesn't work—and this is always something you have to try and have in the back of your mind, and I really tried to do this as well—is it's not forever. So even if it doesn't work, there's going to be a way to fix it or solve it, or, you know. I remember when I moved to Spain, for example, this is probably one of the biggest decisions I've ever made in my life so far was that move. So, I spent some time thinking about it going over it in my head. And, you know, I wouldn't want to do that just based on the **click of a finger**. I think that would feel uncomfortable for me. And it made me feel more stressed out. So big life decisions, I think are always as you said, good to take your time, think about it, and you know, as best you can—but then you never know what's going to happen at the end of the day. You can plan things as much as you want, but once you take that decision, maybe—maybe something really great will happen, maybe it won't be so great. But big decisions, I think are always best to think through beforehand.

Andrew: What do you think about the role of intuition in decision-making? Do you trust your gut? Do you go with your gut? Or do you like to think about just the rational facts, the logical side of life?

Anna: I think it's a bit of both. And I love that thing about go with your gut because you just sometimes have a feeling about something and you're like, I know that this is the right thing to do. And that's kind of how I felt when I moved here to Spain and how I felt at other points in my life significant points. I'm like, I need to make a decision. It's just something you feel, intuition, in your gut. So, I think you have to trust your intuition sometimes. It's like a sixth sense, I think, your—you know, what you think is right, and just feels right, you **can't really put your finger on it**, but it just feels like the right thing to do. So, I think it's a bit of both, but then we aren't, humans aren't rational. So, also at the same time, you know, there's a thing about never make a decision when you are angry, upset, really happy, or—well any extreme of emotion, like, never make a big decision when you're like, I don't know, like you're like, “Oh, yeah, I've just won 100,000 pounds, now I'm gonna bet my 100,000 pounds in the casino.” Bad idea. So, it's like, any extreme of emotion is not—they say it's not good to make a decision. So, I can agree with that. I think that—I think most people would agree it's better to do it with a level head.

Andrew: So, if we were to transition into talking more about the kind of daily choices that we have to make that can often cause decision paralysis—you gave an awesome example of choosing your outfit in the morning, right? Do you wear the brown pants, or do you wear the blue jeans? Like, do you have any other examples from your daily life where sometimes, maybe you get paralyzed and can't make a decision because you'd have too many options?

Anna: Oh, yeah, one thing that really gets me is like, what to eat for lunch.

Andrew: Oh, yeah?

Anna: Oh, god, yeah, 'cause I mean, it's just me, right? So, I'm only preparing lunch for me. But oh, god, I wish I had a schedule, you know, of different meals every two weeks on a rotation. That would be the ideal world, the dream world. For me, it just doesn't work like that. So, I'm going to the supermarket every day. I'm like, oh, what do I have for lunch today? Tuna, salad, and it's just like, annoying. But then I wish I could eat the same thing every day. I eat the same thing for breakfast interestingly, I have porridge and that's pretty routine because I can't be bothered to think about breakfast—in the morning? I'm just like, I can't be bothered to think about, you know, choices or whatever. I'm just like, give me the porridge and let's go.

Andrew: Sure.

Anna: But for lunch, you know, I'm thinking about different combinations. Different salads, different cheeses. I mean, it's just ridiculous. So, but then if I ate the same thing every day, I'd be bored out of my mind. So, I don't know. Yeah, I think eating, for me, choosing what to have for lunch and dinner is just a daily thing. But I mean, it's a lucky, to be honest, I have to say is, it's a lucky thing to have that I could go and pick, have lunch. So, I mean, you know, I'm not complaining too much.

Andrew: I think a lot of people can relate to that, for sure. I'm thinking about it right now, honestly, in the back of my mind, Anna, we're getting close to dinner time here, where I am, so I'm thinking, what am I going to have for dinner? And it is taking up a little bit of my mental energy, making this kind of decision. I know, some people are really organized, and they have meal plans and schedules that they follow. But I'm not that kind of person. So, for me, definitely dinner and lunch is something that I think about. Breakfast is easy because I just drink coffee for breakfast. And that's that, but lunch and dinner, I have to spend some time thinking about.

What about FOMO, Anna? FOMO. Fear of a better option. When you think, ah, should I pull the trigger on this decision? Should I wait and see if a better option comes around? Have you ever experienced FOMO before?

Anna: Oh, absolutely. Many times. I'm going to use the example—at the moment, I'm looking for a flat. I'm looking to move to a new flat. And I mean, there's so many flats in Madrid. There's so many flats. I mean, literally, there's so many flats. But you know, I'm like, I like this one, but I don't know, it's not quite right, I'll wait for the next one, I'll have a look at another one. And then I'll, you know, wait a couple of weeks, and I'm like, well, I'll wait for—for the next one. So, it's like, the **grass is always greener**, you always think there's going to be something better, or there's going to be this amazing flat that's going to become available next week. And, you know, there's always something because, you know, I'm not looking for a flat, you know, a really, really expensive flat. So, I have a budget, of course, like most people, and you know, with my budget, I can afford a certain level. And you know, there's always something that's—you're going to have to sacrifice on something. You know, whether it's the size, the location, or the, I don't know, the decor or whatever, you're going to have to sacrifice on something. So, I find it really hard to make a

decision with that. And I actually backed out of a flat, partly because, you know, I've gone through the process, and I, you know, I was just about to sign a contract. And then my intuition told me coming back to that thing about the gut just like, something just doesn't feel quite right. And I actually decided to back out of that, even though I gone through all the process, everything seemed fine. There was just something at the last minute that made me think, no, I think I should hold out for a little bit longer. And I don't know if that was a good decision actually, to be honest, I think it probably would have been a good flat for me, but I think it came back to this thing about maybe there's something better maybe, you know, I could find a flat in a bit of a better spot for me 'cause it—you know. So yeah, it happens to me. Does it happen to you, as well?

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. And I think the example that you brought up of searching for a new place to live or a real estate in general is a real good one. I'm reminded of a conversation that I had with one of my friends recently and we're from the same place in Canada. We're hometown friends. And so, we were talking about the real estate market in our hometown and like so many places around the world these days, Anna, the housing market in Canada is on fire. And the average price of a house in Canada now is insane. It's like over \$700,000 Canadian, which is very, very, very high. And my friend's been thinking about buying a house for a couple of years. And he was saying, oh, I should have bought this house two years ago, it was so much cheaper two years ago, and now the market has grown so much in those two years, that, you know, trying to find a house that's equivalent is almost impossible, because all the prices have gone up so much. So, he was saying, uh, should I get in the market now, or should I wait and see what happens? And he was looking around at different real estate options. And I told him, you're gonna have to make a decision, if you want to buy a house, just buy it now, because it doesn't look like the market is slowing down at all. And maybe two years from now, you'll look back at this moment and still have some regret about not pulling the trigger and buying something. Or he might be very happy because the market crashed, and he didn't make a bad investment. It's really hard to say when it comes to investments and making these kinds of big purchases, but I think that was an example of FOMO, you know, at the time, he wasn't sure if he should buy that house, or wait or see what's happening and he just waited too long. And then in the end, now things have changed completely, and he's not able to buy that kind of house anymore.

Anna: Yeah, and that's a really good example about these, you know, these big investing and things like that, and making a big life purchase. You know, buying a house is a massive thing. I mean, at the moment, I'm only looking to rent somewhere. But I imagine that when I come to hopefully in the future, you know, own my own house, and I can't even imagine how long that's going to take me to make a decision on that because it's a big thing. But I always feel like, if I approach something where I have to make a decision in my life, you know, something big, not what we're having for breakfast, but something big. And you know, I'm going back and forth with it, I'm going round in circles, that kind of tells me something. That tells me that I'm probably not ready to make that decision. Because if I'm so unsure, and I've got all of these doubts in my head, then that kind of tells me maybe I need to look into it a little bit more, you know, and I also think getting an outside

perspective can sometimes be really useful. So, somebody who will, like, throw back at you, like maybe what you're not seeing, or give you a little—give you a different perspective, when making a decision can sometimes be useful or more confusing. So again, it depends. It depends!

Andrew: Yeah, if you can have somebody to help you though, and guide you and show you your blind spots—what maybe you're missing in that situation—because some things can be emotional for us when we're making the decision but they're not really to the person that's your friend, or that's helping you, consulting with you, right? So, they can point out those things to you maybe tell you something that you don't always want to hear but can be actually really good advice in the end when it comes to making a decision.

Anna: I think it's, again, coming back to that idea of, I guess, the thing about decision paralysis. And then there's the—other hand, which is the paradox of choice where, you know, you have so many options that it actually—you think that it's going to be quicker to choose something, but actually having all of the options makes it much more difficult. If you only have to pick between brown and blue—but then if you have to pick between brown, blue, pink, yellow, green, red, purple, turquoise, you know, you're like, oh, gosh, I don't know what I'm gonna pick. So, definitely I—the paradox of choice does definitely ring true, and I think is very prevalent in our society, especially at the moment, because we can do so many things. What do we do with ourselves?

Andrew: One thing that I've started doing to fix this problem in a very small way, is the queuing system that I'm seeing on a lot of different apps these days. For example, on Netflix, right? Instead of, you know, when my wife and I want to watch a movie, sometimes we'll scroll through Netflix and keep looking through until we can find the perfect movie. But these days when I see something, something pops up, but I'm not really ready to watch a movie, I'll just add it to my queue or to my favourites. I'm not exactly sure the term that they use on Netflix, but there's this area where you can save movies that you wanna watch in the future and kind of all put them in that one place. So then when it is movie night and we're sitting down to watch something, I already have a selection of like the top three or four movies that I'm interested in watching and I don't have to endlessly scroll through all of their content trying to find what I want to watch. And I think this is going to save me a lot of time. And yeah, I'm going to try and do this kind of thing and other aspects of my life as well. When it comes to reading books, I'll just make a list of books that I want to read, and then just read them in order, I won't even think about what is the best one on this list. If it makes it onto my list, it means it's worthy of reading. And I will just select the top one on the list, and I'm hoping, you know, that this kind of system of queuing up ideas can help me to make decisions faster and save me some time in the end.

Anna: Yeah, the Netflix one is a killer, or any streaming service where you're like, OK, what do we watch? And then it's like, half an hour trying to choose something, you start watching it, and then you're like, "I don't like it." And then you go back to the beginning. And again, it's like you've got thousands of films, documentaries, anything that you want to watch, and then you can never find anything to watch. So, I mean, that is just the perfect

example of the paradox of choice. You know, it's like, if you only had a decision between two movies, it would probably be a lot easier than having thousands. But you know, obviously, it's great that you can just scroll through and have a look. But I like the idea- I liked that idea. I hadn't thought about that. I'm actually just not trying to watch Netflix anymore, because. . .

Andrew: It's probably even a better idea.

Anna: Yeah, I'm trying not to watch Netflix. I'm trying only to watch Netflix at the weekends now because, you know, I'd get into a habit of like watching it in the evening. And I'm like, no, I'm just gonna leave it for the weekends because, you know, otherwise it infiltrates in my everyday life. And I prefer to keep it as a treat rather than a— rather than a routine. But yeah, Netflix is a killer, for that.

Andrew: All right Anna, that brings us to the end of this episode. But I want to thank all of our listeners for joining us here today. And guys, I hope you are able to learn a lot with this episode. And of course, congratulations on getting some English listening practice in as well. That is exactly what you need to do to build your English fluency. So, keep up the good work. Now Anna and I have shared our opinion on this topic, but we are very curious about you, and we'd love to know what you think. And I think the rest of the Culips community would also like to know what you think. So please visit our website, which is [Culips.com](https://www.culips.com). And you can leave a comment there. And everyone can read it and we can start a discussion so you could tell us about what you learned in this episode, or maybe share a story about when you experienced FOMO or decision paralysis.

Anna: This episode was made possible thanks to all of our wonderful supporters. And if you enjoy Culips and find it useful for you to build your English skills, we'd love it if you could help us by leaving a five-star rating and a positive review on your favourite podcast app.

Andrew: And of course, you can also support us by signing up and becoming a Culips Member. There are tons of great benefits when you are a member. Like you'll get access to the study guides and transcripts for all of our episodes, plus much more. To learn about all the details and to become a member just visit [Culips.com](https://www.culips.com) or check out the link in the description. Guys, we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode, and we'll talk to you all then. Goodbye.

Anna: Bye, everyone.

Detailed Explanations

To let the world pass you by Idiom

To let the world pass you by means to sit back and do nothing. People who **let the world pass them by** don't do anything with their time. They don't take any opportunities available to them. For example, they don't accept a new job, meet new people or travel. They also don't actively look for ways to change or improve their lives. Instead, they watch the world—such as friends and family—live their lives.

Many people see this as a waste. That's why it's considered bad to **let the world pass you by**. You'll often hear this idiom as "**don't let the world pass you by**"—this is a warning said, usually by friends or family, to someone who might be sitting back and doing nothing.

Similar expressions include to **let life pass you by** and to **watch the world go by**.

Here are a couple more examples with **let the world pass you by**:

Nobutoshi: I heard you've decided to go travelling for a month. That's really exciting!

Jean: Yeah. I realized, like, last month, that I've done literally nothing with my life. I've just been **letting the world pass me by**. I've always wanted to travel, so I figured, why not do that now?

Nobutoshi: That's really cool, man. I'm impressed. I'm definitely not brave enough to do something like that.

Jean: Well, yeah. You've spent the past three years working hard to build your career. That's impressive to me! I'm still in the same job I had when I graduated. So, I'm trying to live a little more. Like you!

Samantha: Are you free next weekend? A bunch of us are going to a resort in the mountains for some hiking and stuff.

Karl: Uh, no thanks.

Samantha: Come on! You've stayed inside your house all summer. You can't spend your whole summer **watching the world go by**.

Karl: Oh, I think I can! And I'm definitely going to. Have fun though!

In the heat of the moment

Idiom

In the heat of the moment means to say or do something when you're angry or excited, without thinking about it first. In other words, you say or do something spontaneously when you're feeling a strong emotion. In this episode, Anna mentions that "sometimes I make decisions **in the heat of the moment** that are perhaps not the best thing to do." This means she sometimes makes decisions without thinking about it.

The "heat" is the strong emotion in this phrase, and "in the moment" signifies the part where you are not thinking before speaking or acting. Often, speaking or acting **in the heat of the moment** is a bad thing. That's because anger is the most common emotion attached to this idiom. When people are really angry, they say or do mean, rude, or unkind things without thinking about it first.

Here are a couple more examples with **in the heat of the moment**:

Hamish: What happened at the party last weekend? Everyone is all angry and anxious today. Was there a fight or something?

Tina: Well, you know... parties get a bit wild sometimes, with people doing stupid things **in the heat of the moment**. Let's just say that a lot of people did a lot of really stupid things at the party.

Hamish: Should I be glad or sad that I missed the party?

Tina: Glad. Definitely glad. I wish I hadn't gone.

Yasmine: What are you doing here? I told you I'm not talking to you. Please leave.

Woo-Jin: Come on, Yasmine. Please don't be like that. I didn't mean it, I promise. I said it **in the heat of the moment**.

Yasmine: Oh, so because you were angry, it's okay for you to insult me like that? You know how hard I've worked!

Woo-Jin: I do, really. I'm sorry, okay. Please, let's just go back home, okay? We can talk about what happened.

Yasmine: No, I don't think we can. Woo-Jin, you should leave. Don't call me. Good-bye.

On a whim Idiom

On a whim means to take place suddenly or impulsively, often without planning ahead. When you say or do something **on a whim**, it's an impulsive urge, desire or idea. You do it because you want to. Like "in the heat of the moment", the action or statement happens without strong emotions or even much forethought.

In this episode, Anna explains that she never likes to make big decisions about her personal life **on a whim**. "She doesn't like to impulsively make big decisions because "they could have a big impact on your life and your enjoyment."

Here are a couple more examples with **on a whim**:

Marcel: I heard you joined a band. Is that true?

Chouko: I did! We're called the Punky Monkeys. It's so much fun, like, we just get together and play different songs and stuff.

Marcel: But why did you join? You never seemed interested in music before.

Chouko: Oh, I saw their ad looking for a drummer, and I played drums in school, and I wasn't bad. It sounded kinda fun, so I just decided to join **on a whim**.

Marcel: They don't mind that you don't have any actual experience?

Chouko: Haha, well, they don't have any actual experience either. So, we're all at the same level, you know?

Marcel: Okay, well, as long as you're having fun.

Gabriella: Oh, whatcha got there?

Matt: Ice cream. We saw this cute ice cream parlor when we were on our way back and stopped **on a whim**. It's really good. They said they make all their own ice cream in the back of the store.

Gabriella: It looks really good. Did you get me some?

Matt: Of course! Lee has yours. You like triple chocolate, right?

Gabriella: I do! I'm going to find Lee and my ice cream now!

Click of a finger

Idiom

Click of a finger, or **snap of your fingers**, means in an instant and without hesitation. Something that can be done **at the click of a finger** is easy to do and often requires very little effort. You can do it so quickly that it's done in the time it takes to click (or snap) your fingers.

For example, if you enjoy reading e-books, you might say, "I can get the next book with the **click of a finger**." That's because it's very easy to quickly purchase and read an e-book (if you have the right device, of course).

Here are a few more examples with **click of a finger**:

Rachel: You know, the project manager, Martha, is really amazing. Like, every time we have a meeting, she's able to give these in-depth reports and knows what's going on all the time. How does she do that?

Mi-Kyung: I agree, she's really good at her job! I think it's because she has so many talented employees, and she gets everything she needs from them with the **snap of her finger**.

Rachel: I hope I can build a good team like that one day, so I can be just like her.

Min-Jun: Why are you so nervous right now? We're practically done our project. You should be excited.

Christoph: Oh, I know. But you know, if we're not careful, everything could be deleted with just the **click of a finger**.

Min-Jun: Whoa. So that's why you've been saving the doc every five minute.

Joel: Man, it's crazy how much our music consumption has changed nowadays. Like, we used to have to go out and buy actual CDs and stuff.

Matilda: I know! Now, artists can put their music out with just a **click of a finger**, and the whole world can buy it just as easily.

Joel: It's true, but I still like having physical CDs.

Put [one's] finger on it

Idiom

Put [one's] finger on it means to be able to explain something because you fully know or understand it. The “it” in this idiom could be anything, from the answer to a question on a test, to describing a feeling, or to understanding what someone is saying.

You'll often hear this idiom used in the negative: “I **can't put a finger on it**”. This means that you're pretty sure you know or understand something, but you can't quite explain it. You're not able to say exactly what's wrong or different about a situation. For example, “Ally knew something she had said wasn't true, but she couldn't quite **put her finger on it**.” Ally can't explain or say what is wrong, even though she knows there is something wrong.

Here are a couple more examples with **can't put a finger on it**:

Meghan: Hi Lorenzo! Did anything interesting happen while I was on vacation?

Lorenzo: No, things were pretty calm here last week. Hey, wait. You look different.

Meghan: Haha, do I now? What's different?

Lorenzo: I'm not sure. I **can't put my finger on it**, but there's definitely something different about you today.

Meghan: There is! I finally got contacts and I'm not wearing my glasses!

Lorenzo: Oh! Wow, you're right. It really changes your face, but in a good way.

Tara: Who is that?

Yan: That? Oh, that's the new employee. She just started today.

Tara: She reminds me of someone, but I **can't quite put my finger on who**.

Yan: You're probably thinking about that lady in accounting, the one who always wears yellow, Sharon.

Tara: Yeah, that's it! Why does the new girl remind me of Sharon?

Yan: Because Susie, that's the new girl's name by the way, is Sharon's daughter!

Tara: Ah, that'd be why. Huh, well, hopefully she's as nice as her mom.

Grass is always greener

Idiom

Grass is always greener is a shortened version of the proverb, “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” It is a way of saying that other people have something better than you. Your neighbour has greener grass than you. This idiom sums up that human emotion or desire always wants something different and better. That desire makes us jealous or envious of people who have anything that we don’t have. Their grass looks greener than ours. People who believe that others have it better than they do feel that the **grass is always greener** on the other side.

This is also used as reminder that just because the **grass is greener** doesn’t mean that things are better. People say this to someone who is complaining about something they can fix, to remind them that things aren’t always better on the other side. You could also tell the complaining person another version of the proverb, “the grass is always greener where you water it.”

Here are a couple more examples with **grass is always greener**:

Binh: What’s wrong with Lucy today? She seems really frustrated.

Alicia: Oh, you know. She applied for that transfer over to sales, but she didn’t get it. Now she’s angry.

Binh: She’s always applying for new positions in different departments. Doesn’t she like working with us?

Alicia: Well, you know Lucy is never happy. Every time she gets what she wants, she gets bored of it and starts looking for something new.

Binh: That’s true. She’s one of those people who always thinks the **grass is greener** somewhere else. Well, hopefully someday she’ll find a place where she’s happy.

Christine: I’m so jealous of the Smiths. It just seems like they have this perfect life, always traveling and spending time together

Riz: I dunno, the **grass is always greener**, you know? I’m sure they have their own problems that no one else can see.

Christine: I doubt that. Their lives are perfect. Sigh.

Quiz

1. What does it mean to say or do something in the heat of the moment?

- a) You say or do it while angry or excited and without thinking first
- b) You say or do it in order to suddenly increase the temperature
- c) You say or do it because it's very hot at that time
- d) You say or do it after much thought and without any emotion

2. Which of the following means to be jealous of someone else's life?

- a) The ground is always browner
- b) The sky is always bluer
- c) The grass is always greener
- d) The water is always greener

3. What does it mean when someone lets the world pass them by?

- a) They spend a lot of time sitting by the side of the road
- b) They don't take advantage of opportunities
- c) They work hard to find new opportunities
- d) They take advantage of every opportunity they can find

4. Which of the following means to be able to fully explain and understand something?

- a) Put a finger on it
- b) Put a thumb on it
- c) Put a number on it
- d) Put a pin in it

5. What does it mean to do something on a whim?

- a) You don't want to do it, but you have to
- b) You do it only because someone else told you to
- c) You do it after much thought and consideration
- d) You do it suddenly and because you want to

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Describe a time when you were unable to make a decision because you had too many options available to you. Were you able to make a decision in the end?
2. Andrew and Anna mentioned Netflix as an example of a platform that offers too many choices to its users. What is another platform or place you feel offers too many options, leading to decision paralysis? Why?
3. Have you ever felt it would be better not to make a decision, preferring to let the world pass you by? When and why (or why not)?
4. Describe a time you made a decision in the heat of the moment or on a whim. How did you feel afterwards?
5. Describe a time you thought you made the wrong decision. What happened? Was the decision actually wrong one in the end?

Quiz Answers

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

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