

Chatterbox #332 – The soundscape of our lives (ad free)

Episode description

In this episode, Andrew and Anna explore the impact of sound on our daily lives. From the noises that wake us up in the morning to the background sounds that shape our work, relaxation, and social interactions, they discuss how these sounds affect our mood, focus, and overall well-being. Tune in to learn how sound impacts daily life and boost your English skills at the same time!

Fun fact

Did you know that some people hear colors? A condition called “synesthesia” causes some people to associate sounds with colors. For example, hearing a specific musical note might make them “see” the color blue.

Expressions included in the study guide

- First thing in the morning
- Placebo effect
- To be ruthless with [something]
- To gab away
- To make [one's] blood boil
- To find your groove



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: Chatterbox episode number 332, "The soundscape of our lives." Featuring Andrew and Anna.

Joining me now to co-host this episode with me is Anna. Hello, Anna. Welcome. How are you?

Anna: Hi, Andrew. Hi, everyone. I'm good, thanks. And yourself?

Andrew: I'm doing very well. And Anna, I don't know if you remember exactly, but one of our last Chatterbox episodes was about etiquette in the workplace. And the reaction to that episode was really interesting, Anna. I talked with some of our Culips members about that episode and a lot of people had many things to say about the no-scent zone. Do you remember when we talked about the no-scent zone? The reaction to that was really interesting, to hear people's opinions from different corners of the world about the no-scent zone. Which is, in Canada, we have these places where you're not allowed to wear perfumes or colognes, just for anybody who doesn't know what I'm talking about. That's what a no-scent zone is. And yeah, it caused a lot of debate and we had some really interesting conversations about that and that got me thinking about our senses. Of course, our sense of smell is one sense. And so, I thought it could be interesting to discuss the other senses on Culips as well. And so today we're gonna do that. We are going to talk about sound. And not so much about music, although music may come up in the conversation, but more about the sounds around us and the impact and the effect that sound has on our daily routines and our daily lives. So, I think this will be a really interesting conversation, Anna, and I'm excited to hear what you have to say about it.

And I think, why don't we start at the beginning of the day, when we first wake up? Because so many of us wake up to a sound, right? I think maybe sound and light are the

two triggers. Probably, I don't know, maybe temperature as well. Those are some of the triggers that wake us up, right? And for most people, it's an unpleasant way to start the day. You have a loud buzzing sound or ringing sound as your alarm clock, and we start the day on that kind of negative note. I don't know, Anna, how do you wake up at the start of the day? Are you one of these people? Is there some kind of loud jarring sound that wakes you up in the morning?

Anna: That is definitely how I used to wake up. I used to have this horrible old-school alarm clock, which had this awful tone, but then sometimes the more awful it is, the easier it is to wake up because you just have to get up. You can't stand it any longer, so you have to switch it off. But actually, recently, I've just been trying silence, so no alarm. And the way that I'm trying to wake myself up now is with a light that fades on gradually. So instead of having a noise that's very jarring, like kind of, eeeh eeeh, which is just, like you said, not a great way to start the day, I've tried starting with light that comes on gradually over 15 minutes. And, you know, silence, because I'm very fortunate. My neighbors are very nice people. They don't cause me any hassle, and, you know, I sleep very well where I live, which is, you know, I'm very grateful for that. But I really like silence, actually, in the morning. I really like to wake up just, almost like, in my head, I imagine it's like a clean and fresh way to wake up. It's just like silence, and just with light, because, yeah, there's nothing worse than that phone alarm going off, and it's like, it just sends a shiver down your spine, and you're just like, oh, I just wanna go back to bed. This is horrible. What about you, Andrew? What do you hear **first thing in the morning**?

Andrew: Yeah, interestingly enough, and this is a little bit of an unfortunate feature of the way our house is aligned with the street, but our bedroom window backs out to a kind of small apartment complex. And the small apartment complex has a little parking area and a recycling area that's not too far outside of our window. And now we're in the winter, so it's OK because we have our window closed, and we have some good soundproofing, so I don't really hear the street. But for a lot of the year, we actually crack that window open a little bit, and so almost every day, there are two things that wake me up. One is there's a

magpie that likes to come and check out what's in that recycling area every morning, and so he's caw-cawing in the morning, and actually, there's a little metal dividing fence between the edge of our house and the edge of that other building, and the magpie lands on that fence, and I can hear him walking and hopping on that fence, and that wakes me up. And sometimes also early in the morning, there are some people who I think maybe are looking for cans to take to the recycling center. You know, they scavenge for those kinds of things where they can make some money that way, so some people come by and check out that little recycling area, and so I can hear aluminum cans. And so that usually wakes me up, but that's very early, like at maybe 5 or 6 a.m., so I usually hear that, it wakes me up, and then I just go right back to sleep. But that's the first interaction I have with sound in the morning.

But then a little bit later on, I have to wake up for real. I have to start my day, and I have several different ways of waking up depending on how urgent it is. So, if it's not like a super urgent thing, maybe I don't have an appointment or a meeting or work to do in the morning, but I still wanna wake up at a decent time, I will set my watch alarm. So, I have an alarm on my watch, and I can set that to vibrate. So, I think that's the nicest way to wake up. You don't have that jarring sound like you mentioned earlier, Anna, and so just a little vibration on my watch, and that works pretty well. I'm a light sleeper in general, so as soon as that buzzes, it usually wakes me up and does the trick. But I have a smartwatch, and so you have to charge the battery, right? And there'll be some days where I'm getting ready to go to bed, and I'll look at my watch, and there's like 5% battery, and I get worried, oh, what happens if my battery dies at night, and then my alarm doesn't go off, and then I don't wake up? You have to do all of this planning. So, in those situations, I just use my smartphone.

And yeah, I have, I don't know, Anna, if you know this guy, but there's a Japanese musician who's a famous composer, actually. His name is Ryuichi Sakamoto. He's a musician who I admire, and I like his work, and back in the day, he commissioned some alarm clock jingles for, I think it was Nokia. I'll have to look this up later and see if this is

correct. But I learned about this fact that he was commissioned to compose some alarm clock jingles, and I thought, wow, that's really cool, so I went onto YouTube to see if I could hear them, and I heard them, and I liked them, and I downloaded them to my phone and set them as my alarm clock as well. So, when my alarm goes off, I have this little jingle by this composer that wakes me up, and it's a nice way to start the day. It's not just the Wah, wah, wah alarm sound.

Anna: Ooh, yeah.

Andrew: And I try to keep my phone away from my bed so that I'm forced to get up and turn it off. And I would say that whenever my alarm goes off, I'm very sensitive about it also waking up my wife, so I try and get out of bed and turn it off as quickly as possible because I often wake up before her, and so in that regard, it works well. Like, I'm sort of forced to get up and turn it off, and I start the day that way, yeah. I guess... I guess it's an ideal way to wake up. It's not that jarring. I think jarring is the best adjective to use, jarring sound. And maybe we should explain that word, Anna, because we've used it several times. In your opinion, what does this mean? What is something that's jarring to you?

Anna: Well, it is a weird word, guys, if you hear it, because you hear the word "jarring" and you think "jar," which is a container where you might put jam, so you think, how on earth does jarring mean, or what does jarring mean? If I could give my best description of it, it's just something that stops you in your tracks. Like, it's almost something that you can't process. It's just horrible. It almost goes against every fiber in your being. It's just a horrible sound. It sends a shiver down your spine. It just makes your body react almost like, ugh. I would say that's how I would describe a jarring sound. Not pleasant, definitely. It's definitely not positive. It's definitely negative. And it's something that stops you in your tracks. And it's just not very nice. I don't know how else to describe it. Jarring sound, horrible.

Andrew: That's very good. It also has a shock factor, I think. So, it's something that you're not expecting, and it shocks you and it takes you by surprise, right? You're not really expecting it. And yeah, almost puts you in a bad mood as well. So, nobody wants to start

the day that way, or at least I don't. Maybe some people do, but it sounds like the both of us don't. So, Anna, you have this nice, almost silent way to wake up and start your day. I'm wondering, then, about how sound affects your day-to-day life. As you're doing your work, as you're moving through the city, what kinds of sounds do you notice and what kind of impact do they have on you as you go about your day?

Anna: Well, I used to live actually in a house that was right next to a main road. This was when I lived in Liverpool about seven years ago. And since then, I've been way more sensitive to sound because I used to get woken up by just loads of cars driving past the window at like 6 a.m. in the morning. It was horrible. It was the worst thing ever because I didn't realize when we rented the apartment that we were on a main road. It's like, mistake, make sure to check if the apartment's on a main road next time.

Andrew: Those are those things you have to go through to be able to notice, right? You never know to check about that until it's happened to you, yeah.

Anna: Rookie mistake. So now I'm very sensitive to it. So, I... I really pick up on different sounds. And when you're in the city, like I live right in the middle of the city, you're always hearing things going off. Maybe it's emergency vehicles. Maybe it's constant construction because when you live in flats, you kind of have this da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da if people are doing construction near you. I had a terrible time last summer because they were doing the flat above me and also below me for about three months during summer. So that was great. But I do like some of the sounds that come from the city, the sort of the background noise. It does kind of help you feel, I don't know, a little bit more connected. You can hear people out and about and I do like that. But then there are some things about being in the city, which is just like, sometimes you just wanna be able to sleep and then all you can hear are people in the terrace having a beer, especially in Spain, which is very common. If you live near a terrace, forget it. That's it. You're not gonna sleep in summer. Just forget it. Give up. Move house.

Andrew: And what do you mean by a terrace in that situation? Like people at a restaurant that has a terrace with outside seating?

Anna: Yes, exactly. So, they have a sort of outside seating where you can have drinks and eat and things like this. But I mean, just forget it. If you live in a flat near there, you're just gonna have noise all the time constantly, especially if it's a popular bar, of course. So that's another thing to add to the list. If you ever move to Spain, make sure you're not near a terrace because you will be disturbed continuously. So yeah, there's some sounds I like, there's some sounds I don't like. I guess that's just kind of city living. What about you, Andrew? How is your day affected by sound?

Andrew: Yeah, I have to say, I think I'm very lucky in my current living situation. My neighborhood is really quiet, even though I live in Seoul, which is a huge, huge, huge city. And there are areas that are very loud. Of course, if you're by a highway, it's going to be really loud. If you're by a main street, it's going to be pretty loud. If you're near an entertainment district, you're also going to have a lot of those party sounds that come with people having fun, right? Also, I don't live in an apartment, and I know this can be a huge cause of stress for many people is if you hear your neighbors stomping around upstairs, or if you hear different sounds from the neighborhood. In my last place where I used to live, we had quite a few senior citizens who were in the building, and they had this little area where they would hang out out front of the building. And during the winter, it was a super quiet space because it was too cold for them to hang out. But as soon as spring hit, all of the grandmas and grandpas would just hang out in front of the building and have little parties with their tea and snacks. I don't know exactly what they would do, but they would be very, very loud. And that sound would come in our windows, and it even stressed me out for recording the podcast sometimes. I was like, oh, can people hear the old folk out there? They were probably in their 70s, but they're laughing and talking quite loudly all the time.

And so, yeah, those are just some of the things that you have in the city, right? You have so many people gathering, and of course, people are going to make noise. But I have to say, going through my day-to-day now is quite quiet. My neighborhood is quiet. And also, there are more electric cars on the streets these days, I think, electric vehicles, which are

also very quiet. I've even heard, I don't know if you heard this, Anna, but I've heard there's a city in China. I can't verify if this is true or if this is just an internet rumor that I read. But I heard that this city has almost totally, completely adopted using electric vehicles, and so the streets are totally silent. I thought, wow, that's really cool. You don't hear any of the engine roar anymore. So yeah, I mean, here in Seoul as well, a lot of the taxis, the buses are all electric now, and I think that's reduced some of the noise pollution that you hear in the city. And that's a term we can use for this situation, "noise pollution." Of course, there's always a lot of construction going on in a big city as well, and sometimes that can be loud, but thankfully, that's not really affecting me at the moment.

Anna: Yeah, construction is the worst. As soon as you hear that there's some people gathering outside one of the apartments, you're like, oh no. You're like, that's three months of my life over, basically. But I'm very lucky as well. I live in a really nice apartment complex, which is very chill. None of the neighbors have parties. We're all a little bit older, so it's great. We don't have any students here, so I'm happy with that. So that makes, really, it makes the day-to-day much better. I feel very grateful that I can just relax peacefully at home. There's really nothing worse, I think, than having your day disturbed by other people, for example, playing really loud music or having lots of parties and things like that, and you can't sleep. You know, maybe I was guilty of that when I was at uni, but we were all together. We were in a uni residence, so it didn't matter. We were all keeping each other awake. But when you're sort of working full-time, all you want is just, let me sleep. Let me do my thing. Please don't bother me.

Andrew: Anna, I'm wondering if this is a thing, either in the UK or in Spain, because it is in Canada, but it isn't in Korea, as far as I know. In Canada, you can get your driver's license when you're 16 years old. And this is something that many high schoolers aim to do. They want to get their driver's license as soon as possible because, especially in the medium-sized and smaller-sized cities in Canada, there's not very good public transportation, maybe just some buses that run infrequently. And so, if you get your driver's license, then you have some freedom, and you can buy a cheap used car, and

yeah, you have freedom. And so, a lot of students, that's what they do. They get their driver's license when they're 16 years old. They buy the cheapest used car that they can find. And then, not every student, of course, but many students, and especially the guys, I think. And, I remember this was a thing when I was in high school, and it's still a thing now, they will deck their cars out with subwoofers and really powerful sound systems. And then they just pump their music as loud as they can, just these huge stereos.

Like, I remember some of my friends in high school would literally fill the trunk of the car with subwoofers, and they would just be these extremely loud sound systems, and then they'd drive around, and you'd hear them coming from a mile away, just pumping some hip hop beats or something, and this big, deep bass sound. And so that was really a genuine kind of sound pollution, like very, very annoying, and a little bit dangerous in my opinion too, because they can't hear sirens, they can't really focus maybe on some other cars around. And so, yeah, I don't know. Sometimes still in Canada, you'll hear these people driving with these really, really loud sound systems. Is that a thing in the UK or in Spain at all?

Anna: In the UK, yes. When I was younger, I used to see people doing that type of stuff. I haven't seen any of those sort of zooped up, I think they call it, zooped up cars or something.

Andrew: Souped up, yeah.

Anna: Souped up.

Andrew: Yeah.

Anna: But yeah, I'm surprised they haven't made themselves deaf. I mean, the volume of those type of speakers is absolutely insane. I did used to remember some people driving around with that sort of thing. But I was wondering whether we could talk about comforting

sounds, because I have a few friends, and guys, maybe you're in the same position as well. I'm thinking about one person in particular, and they cannot sleep if they don't have the sound of something in the background, like a fan. Specifically for this person, it's a fan. So, they have to sleep all night with just a fan, very, very low power, but just a fan going off in the background. And I find that fascinating, because for me, I'm the opposite. I need complete silence. But they cannot sleep if they don't have that background noise, which I just find so interesting. I don't know whether, Andrew, you have anything like that background noise or whatever that helps you to relax.

Andrew: Yeah, I've heard of people like that, that like to have some white noise or a fan going. I recently stayed with my brother. I slept on his couch in his living room, and I think it was my first night there. We woke up in the morning, and we were drinking coffee, and I asked him, "How'd you sleep?" And he said, "Oh, I didn't sleep very well because you turned off the bathroom fan." He went to bed first, and then I went to bed later, and when I used his bathroom, I turned off the light, and I turned off the fan in his bathroom. But I guess he usually keeps that fan going, and it's similar to your friend. That white noise that the fan produces really just helps him to sleep well, and so he was like, "I should've told you, but you gotta keep that fan on at night."

Anna: Yeah, it's not the first thing you think. You think, well, I'll turn it off because it's probably gonna really annoy them, but actually, it's like a sleep aid. I think it's because some people find silence actually worse because, in a way, if it's silent, you can hear every tiny little thing, like if there's a little sound or a little noise. So, what my friend told me is that the fan actually, in a way, just provides that uniform sound in the background so you don't actually pick up on the little sounds that you might hear during the night. Just fascinating. I found it really, really interesting, but also, I mean, wow, the electricity bill. I don't know, maybe a fan doesn't use up that much power, but really, really interesting. For me, if I wanna relax, I do really like meditation sounds, ambient music, and I'm really into that, and I will listen to that throughout the day if I wanna focus or concentrate. So, I love that type of ambient meditation music. That is just the best. I really, really enjoy listening to all of that

stuff, more than, let's say, the top hits and whatsoever is in the charts. I don't even know if they call it that anymore, but that sort of stuff relaxes me. It makes me feel energetic. It focuses me. So, I love that type of music, and I actually pay an app because they have this specific type of music that I really like. So, it's just, yeah, that kind of ambient music, I would say. I love that.

Andrew: Yeah, have you ever heard, I might mess the pronunciation up of this, and if you know what I'm talking about, Anna, help me with how to pronounce this word. I think it's called binaural beats. Am I pronouncing that correctly?

Anna: Right.

Andrew: B-I-N-A-U-R-A-L, binaural beats, maybe.

Anna: We'll go with that.

Andrew: Guys, this is the thing. Sometimes even English native speakers don't know how to pronounce words when we haven't heard other people say them before. You only see it, and you're like, how do I say this? But essentially what this kind, this genre of music, I don't know the science behind it, but I've listened to it and used it before, and I found it helpful for what I'm trying to focus or concentrate. It's like that style of music that you were talking about, Anna, kind of ambient music with lots of synthesizers and just very calming music, almost new age music. And in the background, they also play a hum that is vibrating at a certain frequency. And that frequency is supposed to have some effect on your brain that leads you to focus or leads you to deep concentration. And I have no idea about the science behind it at all. I'm not sure if it works or not from a scientific perspective. But some of these things, you know, if you just trust it and you think it's gonna work, then sometimes you can have that **placebo effect**. Like, so I don't know, I've used that before while I'm doing some important work where I need to focus, or even I sometimes play it when I'm playing chess. And I thought, oh, it kind of gets me into the

zone. It's just focusing music. So yeah, I think those kinds of sounds, whether it's scientific or not, I'm not sure, but it does, I like to think, have an effect on me.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's supposed to match your brainwaves or the frequency of your brainwaves or something along those lines, I remember. And another thing that I do sound-wise is I turn off all notifications on my phone. So, one thing that I cannot stand, like I hate it with a passion, is like, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. Oh, that just makes me, it triggers me. It's very triggering for me, that sound. I think it would be good, actually, Andrew, if we explain triggering, how would you explain triggering? Because that's a word, actually, that the guys listening to this might hear a lot at the moment.

Andrew: "Triggering" means something that creates a strong reaction in somebody. So, it causes you to have a strong reaction and usually a negative reaction. You'll see this word a lot of times maybe before discussing something like a movie or a book where maybe there's a lot of violence in the book, for example. And so, they will say, "Trigger warning, this book contains a lot of violence." And if violence is something that, maybe you had an experience in your past where you were the victim of violence or something like that. And that could cause you to have, yeah, just a bad reaction and make you feel bad. Well, then maybe you wanna stay away from reading this book. So, a trigger warning is that kind of warning. And here, Anna, you're talking about a triggering sound. So, this is a sound that causes you to have a certain type of negative reaction. And in this case, it's those notifications from your phone. And I completely agree. My phone is on do not disturb mode almost all of the time. The only time when I turn it off is when I know that my wife is maybe out and I'm waiting for her to come home or I know that maybe she'll call me and I wanna make sure that I don't miss anything. But when I do turn that do not disturb mode off and I have the sound on and it's like email notification, this, this, this, this, I'm like, oh, I'm going crazy. I really can't stand it. We're on the same page there.

Anna: Can't stand it at all. And I mean, don't get me wrong. There's not loads of people that are contacting me or anything like that. You know, I'm not really a very into bad

person or anything. It's just, I don't know what it is. It's like when I hear it, I'm just like, "Oh, I don't wanna hear that!" So, **I'm ruthless with notifications**. I get rid of all of them. I don't like the sound notifications on that. And there's another sound actually, which I find really triggering, which is, I don't know if you Andrew or guys, you've ever used Zoom, which is a online meetings platform, let's say. And when somebody joins a meeting, it has this little sound, which is like, diddit, diddit? And I don't know what it is. I don't know what they've done with that sound, but it just hits me somewhere. And I'm like, I wanna kill myself. I don't know what it is, but it's like, there's something about that sound. And the problem is if you're wearing headphones and if you've forgotten to turn down the sound, you're waiting for somebody to join the meeting. The sound's really high. And then it's like, diddit, right in your headphones, in your ear. And you're like, oh my goodness. It looks like a shock, you know, shock through your whole body. Yeah, I'm not so keen on that, but I don't know what it is. It's just something about the way they've made that sound. It just sends a shiver down my spine.

Andrew: Totally, I totally know where you're coming from. Those drive me crazy too. Any kind of computer or notification sound, something that especially breaks your focus while you're trying to work at the computer, definitely those have to be off because they are extremely annoying and distracting. Anna, I don't know if you have, or if you can relate to this at all, but here in Korea, in general, there is a culture of being quiet in a public space. So, if you're riding on the subway or on the bus, in general, I would say it's better than Canada, better than Western countries that I've been to, where people, for the most part, are respectful in a public... shared public space. And so, I would say 99.9% of people just have their headphones in. And if they, you know, sometimes if it's a really busy subway, people will chat with their friends. And in those kinds of situations, actually, I don't mind either because it's so busy. There's just the chaos of so many people being on public transportation at the same time that it's OK. But recently I was on the train and I was going to the countryside and there was an announcement when I got on the train. It said, please be quiet in this car. No talking with your friends. If you get a phone call and you need to talk on the phone, then you should go into the space in between the cars. There's like a

little lounge area and some washrooms and stuff. Go over there and have your conversation. That's the talking zone, but inside the main train car, this is a quiet zone, no talking.

And it was only about two minutes after that announcement went off that somebody's phone rang and they picked up the phone and they were just like **gabbing away** for the next 20, 30 minutes. And nobody said anything. The train staff who comes through the train every 10 or 15 minutes or so just to check on things didn't say anything. And it **made my blood boil**. I don't know why it was so triggering. I got so upset that this guy was talking in the quiet area. I thought, you know, if this was in Canada, probably it would be OK because we wouldn't have that kind of rule. But I think it was more the blatant disregard for the rule. I think my personality is like, if there's a rule, we must follow the rule. And it wasn't so much the talking as the rule breaking that got me, but it really, yeah, it triggered me. I felt upset and I don't know. Yeah, I didn't say anything. Of course, I'm not, you know, I'm one of those people who will stew silently. And "stew" just means they're sitting angry, right? You're just sitting there angry. I'm stewing, but I'm silent. I'm not going to confront somebody. But yeah, I don't know. Do you ever have anything like that? Like some people in public, maybe playing music on their phone without any headphones or games, those kinds of things, does that drive you crazy too?

Anna: I mean, good grief, Andrew, you wouldn't last 10 minutes in Spain. I mean, this is definitely not your country if you're not into that sort of stuff. Spain is an interesting country because the people are wonderful, but they are very expressive. And something I had to get used to is that when you go to a restaurant in Spain, I'm making a generalization here, guys, OK, based on my experience. But when you go to a restaurant, the sound just starts going up, up, up, up, up, up. And then you're like, oh my goodness, I can't hear myself think. So, I do find that people in Spain in general and the public places can be quite loud. And you'll find that people do speak really loudly on the Metro or whatever.

And I have one specific experience where I remember getting the train from Madrid to Salamanca, which is a city in the West of Spain. And there were four girls sat behind me, four teenage Spanish girls. And I can't tell you the sound that they generated. It must've been picked up on the Richter scale of earthquakes because they were, I cannot tell you how loud they were. It was, they were just chatting and talking and they were just, the sound was just going up and up and up and up and up. I was like, how is this possible that four people have generated this level of sound? And when they got off, so this is the carriage, they got off at one of the stops on the way and everybody collectively in the carriage was like, "ahhh." Oh my God, it was like a violation on our eardrums. So yeah, it's something you get used to here, I think. There's not these kind of rules about being quiet and things like that. But it would **boil my blood** as well if I was in a quiet carriage and somebody whipped out their phone and started having a full-on conversation. It's the quiet carriage. If you wanna chat, go to the normal carriage.

Andrew: Yeah, I think we just must respect the rules. It's the rule-breaking more than the sound that got me, I think, yeah. Anna, before we wrap things up here and we will end shortly, I wanted to ask you about your unique podcast recording style. I just learned this about you recently, actually, and I was so shocked to hear about how you record your podcast. I don't think you do this with Culips, it's just with your other podcast, Confident Business English. But could you tell us about your unique podcast recording style?

Anna: Of course. When I did some coaching for my podcast and to train my voice, I was given a really, really good tip by somebody that does a lot of voice acting. And they said, when you record, try putting, at a low level, music in the background, something cheerful, depending on the mood that you wanna give, cheerful, sad, melancholy. Put the music at a low level in the background and record, because it's gonna help you, in my case, sound a little bit more upbeat and it also helps your voice follow a rhythm alongside the music. So often when I'm recording my podcast, Confident Business English, and it's just me by myself, I just have this sort of coffee shop jazz in the background and, I don't know, it just helps your voice sound sometimes a little bit more upbeat. Upbeat just means happy, a

little bit more cheerful, a little bit more joyful. And I think this is, even in a way, there's another thing that I think this links back to, which is that famous case of people, when they stutter.

And when you stutter, you get stuck on certain syllables, certain words. And there was, I think there's this technique where if you play music to people who stutter and then they try and speak, they can speak much easier without the stutter. So, I think there is something about music while speaking, which can be really, really nice and helps you to get a good rhythm. So, it could be useful if you're doing presentations or even sometimes in meetings, I do it at a very, very low level, just to, I don't know, give it a bit of a vibe, a bit of an atmosphere, you know? So yeah, that's how I like to record my podcast. And I think it does make a difference.

Andrew: Interesting, so you just have the music on in your headphones. Obviously, the listener is not exposed to the music. OK, so it's just for you. I've never tried that. I've never even considered doing that, but maybe I'll try it for a Culips episode. Maybe I'll throw some tunes on. I definitely, you know, I've done some video editing before. And when you're editing video, maybe you'll have just the audio track and then you throw some background music onto the video. It does really change the whole vibe of the tone, right? The vibe and the tone is really different. So yeah, maybe that would change the way that you speak. If you had that moody music in the background, maybe it could make you sound more energetic or enthusiastic. And also, I think that's a great point about speaking to the rhythm of the music could help you maybe for **finding your groove** or finding your intonation pattern, all of these things. So, I'm going to try that out. And maybe our listeners as well could try speaking English to music and see if that could help maybe even for English speaking practice. I think that's a great idea. I'm going to try it out.

That brings us to the end of this episode. Talk to you next time, bye!

Detailed Explanations

First thing in the morning Phrase

In the episode, Anna asks Andrew, "What do you hear **first thing in the morning**?" She is asking about the first sound he hears when he wakes up. This phrase is used when talking about something that happens right at the beginning of the day, before anything else. It helps show that the action or event takes place as soon as someone wakes up.

"First thing in the morning" means doing something immediately after waking up or as soon as the day begins. For example, if you say, "I'll check my emails **first thing in the morning**," it means you will do it as soon as your day starts. This phrase is often used when making schedules, setting priorities, or talking about daily routines. If you like to exercise early, you might say, "I always go for a run **first thing in the morning**."

The phrase likely comes from the idea that morning is the first part of the day, and doing something "first thing" means doing it as soon as possible. Some common synonyms for this phrase are "right away in the morning" or "as soon as I wake up." On the other hand, an antonym would be "last thing at night," which means doing something before going to bed.

To remember this phrase, think of your own morning routine. What is the first thing you do after waking up? Maybe you drink coffee, check your phone, or take a shower. If someone tells you to do something **first thing in the morning**, it means you should do it before anything else that day.

Here are a couple more examples with **first thing in the morning**:

Maya: Did you take out the trash? It's starting to smell.

Tim: Ugh, I forgot. I'll do it **first thing in the morning**.

Maya: You better! The garbage truck comes at 7 AM.

Dan: The Wi-Fi isn't working again! I need it to finish my project tonight.

Jess: Ugh, not again. I'll call the internet company **first thing in the morning**.

Dan: Please do. I can't go another day without a stable connection.

Placebo effect

Noun

In the episode, Andrew talks about binaural beats, a type of music that is supposed to help people focus. He says he isn't sure if there is real science behind it, but when he listens to it, he feels more concentrated. He suggests that this might be because of the **placebo effect** – when people feel an improvement just because they believe something will work, even if it has no real effect.

The **placebo effect** happens when someone experiences real changes in how they feel, but only because they expect a treatment to work, not because the treatment itself is effective. For example, if a person takes a sugar pill but believes it is a strong painkiller, they might actually feel less pain. The **placebo effect** is commonly studied in medicine, but it can also happen in other areas, like music, relaxation techniques, or even lucky charms.

The term **placebo** comes from Latin and means "I shall please." Doctors first used it in the 1700s when they noticed that patients sometimes got better just because they believed they were being treated. Another phrase related to the **placebo effect** is "mind over matter," which means that belief can influence reality.

To remember the **placebo effect**, think of a time when you believed something helped you, even if there was no real reason. Maybe you wore a lucky shirt to an exam and felt more confident, or you drank a caffeine-free drink but still felt more awake because you thought it had caffeine. The **placebo effect** shows how powerful our minds can be!

Here are a couple more examples with **placebo effect**:

Noah: My headache disappeared so fast after I took that new pill! It must be really strong.

Lisa: Actually, that was just a vitamin. It looks like the **placebo effect** worked on you!

Noah: No way! So, my brain just made me feel better?

Mark: Did you hear about that new drug trial? Half of the people took real medicine, and half took a placebo.

Linda: And some of the placebo group still felt better?

Mark: Yeah! That's the **placebo effect** in action.

Linda: It's crazy how powerful the mind is!

To be ruthless with [something]

Phrase

In the episode, Anna says, "I'm **ruthless with notifications**. I get rid of all of them." She means that she is very strict and does not hesitate to remove or silence notifications on her phone. This phrase is used when someone makes firm and sometimes harsh decisions about something, without feeling bad about it.

"**To be ruthless with [something]**" means to be very strict or decisive about something, without showing hesitation or mercy. If someone is **ruthless with their time**, it means they do not waste any of it. If someone is **ruthless with their diet**, they avoid all unhealthy foods without exceptions. This phrase is often used when people are making tough choices and need to be firm.

The word "ruthless" originally meant "without pity or mercy." It is often used to describe tough businesspeople or competitors, but in everyday life, it can simply mean "being strict" about something. A synonym for "ruthless" in this context is "strict" or "uncompromising."

To remember this phrase, think of a boss who is **ruthless about work**—if an employee is late, they get in trouble immediately. Now, imagine applying that attitude to something in your own life. If you are **ruthless with distractions**, you remove anything that takes your focus away. Being **ruthless with clutter** means throwing away unnecessary things without hesitation.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be ruthless with [something]**:

Olivia: I keep skipping workouts because I'm too tired after work.

Jake: You need to **be ruthless with your schedule**. Block out time for exercise.

Olivia: I guess I could wake up earlier... but that sounds painful.

Jake: Come on, it's not so bad!

Michael: I heard they're making changes in the company.

Anna: Yeah, management has **been ruthless with budget cuts**. A lot of departments are losing funding.

Michael: That's tough. I hope our team doesn't get affected.

Anna: Me too.

To gab away

Phrasal verb

In the episode, Andrew tells a story about a man on a train who was **gabbing away** on his phone for 20 or 30 minutes, even though there was a rule about staying quiet. Andrew got frustrated because the man ignored the rule and kept talking.

"To gab away" means to talk a lot, usually in a relaxed and informal way. If two friends are chatting excitedly at a café for hours, they are **gabbing away**. The phrase is often used when people are enjoying a conversation, especially when they lose track of time. For example, if someone says, "We **gabbled away** all night," it means they talked non-stop without noticing how much time passed.

The word "gab" comes from an old English term meaning "to chatter or talk a lot." A common synonym is "chat away" or "talk non-stop." Be careful when using this phrase – it's often playful, but it can sound negative if someone is talking too much in an inappropriate situation (like Andrew's train story).

To remember **"gab away,"** think of a time when you were having such a fun conversation that you completely lost track of time. Maybe you were talking with a friend about a trip, a favorite TV show, or just sharing funny stories. When people **gab away**, they enjoy the conversation and don't feel rushed.

Here are a couple more examples with **to gab away**:

Emily: Did you see Sarah and Lisa this morning?

Ned: Oh yeah, they were **gabbing away** at the coffee machine for at least 40 minutes.

Emily: I don't get how they have so much to talk about every single day.

Ned: I know! Meanwhile, I just need my coffee and five minutes of peace before I start work.

Sophie: Did you talk to that guy in the blue shirt at the party?

Chris: Yeah, he just kept **gabbing away** about his job. I couldn't get a word in!

Sophie: Same! He told me his entire career history. I don't even remember his name, but I know every detail about his last three jobs.

Chris: I had to pretend I got a text just to escape.

To make [one's] blood boil

Idiom

When describing the situation on a train where someone ignored the quiet zone rules and talked loudly on their phone for a long time, Andrew says, "**It made my blood boil.**" He means that the situation made him extremely angry, to the point where he felt physically upset. This phrase is used when something makes you so mad that you feel it in your body – your heart races, your face gets hot, or your muscles tense up.

"**To make [one's] blood boil**" means to become very angry about something, usually because of unfairness, disrespect, or annoyance. For example, if someone cuts in front of you in a long line, it might **make your blood boil**. If a coworker takes credit for your work, that could also **make your blood boil**. This expression is often used to describe a reaction to rudeness, injustice, or frustrating behavior.

The phrase comes from the idea that when people are very angry, their blood feels like it's "boiling" inside them. While there's no actual change in body temperature, strong emotions like rage or frustration can make your heart beat faster and your face turn red. A similar expression is "to see red," which also means to be extremely angry.

To remember this phrase, think about a pot of water on the stove. When it heats up slowly, it starts bubbling and eventually boils over. Anger can feel the same way – it builds up until you're ready to explode!

Here are a couple more examples with **to make [one's] blood boil**:

Emma: I stayed up all night finishing our group project because Alex didn't do his part.

Harry: Are you serious? That would **make my blood boil**.

Emma: Yeah, and then he had the nerve to say, "Great job, team!" during the presentation.

Harry: Unbelievable. Next time, we're picking a different partner.

Ethan: My teacher gave me a bad grade with no explanation.

Lily: Did you ask why?

Ethan: I did, but he just shrugged. That really **made my blood boil**!

Lily: That's ridiculous!

To find [one's] groove

Idiom

In the episode, Andrew talks about how playing music while recording a podcast might help Anna **find her groove**. He means that listening to music could help with speaking rhythm and energy, making it easier to speak naturally and confidently.

To find [one's] groove means to become comfortable and confident in something after some practice. At first, you might feel awkward or unsure, but after some time, things start to feel smooth and natural. This expression is often used when talking about sports, work, learning a skill, or creative activities. For example, if you start a new job and struggle at first but then start working smoothly, you could say, "It took a few weeks, but I finally **found my groove**."

You can use this phrase in many situations. If you start learning how to dance, at first you might feel uncoordinated, but after practicing, you **find your groove** and move confidently. A writer who struggles with writer's block but later starts writing easily could also say, "I finally **found my groove**, and now the words are flowing."

This phrase comes from music and dance. In jazz and other music styles, a "groove" is a steady, smooth rhythm. When musicians **find their groove**, they play in a way that feels natural and effortless. A similar expression is "get into the swing of things," which also means getting used to something and feeling comfortable.

Here are a couple more examples with **to find [one's] groove**:

Nina: How's your new job going? I remember you said the first week was stressful.

Dean: Yeah, the first few days were rough, but I'm starting to **find my groove**. I'm getting used to everything now.

Sophia: That's great! Once you get comfortable, work becomes much easier.

Alex: Driving feels so stressful! There's too much to think about.

Ella: That's normal. Once you practice more, you'll **find your groove**.

Alex: I hope so. Right now, I feel like I forget everything once I start the car.

Ella: Don't worry, that's more common than you'd think.

Expression Quiz

1. Which situation best describes the placebo effect?

- a) A new medicine works immediately because it has strong ingredients.
- b) A person feels sick after taking medicine.
- c) A doctor gives a patient the wrong medicine by mistake.
- d) Someone feels like their headache improved even though the pill they took was just made of sugar.

2. If your friend says they are being ruthless with their wardrobe, what are they doing?

- a) Throwing away or donating a lot of clothes without hesitation.
- b) Buying more clothes to replace old ones.
- c) Organizing their closet without getting rid of anything.
- d) They're breaking their wardrobe.

3. Which of the following best describes someone gabbing away?

- a) Staying silent and listening to others.
- b) Giving a short and serious speech.
- c) Talking non-stop about different topics.
- d) Speaking very little and only when necessary.

4. What might make your blood boil?

- a) Watching a relaxing movie.
- b) Hearing someone insult your best friend.
- c) Drinking a hot cup of coffee.
- d) Eating spicy food.

5. What does it mean to find your groove?

- a) Start feeling comfortable and confident in what you're doing.
- b) Dance to your favorite song.
- c) Follow someone else's instructions exactly.
- d) Become lost and confused in a new situation.

Comprehension Quiz

6. What inspired Andrew to talk about sound in this episode?
7. How does Anna currently wake up in the morning?
8. What does the word "jarring" mean, according to Anna and Andrew?
9. What is the main reason Andrew got upset on the train in Korea?
10. Why did Anna say Andrew wouldn't last 10 minutes in Spain?

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What do you hear **first thing in the morning**? Do you use an alarm, wake up to natural light, or do something else? How does it affect your mood for the day?
2. What sounds make you feel relaxed or happy? For example, do you like the sound of waves, birds, or rain? Which sounds do you find triggering?
3. Some people need white noise, like a fan, to sleep. Others prefer total silence. What about you? Do you have any habits or sounds that help you sleep?
4. Have you ever experienced the **placebo effect**? For example, did you ever take medicine, drink a special tea, or use a product that you thought worked, but later realized it might have just been your belief that made the difference?
5. What is something that **makes your blood boil**? Is it when people talk loudly in a quiet space, when someone cuts in line, or something else?

Quiz Answers

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

6. The discussion about the "no-scent zone" in a previous episode made him think about the senses.

7. With a light that gradually turns on.

8. A sound that stops you in your tracks and is unpleasant.

9. Someone was talking in a quiet zone, breaking the rules.

10. Because Spanish restaurants and public places are often very loud.

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