

## Chatterbox #117 – Study habits

### Informal Contractions in this Episode

Informal contractions are unofficial short forms of other words, and they're usually only used in casual conversation. For example, when a native English speaker talks casually, they might say *gonna* instead of *going to*, or *whaddya* instead of *what do you*. Even though informal contractions are usually only used in spoken English, we include them in the Culips written transcripts to help you get used to how they're used and what they sound like.

These are the informal contractions used in today's episode, along with their meanings:

- **'cause**: because
- **dunno**: don't know
- **gonna**: going to
- **gotta**: got to
- wanna

### Transcript

Andrew: Hi. I'm Andrew.

Harp: And this is Harp.

Andrew: And we're here with another Culips episode.

Harp: Yes. Make sure you check out our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, because there you can find all our older episodes. Do you know that we've had episodes from 2008?

Andrew: I actually didn't know that.

Harp: We have 5 years of episodes, so go to the website and check it out.

Andrew: Check out our long and wonderful history.

Harp: Yes. And while you're at the website, you should sign up and become a member, because when you're a member, what do you have access to?

Andrew: Yeah. When you sign up to be a member, you get our Learning Materials, which includes full transcripts of our episodes. So you can see everything that we've said. If there's something that you don't quite understand, well, look at the transcript and see what it is and figure it out. Um... You also get detailed explanations of the most important expressions that we mention in every episode. And you get a quiz, which can test your comprehension.

- Harp: Exactly. And remember, if you wanna say hi or you have a suggestion for an upcoming episode, leave it on Facebook or send us a tweet on Twitter.
- Andrew: Tweet at us. Yeah, we love to hear your suggestions for new episodes. So, Harp, what's happening? What's new?
- Harp: I'm actually **looking to take a French class**.
- Andrew: Really?
- Harp: Yeah. I'm feeling comfortable, but I really wanna work on my written French and I need to improve my grammar.
- Andrew: Yeah. Grammar. No fun, is it?
- Harp: No, it's not fun at all. But it's important, so I'm looking for a French class and I'm hoping to start in a couple months.
- Andrew: Sounds great. Good luck.
- Harp: Thanks. And that's interesting, because today we're bringing you a Chatterbox episode, which is where we chat about cultural things, sometimes we interview people, and today we're gonna talk about studying.
- Andrew: Yay! Studying; my favourite thing.
- Harp: Yeah. You do a lot of it, 'cause you're in school right now.
- Andrew: Yeah. **I'm right in the thick of it**. I guess this is my fourth semester of my master's degree, and I study all the time.
- Harp: Very, very interesting. So today in the Chatterbox, we're just gonna talk about study habits, studying in Canada, and our experiences studying in university.
- Andrew: Yeah. So, Harp, where did you go to university? What's your background?
- Harp: I went to the University of Alberta and I did my bachelor's degree in **political science**. And then, when I moved to Montreal, I went to McGill and I did a certificate in **human resources**.
- Andrew: Human resources. What made you decide to switch from **poli-sci** to **HR**?
- Harp: Uh... I couldn't really find a job in anything related to **political science**.
- Andrew: Classic story. Yeah.

- Harp: And you've done a bachelor's degree, and now you're doing a master's, right?
- Andrew: Yeah. I studied history and English before. And now I'm studying linguistics, so I also did a change from my BA to my grad studies. Yeah.
- Harp: OK. So, you're in your fourth semester, Andrew. Does that mean you're almost done?
- Andrew: I'm almost done, yeah. I'll be finished in the spring. It's great. There's **light at the end of the tunnel** for me.
- Harp: So interesting. Now, how long has it been between your bachelor's degree—since you finished your bachelor's degree—to when you started your master's?
- Andrew: I took 3 years off in between my BA and my MA.
- Harp: And what do you find the differences are? Like, in terms of studying and different ways of learning?
- Andrew: One thing that I've really noticed is that I don't have to write as much for my master's degree. And I'm not talking about writing papers, because I do that a ton now, but I'm talking about physically writing. Before, I had to always take notes in class. I was writing like crazy. I had a callous on my finger from where my pen hit my finger, because I would write so much. But now, everything is electronic. If I do take notes in class, I just type them up. And that even doesn't happen very often because all of my professors put their notes, their PowerPoint slides, on the Internet, so I can just see them up there.
- Harp: Ah, yes. I actually experienced the same thing. I remember having to write so many notes, and the same thing: having a callous where you would just write and write and write in class.
- Andrew: Yeah. And now if I do have to write something, like an exam or a quiz, in class, it really shocks me. Because I'm like, "Why am I doing this?" Like, my hand doesn't know what to do. It gets cramped up after a couple of minutes. It's really pathetic. And it's sort of sad. Like, we're losing the art of writing. And my handwriting now is super sloppy, and I'm always afraid that the professors can't read it. But it's just the way that things are going. We're switching to electronic note taking.
- Harp: Yeah. I wonder if there's ever gonna be a time when we're writing our exams on computers at school.

- Andrew: Well, a lot of my quizzes that I do have to take are online now. And I just take them whenever I want. There's **a window**, like, **a 24-hour window**, and I just log in and write the quiz at my house.
- Harp: Wow. So much has changed since I was in university.
- Andrew: One thing that I've noticed too, 'cause I do some teaching on the side, and I've noticed now that when I teach kids, they completely don't know what taking notes is and what they do is they pull out their cellphone and take pictures of the blackboard.
- Harp: **Stop it!** Really?
- Andrew: Yeah. That's what kids do these days. They don't even take notes at all. It's a foreign concept to them. They just take a snapshot of the blackboard.
- Harp: That's hilarious. I had no idea kids were doing that.
- Andrew: And I've started doing that now too. I've learnt it from them. And all my classmates make fun of me for that, but it's way more efficient. It's good.
- Harp: It's genius, actually, is what it is.
- Andrew: There is, I've gotta say, **there is something to be said for** the physical act of taking notes. I think it helps me remember stuff. So when... Especially when I'm studying, I like to physically write out things, but I never read that again. You know, I just write it and then throw it out, just to get it in my brain.
- Harp: Yeah. I actually... I'm the same as you. I really... I learn by writing, so when I was in school, I used to write a lot of notes, even after. Like, I would summarize what the teacher said or I would summarize what was in my text book.
- Andrew: Mmhmm. Yeah.
- Harp: Now, I have a question for you about textbooks. Are your textbooks online or do you still have to buy a book?
- Andrew: Good question. Both options are available. You can buy an e-book. I have a Kindle, and I can download the e-books, often. Or I can buy a physical book. Usually, what I try to do is just find a classmate who's already taken the course and buy the physical book off them, because I hate reading textbooks and papers on my Kindle. It's no good.
- Harp: I agree with you.

- Andrew: I like to underline things and make little notes in the margins, and you can't do that. You can do that with an electronic reader, but there's just something missing. It just doesn't quite work.
- Harp: I was a big fan of highlighting in my textbook.
- Andrew: Yeah. It makes it difficult to sell at the end of the semester after I've had a little bit of time with the book, 'cause I just completely make it unreadable for the next person.
- Harp: Yeah. But if you're buying it second hand at least you saved the money there.
- Andrew: Yeah. Yeah. That's what I like to do.
- Harp: Now, I wanna go back to this: taking quizzes online.
- Andrew: Sure.
- Harp: OK. Because I was thinking when I was asking the question of whether we're gonna have computers where people are gonna take exams, is that it'll be easier to cheat. Now, do you have a time limit for this quiz? Is it **open book**? Do you have your text book there and you can just take as long as you want? Or how does it work?
- Andrew: They are usually timed, yes. But you are allowed to have your textbook. There's no way that the teacher can stop you from just checking in your book. But... So let's say I'm writing a quiz and it's a 25-minute quiz. As soon as I hit the link to get into that quiz, in the top corner there's a big countdown clock that just slowly counts down, well not slowly, it's actually pretty fast, second by second by second. And it's the most stressful thing. Doing these quizzes online is way worse than in person. In person, it's chill. You're with all your friends, your classmates, **you're in it together**. But when you're by yourself in front of this computer, and it's just... With the countdown clock, it's super stressful.
- Harp: That does actually sound really stressful.
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Harp: Now are these quizzes multiple choice or do you have to write out long answers?
- Andrew: Usually, yeah, writing out answers, not multiple choice.
- Harp: OK.

- Andrew: And, yeah, if you have only 25 minutes, having the book there is worse, too, because you're like, "I don't need to study. I got this. I have the book." But then the countdown clock goes on and you're, like, flipping through your book trying to find the answer and, yeah, it's no good.
- Harp: OK. So you have to study in advance still?
- Andrew: Yeah. **I learned that lesson the hard way** one time.
- Harp: That's funny 'cause even when I was in school and I had some classes with **open-book exams**, I rarely even looked in the book. I had to really prepare before and prepare the concepts before.
- Andrew: Yeah. I think it's better just to know your stuff if you can. **Get it down.** It's better for everybody, better for you, better for the teacher.
- Harp: Yes. Now, about knowing your stuff: Do you memorize things or do you have to learn the concept? How does it work in your master's right now?
- Andrew: Yeah. Definitely you want to try and think about the big picture, and I don't think there's memorization of facts too much. Of course, there's some fact memorization for everything, but, yeah, it's trying to connect concepts and zooming out and seeing the whole sort of field, I guess.
- Harp: And another question for you, because I found this in my bachelor's degree, that as I was going into the higher-level classes, the **400-level classes**, which were my fourth-year classes, I had to do more papers. How is it when you're in your master's?
- Andrew: One thing that's changed for me from the BA to the master's is there are a lot more presentations to do. So, most of my marks come from... There'll be one big paper every semester for each class, and one big presentation every semester for each class. And I think why that is is that class sizes are just much smaller now. When I did my BA, there would be, maybe, 30 people in every class and it's just not feasible to have a presentation from every student. But now, I have maybe 8 to 10 people in every class and there's time for everybody to get up and demonstrate what they know and show off a little bit. So, yeah, I have lots of presentations to do now.
- Harp: I'm intrigued. What kinds of things are you presenting about?
- Andrew: Um... This semester there's a lot of research presentation. There's not... I mean, we do a ton of reading already, but one way to sort of share information about research is to have every student read some papers and present them to the class about that topic for each week. So let's say we have to read three research papers for every class, then a student will present a fourth one. So we just get exposed to extra ideas.

- Harp: OK. So the four papers are all related to one topic; three that are assigned by the teacher and the student picks one and then they're presenting on all four of them all together?
- Andrew: Exactly, yeah.
- Harp: And do you have to read all of those papers as well?
- Andrew: No. Well, we would read three out of the four and then one student would have **double duty**, just for that one week, and they would have to present the fourth paper.
- Harp: Oh. OK.
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Harp: That's interesting. I hate giving presentations, so I would really not like that format at all.
- Andrew: I hate it too. It's, like, my worst nightmare. But it's good for me. It's, like, sort of forcing me. I feel more comfortable making presentations now that I just have to do it all the time. It's just a fact of life.
- Harp: Do you have any tips?
- Andrew: Um... Practice. Yeah, practice your presentation. The first time you say it to yourself, it's kind of rusty, and the second time it gets better, and the third time it's good. And then if you do it the fourth time as your actual presentation, it's just really smooth.
- Harp: Practice makes perfect.
- Andrew: Absolutely, yeah.
- Harp: And, OK, for you master's, I know that some master's are course based and some are **thesis** based. Which is yours?



- Andrew: I am doing the course-based option, which makes me kind of feel like a slacker a little bit because, I dunno, a lot of my colleagues are writing **theses**. And it just seems like a real cool thing that you get to do. You get to come up with your own idea and do some original research and write this big, long paper. It sounds pretty fun. But I decided to not do that. I'm taking the course-based option. Usually, people who take the **thesis**-track option are more interested in going on to do their PhD, and they want to pursue their own original research, and maybe they want to be professors or researchers. Whereas the course-based option is more for people who want to gain experience and more exposure to the field and want to do something like teach, which is what I'm more interested in.
- Harp: OK. So it's more, kind of, practical versus theoretical?
- Andrew: Exactly, yeah.
- Harp: OK. So I remember doing my bachelor's degree, and even my certificate here at McGill, that once in a while I'd have to pull an all-nighter. Do you have to do that right now in your master's or are you, kind of, spacing out your studying, making sure you're constantly studying so you don't have to cram the night before?
- Andrew: I feel like, at this point, it's going to be all-nighters for the rest of the semester. Like, it's really starting to get bad.
- Harp: Oh yeah? You have so much work right now you think you're gonna have to do all-nighters all semester?
- Andrew: I don't know about all-nighters, but I think I feel like I'm sleeping about 5 hours a night because there's just too much work to do.
- Harp: Wow!
- Andrew: It's dumb, but, yeah.
- Harp: And so is it mainly reading? Is it mainly writing papers? What is the majority of your work right now?
- Andrew: It's mostly reading, to tell you the truth. Writing's not so bad. I like writing. I'm good at writing. But it's just reading.
- Harp: So you're reading your textbook plus research papers as well?



- Andrew: Mostly research papers. Yeah. There's not that much textbook reading anymore. There's a little bit, but it's mostly reading research. I feel like the first year is sort of getting you caught up with some of the big theories and big ideas, and now that **I've got those under my belt**, it's more looking and critiquing research, and that sort of thing.
- Harp: OK. So you're pretty close to being done. There's **light at the end of the tunnel**.
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Harp: And so you want to be a teacher afterwards?
- Andrew: I have no idea. Very typical story about university students. I don't know. I could see myself teaching, but I really don't know.
- Harp: OK. The world will be your oyster.
- Andrew: Yeah. It's exciting and horrifying at the same time.
- Harp: So you're gonna finish in the spring? That's in May or June 2014?
- Andrew: Um... Yeah, that's my plan. We'll see if it happens, hopefully. If I stay on track, it should be around then.
- Harp: OK. So you're finishing this semester and then you have one more semester left. That's it, right?
- Andrew: This semester finishes in December, I guess. Early December. Then I have to write my comp exam, which is gonna be scary. And if that goes well, then I do the winter semester and then I'm finished.
- Harp: What's your comp exam?
- Andrew: This is for people who are not writing the **thesis**. If you're doing the course-based option, you have to still do a big work just to sort of show that you've understood some of the major concepts.
- Harp: So it's, like, a really large paper?
- Andrew: Yeah. Exactly. What you have to do is they give you a paper that you have to read and critique, and you have to write a literature review about this paper. So that means you have to understand the idea of the original research paper, and then go and look at all the literature that's related to that paper and write a review on that topic. And then you have to link that to an area that you're interested in, so a special research area.

- Harp: Wow!
- Andrew: You write two papers. One that reviews the literature and one that's about your interests. And then you have to defend that in front of a panel of three professors.
- Harp: That's pretty intense.
- Andrew: Yeah. It's gonna suck. I'm really not looking forward to it.
- Harp: You're pretty stressed out about it?
- Andrew: Uh... Yeah. I dunno. I think each paper ends up being around 40 pages each. That's what I've heard, so. And it's right before Christmas, which kind of sucks. You only get 3 weeks to do it. It's not a lot of time.
- Harp: So the paper that you're gonna write is gonna be 40 pages? The two of them each?
- Andrew: I think both, yeah. So it's about, like, 80ish pages.
- Harp: And how long are the research papers that you have to read?
- Andrew: Uh... They vary. Some are short. The good ones are short, like maybe 10 pages. But mostly they're probably around 30 pages each.
- Harp: And does your professor assign the research paper that you have to review?
- Andrew: Yeah. That's right. We don't know what it is, so hopefully it's on something that I'm familiar with and that I've studied before and that I know about. Because if it's something that I'm not too comfortable with it's gonna be much harder.
- Harp: So basically you're given this research paper that could be anywhere from 10 pages to even, maybe, 100 pages, let's say?
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Harp: And then you have to write two papers on it, each of which are 40 pages, in 3 weeks and then defend it in front of a panel of three people.
- Andrew: Yeah. But then I get to go home for Christmas after, so...
- Harp: You're definitely gonna need to relax during Christmastime.
- Andrew: I know. I'm gonna take it very easy. But I feel like once this is over with, and that's the big hurdle of the degree, then **it's downhill from there.**

- Harp: Nice. It's easy; **smooth sailing** after that.
- Andrew: But what is really stupid is if you write a **thesis**, it's maybe 40 to 50 pages, max. So it's almost more work to do this course-based option.
- Harp: It sounds like much more work. Maybe they just expect more out of the **thesis**, as well.
- Andrew: I think so too. And it's your own ideas. It has to be original, whereas this is more just sort of reviewing other people's ideas.
- Harp: OK. Very interesting. I think we should stop there.
- Andrew: Yeah. I'm happy to stop right here.
- Harp: OK. So I think that gave you guys a good understanding of our experiences of studying and how things have changed in Canada, and studying in universities, and learning a little bit more about Andrew's program, which is very interesting.
- Andrew: Yeah. If you have any questions about studying in Canada or if you're interested in studying linguistics in Montreal, let me know.
- Harp: Perfect! Um... As usual, check out our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, because there, you can sign up, become a member, have access to the Learning Materials, which gives you a transcript, detailed explanations, and also a quiz.
- Andrew: Yeah. That's right. And thanks for listening. We'll catch you next time.
- Harp: Bye everyone.

## Detailed Explanation

### To be looking to do something

**To be looking to do something** means to be interested in doing it and to be looking for a way to do it. This usually means that you're investigating the options, since *looking* implies searching or considering.

For example, if you're **looking to buy a new winter coat**, it means that you're researching or investigating the options for a new coat.

Here's another example with **to be looking to do something**:

Micha: What are you up to for the winter break?

Narumi: I'm hoping to go to someplace warm!

Micha: Oh, that sounds nice! Anywhere in particular?

Narumi: Well, maybe Hawaii. I've been **looking to do some surfing**, since I haven't done it in so long.

Micha: Sounds fun! Take lots of pictures!

### In the thick of it

**To be in the thick of it** means to be in the middle of something, or to be involved in something complicated. **To be in the thick of it** implies that you're involved in something at the most active or complex stage of a situation.

Here's another example with **to be in the thick of it**:

Dewi: Do you want to grab something to eat after work?

Carmen: I'd love to, but I can't. I have so much research to do for this assignment.

Dewi: Wow, you've been working on that a lot.

Carmen: Yeah, right now I'm really **in the thick of it**, so it's taking up a lot of my time. It should get easier soon.

Dewi: I hope it does! We haven't been able to hang out in weeks!

### Poli-sci, HR, and other short forms

In this episode, Andrew asks Harp what made her decide to switch from **poli-sci** to **HR**. Both **poli-sci** and **HR** are short forms of the names of subjects in school. **Poli-sci** is the short form of **political science**, and **HR** is the short form of **human resources**.

There are quite a few short forms like these for areas of study. For example, people use **bio** to mean **biology**, **soc** (pronounced like the word so, but with a *sh* sound at the end) to talk about **sociology**, and **e-con** to talk about **economics**.

These short forms are used specifically to talk about school subjects, and are not used very often outside of school. For example, if someone becomes a social worker, they are not called a **soc** worker, and if someone becomes an economist, they are not called an **e-con**.

Here are a few more common subject short forms:

- **Comp sci**: computer science
- **Chem**: chemistry
- **Stats**: statistics
- **Lit**: literature

### The light at the end of the tunnel

When you can see **the light at the end of the tunnel**, it means that relief, or the completion of something, is near. This expression is usually used to talk about getting through something unpleasant, complicated, or difficult.

This expression probably comes from the idea of train going through a tunnel. When a train goes through a long tunnel, it's dark and a bit scary, because neither the driver nor the passengers can see the track. So, when you see the light at the end of that tunnel, it means that the scary situation of going through the tunnel will soon be over.

Here's another example with **the light at the end of the tunnel**:

Jackson: How's your essay coming along?

Jerome: I've finished 36 out of 40 pages. I'm almost done!

Jackson: Oh, good. It's so nice to see **the light at the end of the tunnel**.

Jerome: Yeah, especially since I've been working on it for so long.

### A window

In this episode, Andrew tells Harp that he has a **24-hour window** to complete an online test after he opens the link. What Andrew means by **a window** is a certain amount of time, in this case, 24 hours, that is available to get something done.

Actual windows are openings in houses that let light and air in, and allow you to see out of the house. So, if we think about **windows** as openings, **a window** of time just means an opening of time.

Here's another example with **a window** used in this way:

Hailey: Hey, can I borrow a dollar? The snack machine just ate mine.

Badi: Did you leave it in there for a while before choosing which snack you wanted?

Hailey: Yeah, I put the money in before I decided what I wanted, and after a few minutes it just ate my money and didn't let me choose a snack.

Badi: I know. It's a terrible machine. You only have **a 2-minute window** after inserting your money to choose a snack. Here's a dollar.

Hailey: Thanks. I think I'll talk to the office manager about that. It's not fair that it just takes your money.

Badi: Good idea. Good luck!

### Stop it

In this episode, Harp says **stop it** to Andrew when he talks about students taking pictures of the blackboard with their phones instead of taking notes. When used this way, **stop it** is a casual way of expressing shock or disbelief at something.

There are other variations of this expression, such as **shut up**. Although these expressions might sound like you're telling the other person to stop talking, they actually just mean that whatever the person is saying is shocking to you. These expressions are almost like rhetorical questions, which are questions that are not supposed to be answered, but are there to emphasize something. In the same way, **stop it** and **shut up** sound like commands, but they're just ways of expressing or emphasizing astonishment.

Because these expressions sound like commands, you should only use them casually, and with people who will understand that they are not actually commands.

Here's another example with **stop it**:

Nigel: Did you hear who's moving back home?

Delio: No, who?

Nigel: Sebastian Colmes.

Delio: **Stop it!** Are you serious? I thought he loved Florida!

Nigel: He does. But he got offered a job here that he couldn't turn down.

Delio: Wow, that's surprising. It will be nice to have him back in the area though. He's a lot of fun to hang out with.

### There's something to be said for...

**There's something to be said for** \_\_\_\_\_ means that there's greater importance to something than it would appear at first glance. It means that there are advantages to something. Another way of saying **there's something to be said for** \_\_\_\_\_ is **there's a lot to be said for** \_\_\_\_\_.

Here's another example with **there's something to be said for** \_\_\_\_\_:

Crestel: Why aren't you wearing your winter jacket? It's freezing outside!

Tanise: It needs to be washed and I haven't got around to doing it. I hate hand washing things.

Crestel: Why don't you just bring it to the drycleaner?

Tanise: I prefer to hand wash stuff. I feel better about doing it myself rather than sending my clothes to a stranger.

Crestel: Yeah, there's definitely **something to be said for** hand washing clothes. Then you know it's really clean, too.

Tanise: Exactly. I'm planning to wash it this weekend.

Crestel: You'd better. It's supposed to snow on Monday!

### An open-book test

**An open-book test** is a type of test during which you're allowed to have the textbook with you, open, while you write the test. You're allowed to use the textbook to help you with the test. These tests are sometimes very hard, or there is not a lot of time to write them, so having the textbook with you is really not much of an advantage at all.

Here's another example with **an open-book test**:

Sandor: I think I really messed up my last exam.

Yvan: Really? But wasn't it **an open-book test**?

Sandor: Yeah, but all the questions had to do with the lectures, and not the textbook at all!

Yvan: Oh, that's sneaky! You didn't have your notes with you?

Sandor: No, nobody did. Only our textbooks.

Yvan: Oh, well, I'm sure you did fine. You didn't miss a single lecture this semester.

Sandor: Yeah, I just hope I remembered everything the professor said in the lectures!

### To be in it together

**To be in it together** means to be a part of something, or to not be alone in something. In this episode, Andrew talks about how nice it is to write exams in class instead of online, because all the students are sitting together sharing the stress of writing an exam. **They're all in it together**. But when you write a test online, you do it alone.

**To be in it together** is usually used when you're talking about the support and comfort of not having to do something by yourself.



Here's another example with ***to be in it together***:

Oseas: I'm really dreading this weekend.

Pakorn: I know. It's too bad they had to schedule the workshop on the weekend, because it's just like going to work.

Oseas: Exactly. Well, at least we all have to go.

Pakorn: Yeah. It helps that ***we're all in it together***. It might even be fun.

To learn something the hard way

***To learn something the hard way*** means to learn something in an unpleasant way, or to make a mistake before figuring something out. Sometimes ***learning something the hard way*** is the best way to learn it, because if the outcome was unpleasant, you're more likely to remember it and avoid that mistake in the future.

Here's another example of ***to learn something the hard way***:

Jane: Aren't you going to class tonight?

Mel: I don't think so. I'm just going to read the textbook instead.

Jane: Well, I'd consider going if I were you. I had Mrs. Kerpowski last year, and ***I learned the hard way*** that it's important to attend all the lectures. Half of the final exam is about things she says that have nothing to do with the textbook.

Mel: Oh, no. Thanks for the warning. I'll probably go to tonight's class then.

To get something down

***To get something down*** means to master it or learn it really well. This is actually a short form of ***to get something down pat***. ***Pat*** is an old word that means perfectly or properly, but it's not used very much today.

Here's another example with ***to get something down***:

Wellington: Are you trying out for the school play this year?

Sinho: I doubt it. Last year I forgot my lines and it was so embarrassing.

Wellington: Yeah, it's really hard ***to get all the lines down***. But I'm sure you covered it well.

Sinho: Yeah, I don't think anyone noticed, but it was hard to pretend that everything was OK!

400-level classes

In this episode, Harp and Andrew mention **400-level classes**. In most Canadian universities (and probably many other universities too), the course number (also called the class number) signifies what level the course is. The course number usually corresponds to the year of the student it is intended for. For example, **200-level courses** are for students in their second year of university, and **300-level courses** are for students in their third year. So for example, in your second year of university, you might take a course called English 206, or 254, or anything starting with 2. Introductory courses for first-year university students are often numbered 101,

Here's another example with the expression **400-level classes**:

Tyson: How is your course load this semester?

Marianne: Pretty good! I was smart enough to take two **400-level classes** in my third year, instead of having to take them all in my fourth year.

Tyson: I didn't even know you can take **400-level classes** in your third year!

Marianne: Well, you have to apply to do it. But I'm glad I did now, because I have a really light work load this semester, which is so nice.

Double duty

When you have **double duty**, or do **double duty**, it means that you have two responsibilities at once. In this episode, Andrew uses this expression to talk about how each week, one student in his class has to read and learn three papers just like everyone else, but also has to present a fourth one. Because that student has two tasks that week, Andrew says that they have **double duty**.

Here's another example with **double duty**:

Jenyx: Do you want to go to a movie tonight?

Izabel: I can't. I'm babysitting and dog-sitting!

Jenyx: Oh no! You're doing **double duty**?

Izabel: Yeah, which I'm not looking forward to, because the dog is still a puppy and needs a lot of attention.

Jenyx: It can be stressful to have two responsibilities at once. Do you want me to help?

Izabel: That would be great! I'll ask Mr. Jefferson if it's all right.

Jenyx: Perfect! I love dogs, so I can take care of the puppy. And we can watch a movie on TV instead of going out.

Izabel: Sounds awesome. I'll get back to you when I hear from Mr. Jefferson.

Thesis and theses

In this episode, we hear the singular **thesis** and the plural **theses**. This is an unusual way to pluralize a word, but there are a lot of English words that are similarly difficult to figure out the plural of, even for people who have been speaking English their whole lives.

For example, the word *data* seems like a collective singular noun, like *information*, but *data* is actually the plural of *datum*, which is a single piece of information, but isn't used that often in everyday speech. Because of this, some English speakers struggle with whether to say *the data is* or *the data are*.

Some words, such as **thesis**, might seem to be plural because there's an S sound at the end. *Moose* is another word that people struggle to find the plural of. Some people say *mooses*, but the plural of *moose* is actually just *moose*. This can get confusing, because there's no hard and fast rule. For example, the plural of *moose* is *moose*, but the plural of *goose* is *geese*.

To have something under your belt

**To have something under your belt** means to have accomplished, succeeded in, or finished something that may be of use in the future. We recently did an episode that dealt with this expression, called *Introducing Emily*.

The origin of this expression is believed to be related to food. If you've eaten a meal and it's now in your stomach, it's literally under your belt. Food is nourishment and fuel for life, and so is experience and education. So, if something **is under your belt**, it's something good for you that you have finished.

Here's another example with **to have something under your belt**:

Tess: How'd the job interview go?

Signy: Pretty well. I think they liked my education and experience. They were really impressed with my knowledge of Italian.

Tess: I hear that it's really good to know another language when you apply for jobs.

Signy: Yeah. I was really glad **to have Italian under my belt**. I think it may have gotten me the job.

It's downhill from there

**It's downhill from there**, or **it's downhill from here**, means that everything that follows a certain point is either easy or effortless. Sometimes this is confused with the expression *to go downhill*, which means to get worse. This can get confusing, because the expressions **it's downhill from there** and *to go downhill* sound very similar to each other but mean almost opposite things.

The origin of the expression **it's downhill from there** is pretty simple, and refers to walking up or down hill a hill. **It's downhill from there** comes from the fact that walking downhill is a lot easier than walking uphill.

Here's another example with **it's downhill from there**:

Freddy: Have you finished the assignment for sociology yet? I'm only on the second part and I'm really struggling with it. It's so time-consuming and difficult.

Rungroj: Yeah, but **it's all downhill from there**. The third and fourth parts are super easy.

Freddy: Oh, good. I'll look forward to finishing this step then!

### Smooth sailing

**Smooth sailing** means easy or stress free. This expression comes from a very old phrase, dating back to the 1300s, and was used by people working on boats to talk about when sailing was easy because the weather was nice and there were no waves in the water.

Here's another example with **smooth sailing**:

Lalo: Have you taken anthropology? I have an exam in it next week and I'm worried about how hard it's going to be.

Thamy: Yeah, I took that class last semester. The exams are actually pretty **smooth sailing**. They're all multiple choice, and the correct answer is usually pretty obvious because the other answers are too silly to be correct.

Lalo: Oh, that's so good to hear. Thanks! I'll let you know how it goes.

## Quiz

**1. What does it mean if you're in the thick of something?**

- a) You're really close to being done.
- b) You're in the middle of, it at its most active stage.
- c) You haven't even begun.
- d) You're repeating something you've done before.

**2. If the end of a difficult project or time is near, you can say that you see the \_\_\_\_\_ at the end of the tunnel.**

**Fill in the blank.**

- a) light
- b) sail
- c) window
- d) book

**3. A specific opening in time or availability in time is sometimes called \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Fill in the blank.**

- a) a window
- b) a door
- c) a light
- d) an epic

**4. A test where you're allowed to use the course book is called which of the following?**

- a) an open-book test
- b) a closed-book test
- c) an open-window test
- d) an essay

**5. If you learn something the hard way, what does that imply?**

- a) You learn it by having the textbook open.
- b) You learn it in a classroom.
- c) You learn it by making a mistake that affects you negatively.
- d) You learn it by watching someone else do it.

6. If you have two responsibilities at once, you have \_\_\_\_\_ duty.

**Fill in the blank.**

- a) single
- b) plural
- c) many
- d) double

7. If you have something under your belt, what does that mean?

- a) You always study for a test the night before.
- b) You never have to do any homework.
- c) You have achieved something that will help you later.
- d) You failed at something and have to do it over again.

8. If something is easy, we can say that it's \_\_\_\_\_ sailing.

**Fill in the blank.**

- a) smooth
- b) wavy
- c) window
- d) tunnel light

**Answers:**

1.b    2.a    3.a    4.a    5.c    6.d    7.c    8.a