

Real Talk #005 – Shoe shopping

Episode description

When you don't have the right pair of shoes, just getting around can be a real pain. Join Andrew and Morag as they share the essential vocabulary for shoe shopping. Because when you need a new pair of shoes, you need them right away—even if you're visiting an English-speaking country!

Fun fact

Canada has a museum dedicated to shoes! The Bata Shoe Museum is located in Toronto, Ontario, and focuses on shoes over the past 4,500 years. In fact, the BSM has a collection of more than 13,000 shoes and shoe-related artefacts!

Expressions included in the learning materials

- I like your shoes; did you get them in town?
- Where is your sale section?
- Can I try these on?
- Can you show me your [blank]?
- I don't know what shoe size I am. Could you help me?



Transcript

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

Andrew: Hi, I'm Andrew.

Morag: And I'm Morag.

Andrew: And you are listening to Culips.

Announcer: If you want to learn English for everyday use, you've come to the right place. At Culips, we help make English understandable. By listening to our podcast, you can learn natural expressions and conversational structure. If you're interested in learning more about Culips and what we do, check us out on Facebook or our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Thanks for listening. We hope you enjoy this episode.

Morag: Today we are doing a Real Talk episode, in which we focus on practical expressions for everyday use. So, in today's episode, we are going to take a look at some vocabulary we use to shop for shoes.

Andrew: Yeah. Have you ever had to use English when shopping for shoes? Today, we'll look at expressions that come in handy when you're shopping for some new kicks.

Morag: And we will start by listening to a dialogue between a customer at a shoe store and the employee that is helping her to find her new shoes.

Andrew: Mmhmm. And then we'll closely examine the dialogue and go over all the key vocabulary and expressions that we hear.

Morag: And, lastly, we'll finish the episode by playing the dialogue one more time so that you can take another listen closely.

Andrew: All right, let's get started. Here's today's dialogue:

Sales clerk: How are you doing? Can I help you find anything?

Customer: Ah, it's OK, I'm just looking around for now.

Sales clerk: Sure. If you need anything, just let me know.

Customer: Sure. Wait, um, actually, excuse me? Do you have anything like, this but in black?

Sales clerk: In black? I'll take a look in the back. What size are you?

Customer: I'm an 8.

Sales clerk: OK, I'll be right back.

OK, I found something I think you're gonna like.

Customer: Oh, they're cute!

Sales clerk: Yeah, try 'em on, see how they feel.

Customer: Hey, do you have a mirror anywhere?

Sales clerk: Yeah, just over there.

Customer: OK, thank you.

Sales clerk: So? What do you think?

Customer: Well, I mean they look good, but they're kind of uncomfortable. They're sort of narrow in the toe. I don't think they're going to work.

Sales clerk: They just need to be broken in. They'll be tight for the first day, but after that, they'll be the most comfortable shoes you've ever owned.

Customer: OK, well, I think you've sold me because they are really cute so ... OK, I'll take them.

Morag: So, in that dialogue, we just heard an interaction between a customer, who's shopping for shoes, and a sales clerk. Now, we'll take a closer look at the key expressions that we heard in the dialogue.

Andrew: So today we have five key expressions that we will examine. And the first one is *do you have anything like this, but in black? Do you have anything like this, but in black?* So this is a question that the customer asks the sales clerk when she wants to know if they have a similar shoe to the one she is pointing at, but in a different colour, in black. So we can use this kind of question construction when we're asking sales people about the type of stock that they carry. We could say, "Do you have anything like this, but with a high heel?" or "Do you have anything like this, but in leather?" So, yeah, in this dialogue, the customer wanted a similar-looking shoe but in a different colour. She wanted it in black so she asked, "Do you have anything like this, but in black?"

- Morag: Our second key expression is *what size are you?* And this is a question that the sales clerk asked the customer. It's very common. You will hear this in any shoe shopping or clothing shopping experience in English. *What size are you?* There are a lot of different types of sizing, though, so it's kind of difficult. In North America, I'm an 8, but in Britain or the EU, I'm a 39. So you might have to do a little bit of research to see what the sizing conventions are in the place that you're trying to buy your shoes. But no matter what those are, you will always hear someone ask the question *what size are you?* because you need to have a shoe that fits.
- Andrew: Yeah, and so you raise a good point here. In different areas of the world, you use different numbers to convey your size. And in Canada, I think it's the most simple sizing system, really, because the numbers are low, so if you're a man you're probably between a size 8 and I don't know, a size 12, maybe? Probably 9 or 10 is the most common. And if you're a woman, what is maybe the average size? I don't know.
- Morag: Average sizes for a women would be anywhere from 6 to 10.
- Andrew: Definitely, if you're ever going to visit Canada and you plan on doing some shopping, research our sizes before you come. It will save you some hassle in the shoe store.
- Morag: Definitely.
- Andrew: OK, so our next expression is *try 'em on and see how they feel*. *Try 'em on and see how they feel*. So this is something that the sales clerk says to the customer after he gives her the shoes that she requested. So he went to the back of the store, into the stockroom, found the shoes she wanted, gives them to her, and then says "Try 'em on and see how they feel." And so, yeah, this is just something that you will hear from a sales clerk. He just wants you to test the shoes, to make sure they're comfortable, to make sure you like the way that they look and the way that they feel. So this is probably an expression that you will hear more than you will use, but you know, if you're shopping with a friend and your friend is kind of hesitating, do I want to buy this item? Do I not? Well, you can tell your friends, "Hey, just try it on and see how it feels. Maybe it will be perfect, or maybe you'll hate it right away." This can help them make up their mind, I think.
- Morag: I think you're right. It's also important to make sure, like, you have the right size to try something on and see how it feels.
- Andrew: Yeah. And so one last thing about this expression, *try 'em on*. This is really sort of a casual way of saying *try them on*, but I think in fluent, everyday speech, the *them* gets reduced to an *'em*. So we say *try 'em on*, *try 'em on*, not *try them on*. It's just a little easier to pronounce, but this could be a little bit confusing, so the *them* in this expression is reduced to *'em*. *Try 'em on*.

- Morag: All right. So our fourth key expression is *they're a little narrow in the toe*. This is something that our customer says to the sales clerk to express that the shoe is a bit uncomfortable. So she says, "They're a little narrow in the toe." *They're a little narrow in the toe*. And that means that they're not wide enough, there isn't enough room in the toe area for the customer's foot.
- Andrew: Mmhmm. So there may be pinching at the top of the shoe.
- Morag: Mmhmm. *They're too narrow*, so narrow and wide—if there's too much room, you can say *it's too wide*, *too narrow*, there isn't enough room. So can you think about what other expressions other than *narrow* and *wide* you could use to talk about a shoe being uncomfortable?
- Andrew: Well, you know, it's pretty easy for me to think of some expressions, but I'm curious about all the listeners out there. What are some other ways we can talk about shoes being uncomfortable? We're going to pause for a moment and let you think, and then Morag and I will share some of our thoughts with you. So, here's 20 seconds—if you need longer, pause the podcast and we'll be right back and we'll talk about all the different ways you could describe a pair of shoes being uncomfortable.
- OK, Morag, I think that's long enough. What came to your mind?
- Morag: *Too small, too big, too tight, it's rubbing my heel ...*
- Andrew: Yeah, so essentially, we can always just say something is *too small*, *it's too big*, *it's too tight*, *it's too uncomfortable*, *it's too this*, *it's too that*. All right, this is a great way to describe a pair of uncomfortable shoes and these are all expressions you can use when you are at the shoe store looking for some new shoes.
- Morag: And you can always—to be more specific—you can always say *it's too tight on my [blank]*. So *it's too tight on my big toe*, *it's too tight on my heel*, or *too wide*, that sort of thing. You can get a little bit more precise with any of those by saying *on my* and then specify a part of your foot.
- Andrew: Definitely. OK. And our last expression for today is *they just need to be broken in*. *They just need to be broken in*. And this is what the sales clerk says to the customer after the customer says that the shoes are a little bit uncomfortable. And so the essential part of this expression is the verb *to break in*. And when you break in something, you wear it or use it until it becomes comfortable. And so, we usually say that a new pair of boots or a new pair of shoes, they need to be broken in. You need to wear them for a little bit until the shoes adjust to your feet and they're comfortable for you to wear. This is what we mean by *breaking in*.

- Andrew: So, when the sales clerk tells the customer, “They just need to be broken in,” he’s kind of being a sneaky sales guy, isn’t he? He’s saying oh, even though they’re uncomfortable, they won’t be in the future. And who knows if this is true? Sometimes it’s true.
- Morag: Sometimes, I definitely think that’s true. Some of my favourite shoes are Birkenstocks and those do need to be broken in. They specifically conform to your feet, and they’re really uncomfortable for a little while, but then they get awesome. So you know, maybe he was right.
- Andrew: You never know. Buyer beware, right?
- Morag: Yeah. It’s usually better to find shoes that are comfortable right off the bat.
- Andrew: OK. Well, those are the five key expressions for today’s episode. Now we’re going to play the dialogue for you one more time. So when you listen to the dialogue this time, really try to pay close attention to the expressions that Morag and I just discussed to see how they’re used, one more time. So here’s the dialogue again for you, right now:

- Sales clerk: How are you doing? Can I help you find anything?
- Customer: Ah, it’s OK, I’m just looking around for now.
- Sales clerk: Sure. If you need anything, just let me know.
- Customer: Sure. Wait, um, actually, excuse me? Do you have anything like, this but in black?
- Sales clerk: In black? I’ll take a look in the back. What size are you?
- Customer: I’m an 8.
- Sales clerk: OK, I’ll be right back.
- OK, I found something I think you’re gonna like.
- Customer: Oh, they’re cute!
- Sales clerk: Yeah, try ’em on, see how they feel.
- Customer: Hey, do you have a mirror anywhere?
- Sales clerk: Yeah, just over there.
- Customer: OK, thank you.
- Sales clerk: So? What do you think?

Customer: Well, I mean they look good, but they're kind of uncomfortable. They're sort of narrow in the toe. I don't think they're going to work.

Sales clerk: They just need to be broken in. They'll be tight for the first day, but after that, they'll be the most comfortable shoes you've ever owned.

Customer: OK, well, I think you've sold me because they are really cute so ... OK, I'll take them.

Andrew: Well, Morag, I think that's all we have time for today.

Morag: I think you're right, Andrew, but, before we go, I wanted to remind all of our listeners to visit Culips.com and consider becoming Culips members, because a Culips membership is perfect for people who are really serious about studying their English.

Andrew: Culips members get access to our learning materials, which are designed to help you improve your English skills and level up.

Morag: Yeah, the learning materials are really, really helpful and may be the best way to study while listening to Culips.

Andrew: Yeah, you'll get transcripts, detailed explanations of the key expressions that you hear during our episodes, plus bonus expressions, too, as well as quizzes for each and every episode.

Morag: Yeah, so check out Culips.com today to learn more about becoming a Culips member.

Andrew: That's it for now. We'll be back soon with another episode, so we'll talk to you soon.

Morag: Bye everybody!

Andrew: Bye!

Detailed Explanations

I like your shoes; did you get them in town?

Sometimes the hardest part about shopping is knowing what store to visit! ***I like your shoes; did you get them in town?*** is a useful phrase for finding out which shoe stores you might like.

If you see someone on the street and you really like the shoes they are wearing, try saying to them, ***“I like your shoes, did you get them in town?”*** This is a polite and complimentary way to talk to a stranger on the street. Because of the second phrase, “Did you get them in town?” the person you’re talking to will tell you if there is a store nearby where you can get the same pair! You could also ask, “Where did you get them?” but “Did you get them in town?” is a more direct phrase to use if you want to find out if you can easily buy the same pair of shoes.

Here’s an example with ***I like your shoes; did you get them in town?***:

Sandra is travelling and needs a new pair of walking shoes. She sees a girl on the street with just the type of shoes she’s looking for. So, Sandra walks up to the girl and starts speaking to her.

Sandra: **I like your shoes; did you get them in town?**

Stranger: Thank you! I got them in a little store just a couple of blocks away. It’s called L’Intervalle. All their shoes are designed here in Montreal!

Where is your sale section?

Sometimes, especially when you’re travelling, you don’t want to spend too much money on shoes you might not need again. If you need to buy a new pair of shoes but don’t want to break the bank, try asking the sales person, ***“Where is your sale section?”***

Most stores, including shoe shops, reserve a section of the store for sale items. These sections are not always easy to find, however, as they’re usually hidden at the back of the store. If you know you don’t have much money to spend, asking ***“Where is your sale section?”*** is an easy way to be directed to the lower-priced items in any store.

Here’s an example with ***where is your sale section?***:

Marc: Excuse me, **where is your sale section?**

Sales clerk: Oh, it’s at the back corner of the store, over there.

Can I try these on?

If you're shopping for shoes at a mall or in a busy store, the sales clerks are often very occupied. In these situations, a sales clerk might not approach you, and you will have to go to them. When you have found the shoes you want to try on, go to one of the sales clerks and ask, "**Can I try these on?**" They will ask what your size is and then bring you the shoes to try.

As always, if you want to be polite, you can add, "Excuse me" before you ask, "**Can I try these on?**"

Here's an example with *can I try these on?*:

Jessie is in a very busy store. She has found three pairs of shoes that she wants to try on. She takes the shoes up to a sales clerk.

Jessie: Excuse me, **can I try these on?**

Sales clerk: What size?

Jessie: I'm a size 8.

Sales clerk: OK, I'll just be a couple of minutes. You can wait on the bench and I'll bring them over.

Can you show me your [blank]?

Shopping for shoes can be an overwhelming process. There are often so many pairs of shoes for sale that it's hard to know which ones are right for you.

If you want to have some help finding the best pair for you, you can use the question, "**Can you show me your [blank]?**" All you have to do is fill in the *[blank]* with the type of shoes you need. For example, if you need a comfortable pair of walking shoes, you can ask, "**Can you show me your most comfortable shoes?**" If you need a pair of athletic shoes, you can ask, "**Can you show me your running shoes?**" If you're looking for a fancy pair of shoes, you can ask, "**Can you show me your dress shoes?**"

Here's an example with *can you show me your [blank]?*:

Henry is visiting a rainy city, but didn't pack any shoes that are good for walking in wet conditions. He goes to a shoe store and speaks to the sales clerk.

Henry: **Can you show me your shoes that won't get wet in the rain?**

Sales clerk: Absolutely. We have a couple pairs. Follow me.

I don't know what shoe size I am. Could you help me?

Finding the right size of shoe can be difficult. Whether you're travelling in a place that uses a different sizing system than you're used to, you're still growing, or you simply haven't bought shoes in a while, it's normal to be unsure what your shoe size is.

If you don't know what size you are, you can always ask for help! So, if you want to buy a pair of shoes but don't know what your size is, simply say to a sales clerk, "**I don't know what shoe size I am. Could you help me?**"

After you ask for help, one of two things will happen: they will ask you what your shoe size is where you're from, or they will measure your feet. Either way, you'll soon know what size to ask for the next time you go shopping!

Here are a couple of examples with ***I don't know what shoe size I am. Could you help me?***:

Julia is from Canada, but is travelling in Ireland. The shoes she brought with her are falling apart from too much walking. She has gone to a nearby shoe store and found some shoes she wants to try on, but she doesn't know what her size is in the European system. She approaches a sales clerk to ask for help.

Julia: I'd like to try these on, but **I don't know what shoe size I am here in the UK. Could you help me?**

Sales clerk: What's your usual size?

Julia: I'm a 6 in North America.

Sales clerk: I think a US 6 is either a 36 or a 37. I'll bring out both sizes and we'll see what works.

Julia: Thanks!

Paul hasn't bought new shoes in a while and can't remember what size he is. When shopping for running shoes, he approaches a sales clerk.

Paul: **I don't know what shoe size I am. Could you help me?**

Sales clerk: Sure. If you'll take a seat, I can measure your feet and find out your size.

Paul: Thank you—that's great!

Quiz

1. **What are you looking for when you ask, “Where is your sale section?”**
 - a) fancy shoes
 - b) discounted shoes
 - c) boat shoes
 - d) the newest style of shoes

2. **What’s another way to say, “Did you get them in town?”**
 - a) What store did you get them from?
 - b) Did you buy them downtown?
 - c) Did you buy them locally?
 - d) Did you buy them in a mall?

3. **True or false: “I don’t know what shoe size I am. Could you help me?” is particularly useful when travelling, because shoe sizes are different from continent to continent, and sometimes from country to country within a continent.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

4. **If you’ve found a pair of shoes and you want to see if you like the way they fit, what question should you ask a sales clerk?**
 - a) Can I try these on?
 - b) Can I put these on my feet?
 - c) Can I have these?
 - d) Will I like these?

5. **When asking for help finding shoes, what can you substitute for the *[blank]* in “Can you show me your *[blank]*?”**
 - a) a style of shoe
 - b) your preferred colour shoes
 - c) a quality, such as comfortable or waterproof
 - d) all of the above

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Morag St. Clair
Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates
Audio editor: Andrew Bates
Transcription: Transcript Heroes Transcription Services
Learning materials writer: Morag St. Clair
English editor: Stephanie MacLean
Webmaster: Hussain Mohammed
Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima
Project manager: Jessica Cox