

Simplified Speech #014 – Gift cards

Episode description

Choosing the right gift for someone can be hard! Gift cards are great last-minute gifts, but they can lack that personal touch. Do you have strong feelings about gift cards? Andrew and Suzanne sure do! Join them for today's episode as they have a slower-paced, natural conversation all about giving and receiving gift cards.

Fun fact

Before plastic gift cards, people used to give paper gift certificates. However, when colour printers and colour copiers became more widely available, it became easy to make fake gift certificates, and so gift cards were introduced in 1994.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- Knock it out of the park
- Rub (someone) the wrong way
- Chilly
- Personal touch
- Last minute



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: Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And my name is Suzanne.

Andrew: And we are back with another Culips episode.

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Andrew: Hey, Suzanne. How's it going?

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew. It's going well. It's been a little **chilly** here in Montreal. And you know what that means, when it starts to get colder—it means the holidays are approaching.

Andrew: Ooo, the holidays, yeah. Are you one of those people that's very organized and gets their holiday shopping done early? Or do you leave everything to the **last minute**?

Suzanne: Andrew ...

Andrew: Do I even have to ask this question?

Suzanne: What do you think? Do you even have to ask that question? It doesn't matter how much I prepare for the holiday season, I'm always scurrying around at the last possible moment.

Andrew: Yeah, I tend to leave everything until the last moment too. And something that people like us like to give these days are gift cards as presents.

Suzanne: Yeah, that's true.

- Andrew: So today, that's what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about gift cards. And I have to give a shout-out to one of our listeners, Tahani, because she requested that we talk about gift cards. So here we are, a whole episode about gift cards.
- Suzanne: Today we're going to do a Simplified Speech episode, where we have a natural conversation using everyday English, but we speak at a slower speed than we normally do.
- Andrew: That's right. And so today we're talking about gift cards. Yeah, I'm curious, Suzanne.
- Suzanne: Yeah?
- Andrew: Do you ever give gift cards as gifts?
- Suzanne: That's a good question. My mom gives gift cards quite often because our family lives all over the world. So I find that she tends to believe it's easier to send in the mail or online. But I don't really give gift cards to my friends that live nearby.
- But, I find sometimes that they can be a little impersonal, maybe generic.
- Andrew: Yeah, they don't have that **personal touch** to them like some other gifts may have.
- Suzanne: Yeah. But I think if they're specific, they will **knock it out of the park** as far as a good gift. I had a friend who just had a birthday, and we know that she loves to sew and to design clothing. But she doesn't have a lot of time to do it, and she wouldn't get herself this kind of gift.
- And we found, on the internet, someone in Montreal that gives private design and sewing courses, like 3-hour sessions. So we thought this is something she would never get for herself. But it's so specific to what she loves. So even though it was a gift card, it was very personal for her.
- Andrew: These are great gifts, I think. That's kind of a different take on the gift card, though, as we know it.
- Suzanne: Yeah, I think you're right. That's not a traditional gift card.
- Andrew: But maybe we should back up, actually. Could you explain quickly what a gift card is?

- Suzanne: Yeah, a gift card is an amount of money, usually specified on the card, \$25.00, \$50.00, \$100.00.
- Andrew: Any amount.
- Suzanne: Any amount, with an attachment to a store. So, on the gift card, it might say the name of a bookstore, or Amazon, or something.
- Andrew: You could get a gift card almost for any store, and even online stores, right?
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: The iTunes store, Amazon, grocery stores, bookstores, restaurants.
- Suzanne: Yeah, restaurants. Movies—you can get a movie gift card. And it's important to know what the person likes, because if you purchase something so specific like movies or, um, you know, a specific restaurant, you want to make sure they like it, right?
- Andrew: Right. You don't want to buy a gift card to a seafood restaurant for somebody that hates seafood, for example.
- Suzanne: Exactly. Or you can also purchase more general gift cards, like an American Express gift card or a Visa gift card.
- Andrew: Exactly. And, actually, last Christmas, that's what I received as a gift from my parents, was one of these Visa gift cards.
- Suzanne: Nice.
- Andrew: So, essentially, this is just like money.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: You can use it at any store.
- Suzanne: Well, I think there are benefits to that, because if it gets lost or stolen, there's a serial number on the back.
- Andrew: Right.
- Suzanne: They have a little bit more power, you know?
- Andrew: If it's just cash and you were to lose it, then it's gone.
- Suzanne: Yeah.

- Andrew: But with these cards, there is a little bit of insurance in that situation.
- Suzanne: Yeah, that's it, insurance. Yeah, insurance.
- Andrew: And so my mom ended up giving me this gift because she says I'm impossible to buy presents for. If she asks me what do I want or what do I need, I always just say, "Nothing. I don't need anything. I'm fine. I'm good." And so she said, "I don't know what to buy you, so I'll just give you this card." I think gift cards can be good in this situation, too.
- Suzanne: I think you're right, yeah. My mom also sends me certain gift cards. For example, she knows I like to buy makeup, for example, at Sephora. So she doesn't know what I would I want from there, but she knows I like makeup and I have a Sephora, so she can buy me a gift card.
- Andrew: I have another issue about gift cards that I'd like to talk about, one thing that kind of **rubs me the wrong way** about gift cards. And this is that it's very difficult to spend the whole amount.
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: So. Let's imagine I received a gift card to a bookstore for \$25.00, and I find a book that I want to buy that is \$23.00. So I buy the book, I'm happy. But I still have \$2.00 remaining on my gift card. Now, the bookstore won't just give me \$2.00 in cash, so either I lose that \$2.00—the bookstore gets to keep that \$2.00 for free—or I have to make another purchase to use that \$2.00.
- In this type of situation, I feel like gift cards, they benefit the store more than they benefit the consumer.
- Suzanne: I agree with you. That is totally true. Walking around with a \$2.46 on your gift card, it's very difficult to purchase maybe another book.
- Andrew: I don't want to complain about receiving a gift. It's always a nice thing to get a gift. But another thing that drives me crazy about gift cards, I get a lot of them piled up in my wallet and I don't remember how much money is left on them. I know I've used it before, so is there \$10.00 on this card? Is there \$2.00 on this card? Is there \$0.40 on this card? I don't know what to do.
- Suzanne: Yeah. Something popular among my friends and family is to give Starbucks gift cards, because, you know, that's helpful when you're wanting a coffee. Oh, a free coffee. However, um, \$25.00 doesn't go very far at Starbucks anymore.

Andrew: No, it doesn't.

Suzanne: One of the things my mom used to do, she had a marker, like a Sharpie marker, and she would write on the card. So her gift cards kind of had a bunch of writing on them, so she would, "OK, there's \$11.00 left," she'll write in marker. And then if she uses it again, crosses it out, "\$5.00 left."

So this way you know. Because sometimes, when you use the gift card, they give you a receipt with the amount left on the card.

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Suzanne: But, honestly, most of the time those receipts get thrown away.

Andrew: Well, your mom sounds like a very smart lady. And if I was organized enough to do that, it would be great.

Suzanne: Yeah, I'm definitely not organized enough to do it.

Andrew: Well, Suzanne, I think that's about it for today's episode. I want to thank everyone out there for listening to us talk.

Suzanne: It's always great to have you guys listen, and we really do appreciate it. And if you like this episode, why don't you leave us a five-star review on iTunes and like our Facebook page?

Andrew: And we have a website, too. It is Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com, and that's the place where you can listen to all of our back episodes. If you just can't wait until our next episode is released, well, listen to some old episodes.

You can find them on the website, and you can also learn about becoming a Culips member on our website, joining the Culips community and studying with our learning materials. So definitely visit our website.

Suzanne: Well, Andrew, that is it for us today. We'll be back soon with another Culips episode. Bye, everyone.

Andrew: Bye.

Suzanne: Bye.

Detailed Explanations

Knock it out of the park

Knock it out of the park is an expression that comes from baseball. When a batter knocks, or hits, a ball outside of the baseball park, they have an automatic home run. This is the best possible outcome for the batter.

So, when you **knock something out of the park**, you succeed at that activity in the best possible way. In other words, you do a fantastic job.

For example, if you got an A+ on a test, you could say that you **knocked it out of the park** on that test.

Here are a couple more examples with ***knock it out of the park***:

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| Amy: | Hey, Terry, you look a little worried. What's going on? |
| Terry: | It's OK, nothing's wrong. I'm just really worried about that job interview I have on Tuesday. |
| Amy: | Don't worry; I'm sure you're going to knock it out of the park ! |
| Terry: | Thanks. I hope so! |

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| Iain: | Hi Katherine! I haven't seen you in ages—how has life been? |
| Katherine: | Not bad at all! I'm just finishing the last couple of classes for my degree. |
| Iain: | What are you planning to do after? |
| Katherine: | I just heard that I got accepted to nursing school! |
| Iain: | Congratulations, that's great! How about you and Randy? Are you two still together? |
| Katherine: | We sure are! We're actually engaged and we plan to get married this summer. |
| Iain: | Wow, congratulations again! It sounds like you're knocking it out of the park ! |

Rub (someone) the wrong way

When something **rubs someone the wrong way** , the person is annoyed or irritated by it.

In this episode, Andrew mentions that there's something about gift cards that **rubs him the wrong way** . In other words, there is something about gift cards that really frustrates him.

Depending on where you are, there are two slightly different versions of this expression. In North American English, we say *rub the wrong way*, but in British English they say *rub up the wrong way*. While both are correct, the British version sounds strange to North Americans.

Here are a couple more examples with **rub (someone) the wrong way** .

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| Harold: | Can we please not invite Jessie over again? |
| Suzanna: | Why? She's a nice girl—what do you have against her? |
| Harold: | I don't know exactly. There's just something about her that rubs me the wrong way . Maybe it's her voice? It's really annoying. |
| Suzanna: | I think you're being ridiculous, but OK. I guess you can't help being annoyed by her voice any more than she can help how it sounds. |

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| Jeff: | Thanks for coming over to work on our project! You should go into the kitchen and meet my cat, Oscar. He's a sweetie. |
| Katie: | Oh no ... you have a cat? |
| Jeff: | I do. What, you don't like cats? |
| Katie: | I'm sorry, I really don't. I think they're horrible pets. They don't care about their owners, they have their washroom in the house, and they aren't cuddly. I don't understand why people like cats. |
| Jeff: | Wow, that rant really rubbed me the wrong way . Maybe we should meet some other time instead, and pick somewhere that is cat free so we don't run into this problem again. |

Chilly

The adjective **chilly** means uncomfortably, but not extremely, cold. You can use **chilly** in two senses: relating to temperature or relating to unfriendly people or situations.

In the autumn, you might hear someone using the first sense to say that it's **chilly** outside. In other words, when they go outside they notice immediately that the temperature is too cold to be pleasant. For example, in this episode Suzanne mentions that it's **chilly** in Montreal. By this she means that it's no longer pleasantly warm outside, but also not freezing cold.

You can also use **chilly** to talk about people or situations being unfriendly. When talking about people, **chilly** refers to a lack of emotional warmth and friendliness. If someone treats you in an unwelcoming or unkind way, you can say that they are **chilly** towards you.

Just remember that **chilly** never means extreme coldness, in either sense. **Chilly** is just cold enough to be uncomfortable.

Here are a couple more examples with both senses of **chilly**:

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| Sasha: | What do you want to do today? |
| Mark: | Wanna go watch a movie? |
| Sasha: | No, I'm not really in the mood for anything that's in theatres right now. |
| Mark: | How about going for a hike? |
| Sasha: | No way! Have you been outside today? It's chilly ! |

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| Hannah: | How was that dinner last night? Wasn't your ex-girlfriend supposed to be there? |
| Lee: | Yeah, she was there. It went OK, I guess. |
| Hannah: | Did you guys talk at all? |
| Lee: | I said hi, but she was really chilly towards me, so I just left her alone. |
| Hannah: | Sounds like a wise move. |

Personal touch

When you add a **personal touch** to something, you add a special element to something that is otherwise impersonal. A **personal touch** can be anything unique or original that you add to something.

In this episode, Andrew and Suzanne agree that, as gifts, gift cards lack a **personal touch**. That is because they are generic and not personalized. However, you could add a **personal touch** to a gift card by wrapping it in a handmade cardholder, for example.

Here are a couple more examples with **personal touch**.

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| George: | Did you enjoy going over to my parent's house for dinner last night? |
| Nina: | Yeah, it was lovely! Your mom is such a good host. |
| George: | I agree! Isn't she an awesome cook? |
| Nina: | Her food was really good, but what I really liked were the personal touches at the dinner table. I thought it was so sweet that there were handmade name cards for everyone. She even drew a little cat on mine—I love cats! |
| George: | I told you she was a great lady! |

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| Matthew: | Wow, that's a really cool new entertainment system you have. |
| Laura: | Thanks! It was pretty expensive, but I'm really happy with it. It's like I have a movie theatre in my living room now! |
| Matthew: | Where did you buy it all? |
| Laura: | This little audio store downtown. They are so nice there! |
| Matthew: | Oh yeah, did they give you a good deal or something? |
| Laura: | No, but they delivered and set everything up for free, which was great. And the owner sent me a letter thanking me for shopping with them. It was handwritten! |
| Matthew: | Personal touches like that letter make for such great customer service. I'll definitely check out that store next time I'm shopping for audio equipment! |

Last minute

Last minute can be either a noun or an adjective. In either form, it's about completing an activity or accomplishing a goal at the last possible time before a deadline. As a noun, it refers to the last possible moment something can be accomplished. As an adjective, it modifies whatever is being done at the last possible moment.

The most common way to use the noun form of **last minute** is in the phrase *leave it to the last minute*. Andrew uses this construction in this episode when he asks Suzanne if she leaves buying gifts until the **last minute**. In other words, he asks if she buys gifts ahead of time, or if she waits and buys them right before she needs them.

The adjective form of **last minute** is easiest to understand through examples. Imagine you have a letter that needs to be mailed today and the post office closes at 5:00 PM. If you wait until 4:50 PM to go to the post office, you are mailing a **last-minute** letter. Or if you wait until 10 minutes before you have to leave your house to take a shower, you are taking a **last-minute** shower.

Here are a couple more examples with both forms of **last minute**:

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| Ursula: | How did your test go? |
| Fred: | I'm not too sure, to be honest. |
| Ursula: | Did you study enough? |
| Fred: | I studied a ton! I studied for the whole 12 hours before the test! |
| Ursula: | Was that the only studying you did? |
| Fred: | Well, yeah. |
| Ursula: | Talk about leaving it to the last minute ! |

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| Janice: | I can't believe there are only 10 days left until Christmas! |
| Greg: | I know. Do you have all your presents bought yet? |
| Janice: | No, I don't. I still need to get something for my mom and one of my sisters. |
| Greg: | You better get that done soon! Getting caught in the last-minute Christmas shopping rush is horrible. |

Quiz

1. Completing something at which of these times would be the most last minute?

- a) two weeks before a deadline
- b) one week before a deadline
- c) one day before a deadline
- d) one hour before a deadline

2. When it's chilly outside, what kind of cold is it?

- a) mild
- b) uncomfortable
- c) extreme
- d) not cold at all

3. When you knock something out of the park, how well did you do?

- a) you failed
- b) you triumphed
- c) you did OK
- d) you didn't finish

4. True or false: Giving someone a hug when you give them a gift is a good example of adding a personal touch.

- a) true
- b) false

5. When someone gets rubbed the wrong way, they feel:

- a) happy
- b) surprised
- c) annoyed
- d) confused

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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