

## Real Talk #028 – Asking for something at a restaurant

### Episode description

Have you ever wanted to ask for something at a restaurant, but weren't sure of the best way to phrase it? In this episode, Andrew and Suzanne introduce a phrase that allows you to politely ask for anything at a restaurant. Look out for some useful pronunciation tips, as well!

### Fun fact

The world's largest restaurant is located in Damascus, Syria. There are 6,014 available seats in this restaurant. That's a lot of customers!

### Expressions included in the study guide

- To run out of [something]
- Whirlwind
- Could I get [something], please?
- Eavesdrop
- Vouch for [something/someone]
- To touch upon [something]





## Transcript

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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.

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Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hey there, Suzanne.

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

Andrew: It is going well. How about you?

Suzanne: Doing well. But, I have to say, this morning I **ran out of cereal**. Do you ever have that problem? Or do you eat cereal?

Andrew: I don't eat breakfast, so I never have that problem, but I could imagine that it's quite annoying.

Suzanne: Andrew, you don't eat breakfast?

Andrew: No, I'm not a breakfast guy. Just a coffee, that's it.

Suzanne: Interesting. Didn't know that about you. See that, everyone, we learned something new.

Andrew: Well, everyone, today's episode is a Real Talk episode. And Real Talk is the series where we teach you guys the English expressions that you need to know for real-world situations. And today we're going to teach you a very, very useful expression that you can use when you need to make a simple request at a restaurant. Suzanne, we were talking a little bit earlier about our summer vacations.

Suzanne: Yeah.



Andrew: And I just returned from a **whirlwind** trip throughout Asia, and my last destination was Vietnam. And when I was in Vietnam, I did a lot of **eavesdropping** on customers at restaurants because almost all the customers were tourists from various parts of the world. And I heard many, many people trying to communicate in English, but doing a really poor job. They were unwittingly being rude at the restaurant and to the servers because they didn't know how to make a simple request at the restaurant. And this got me thinking, well, I need to do something to help these people. I need to correct this. So this was the inspiration for this Real Talk episode.

Suzanne: It's Super Andrew to the rescue. Well, that's a great idea and I agree, as someone who has been a waitress at a very touristy location in New York City, I can **vouch for that**. I know that it's not their fault, but most people don't know how to politely or, you know, kindly ask for things they need.

Andrew: So let's get that remedied. Let's fix this problem.

Suzanne: OK.

Andrew: But just before we get into it, I want to let everyone know that we have a study guide for this episode. And we think that studying along with our study guide is really the best way to take advantage of listening to Culips. So in the study guide, you'll get a lot of awesome things like a transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-life examples, a comprehension quiz, and more, that's not even it. So if you would like to study along with the study guide, simply visit [Culips.com](http://Culips.com) and give it a download.

Suzanne: Awesome. In just a moment, we're going to listen to four short dialogue examples that take place at a restaurant. And then, after listening to the examples, we'll take a close look at the expressions and vocabulary that you can use next time you're eating out at a restaurant.

Andrew: Sounds like a great plan. Let's listen to those four short examples now.

Man: Oh, excuse me, **could I get a glass of water, please?**

Server: Absolutely, just a moment.

Man: Thanks.



Server: How's the food tasting? Would you like anything else?

Woman: Actually, **could I get another beer, please?**

Server: Yeah, you bet.

Man: Excuse me, **could I get the bill, please?**

Server: Of course.

Man: Excuse me, **could I get a menu, please?**

Server: Oh, I'm sorry—I totally forgot to give you one. I'll be right back with a menu.

Andrew: Very, very nice. All right. So, in all those short examples we heard a customer asking a server for something at a restaurant. And maybe you picked up on it, maybe you didn't, but in each example the customer used the question structure **could I get a something, please? Could I get a menu, please?** A glass of water, please? The bill, please? OK? And this structure is a very natural and polite way to make a request at a restaurant.

Suzanne: Awesome, Andrew. So let's take a deeper dive into the meaning of this request.

Andrew: Yeah, so one of the first things that popped out at me, Suzanne, and maybe our listeners, too, maybe you guys noticed is that the question structure is could I get? **Could I get a menu, please?** All right? Now, many of the tourists that I overheard while I was travelling, they said things like, "Hey hey, menu, menu." Or, "Can I have menu, can I have a menu?" All right? Can I have a menu is better than hey, hey, menu, right?

Suzanne: Yes.

Andrew: But this question structure doesn't use the word can, it uses could. Could I get a menu? Why do you think that is, Suzanne?

Suzanne: For me, I use could more often for sure in a restaurant. It feels like when I say could I, I'm more familiar with the person. I'm being more causal or friendly and almost on their side, on their team. It's not me versus them.

- Andrew: Well, I totally agree with you, Suzanne, that it does sound softer and nicer for some reason, can, although the meaning is the same. Can I get a menu, could I get a menu, they have the same meaning. Could just sounds politer. And, in English, it's a pattern that you'll see in other structures, as well, when we put stuff into the past tense to be more polite when we're making a request. And I think this is an example of that here. So I guess the point that I wanna make is that the two structures are OK, right? Can I get a something? Could I get a something? But the most polite one and the one that will get you the most mileage is **could I get a something, please?**
- Suzanne: Absolutely. It feels like you close the social gap a little bit more.
- Andrew: Totally. Now, we said that it's very polite, but would you say that it sounds formal? Is it too polite?
- Suzanne: No, I don't think it sounds formal at all. I feel like can sounds more formal or some people I've heard even say may I, May I have a menu, please?
- Andrew: Now that sounds really, really formal to me.
- Suzanne: Really formal, right?
- Andrew: Yeah, yeah.
- Suzanne: Can and may, for me, sound more formal, whereas could is almost saying like is it possible or would it be cool, would it be OK? Right? It's kind of a little bit more friendly, on a friend level, I think.
- Andrew: All right, well, the second aspect of this question structure that I think we should **touch upon** is the pronunciation. The pronunciation.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: So let's take a look first at when we use this question structure with a or an, OK? Suzanne, I'll let you take it away here. What's going on with the pronunciation of this structure?
- Suzanne: In this phrase, you have a lot of what we call flaps. A flap is when you have a D or a T between two vowels and it kind of makes a little bit of a tap of the tongue on the roof of your mouth. Like a, almost like a combination between a T, D, and, a R, it's like [Suzanne imitates the sound]. It's a tap. And so when you connect all of these sounds, these words together, you have a couple of flaps. You have one after could, right? Could I? Could I? You bring that D over to the I sound and it's could I get a. So at the end of get, and the T goes over to the /ə/ sound, you're going to make it another flap, could I getta, could I getta. Those are two flaps in a row.



- Andrew: Right, so when we take these four individual words, could, I, get, a, and we say them at a natural conversational pace, it really sounds like one word, doesn't it?
- Suzanne: Yes, exactly. And by connecting that D over to the I sound and the T over to the uh sound, your tongue is creating a little bit of a flap and a jumping off point for the next sound. So it's like could I get a, could I get a. It changes though with the, right?
- Andrew: Yeah, so what happens with the?
- Suzanne: Yeah, so what happens is get ends with a T sound, a tuh. A T sound is made up of two components, a stopping of air and an explosion of air, right? You stop it and then you tuh, explode it. So when you have a T up against a Th, for example, you only are going to stop the air, don't worry about exploding it. So instead of saying could I get the, you would say in rapid speech could I get the.
- Andrew: And I think most of the time at a restaurant when you use the it's gonna be for the bill, the check, right?
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: Could I get the check? Could I get the menu? Could I get the bill? Something like this.
- Suzanne: The wine list.
- Andrew: The wine list, yeah.
- Suzanne: The beer list.
- Andrew: True, true. Now, of course, we have one other determiner, right? We have an, not as frequently used, but still there. What's going on with the pronunciation if we used an, like maybe you wanna order an espresso, for example?
- Suzanne: Yeah. So, with an, we very rarely use the full value of the vowel a, we don't usually say /æn/ or /ən/ in the US, they say /ən/, it's kind of more of a diphthong. So you don't usually say the full value because the main stress of your sentence is going to be the thing you want, right? An espresso, or—
- Andrew: An omelet.



- Suzanne: An omelet, exactly. So, those omelet and espresso are the more important words. So an will actually reduce to an /ə/ sound, right? So when something is not in the stressed position, when it's more like a function word, it goes to an uh sound. So we would say could I get an. Could I get an omelet? Could I get an espresso? Could I get in? Get in, almost like you're saying get in. Could I get an espresso?
- Andrew: Could I get an espresso? Could I get an omelet? Could I get an olive?
- Suzanne: But what you said there, Andrew, was actually even more interesting. One time that you said it, you said get-n, and this is /tn/ sound, right? Like when we say wooden or bitten, we do this thing where we glotterize the N. We delete the an sound and we just go /tn/ Could I getn-espresso? Get-n-a So that's also another way to say it. If you're advanced enough to try the glotterize nasal getn-espresso.
- Andrew: Right, and we should mention that you don't need to pronounce it this way to be understood and to be polite.
- Suzanne: Right.
- Andrew: These are more advanced pronunciation techniques for people who are quite confident in speaking English and really have the goal of sounding like a native speaker, but if you say **could I get a menu, please** and just say each word, word for word, nobody's gonna have a difficult time understanding you at all.
- Suzanne: Yes, exactly.
- Andrew: OK, Sue, I think the final thing that we should talk about is how to use this expression and where. In what situation, in what context can we use this question structure? Could I get a something?
- Suzanne: So, we've already established that you can use it at a restaurant, but you could also use it at a store, say, if you're shopping and you need a different size. Could I get a larger size? Could I get a smaller size? Or you could even use it maybe at a doctor's office or somewhere where you might need a pen, or something to fill out a form.
- Andrew: Oh, yeah, absolutely, that's a very common usage, **could I get a pen, please?**
- Suzanne: Yes, could I get a pen? Could I grab? Sometimes you might say could I grab a pen?



- Andrew: Yeah, both are good, both are good. What about when travelling? If you're checking onto an airplane, you might want to take a look at the airplane window. So you might ask the person at the check-in booth, could I get a window seat? And what about if you're on the bus or on the subway and someone is blocking your way, you could ask that person to move by saying, oh, could I just get by you, please? Could I get by you, please? I think is another really common context where you'll hear this question structure used.
- Suzanne: Yes, that's a really good one. That happens a lot in big cities.
- Andrew: Well, everyone, I think that about does it for us today. I want to thank everybody for listening, and I would also like to remind you about our website, which is Culips.com. C-U-L-I-P-S.com. And if you wanna get the transcript and practice exercises for this episode, visit the website to download the study guide.
- Suzanne: Yes, and don't forget we're also on Facebook at Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast, and you could also get in touch with us by emailing contact@Culips.com, and now on Instagram, too.
- Andrew: Yeah, we're brand new on Instagram.
- Suzanne: Yeah, and so you could find us on [instagram.com/Culips\\_English](https://www.instagram.com/Culips_English).
- Andrew: Finally, we're also on YouTube. We've been uploading content to YouTube. So whatever social media service you like to use, we're there. Just search for Culips English podcast and you'll be sure to find us. We will be back soon with another episode, everyone. We'll talk to you then. Goodbye.
- Suzanne: Bye, guys.



## Detailed Explanations

### To run out of [something]

Phrasal verb

**To run out of [something]** means to use something until there is none left. Usually people use this phrase with products that they finish and need to replace, such as when someone **runs out of shampoo** and they need to go to the store to buy more.

Here are a couple more examples with **to run out of [something]**

Jenna:	Honey, we <b>ran out of milk</b> . Can you get some on your way home from work?
Matt:	Sure thing. Do we need anything else?
Jenna:	Mmm, now that you mention it, can you also pick up a loaf of bread, coffee, tomatoes, and those cookies I like?
Matt:	I think I'll need to write that all down. See you at home.

Janessa:	Shaun, we're <b>running out of time</b> . We have to turn in this project by midnight or else we're gonna fail.
Shaun:	I know, I know. We've gotta stop procrastinating. OK, you start on the data entry and I'll work on typing up the report.
Janessa:	Sounds like a plan. We've got this!

## Whirlwind

Noun/adjective

**Whirlwind** can be used as a noun or an adjective. A **whirlwind** is a storm with strong winds that spin in a circle; however, people often use **whirlwind** to describe an event that is confusing or that is constantly changing. For example, in this episode, Andrew says that he went on a **whirlwind** trip through Asia. Andrew took a trip through many countries and locations in a short period of time; therefore, it was an exciting, busy, **whirlwind** of a trip.

Here's one more example with **whirlwind**:

Aila:	Have you heard about Maddison?
Marie:	No, what's up with her?
Aila:	It's crazy! She met a guy during her business trip in Spain, and they had a 2-week <b>whirlwind</b> romance and decided to get married!
Marie:	No way! Do you know anything about him?
Aila:	Not much. I just heard he has his own business, she met him as a potential client, and, oh, he's very handsome.
Marie:	How exciting!

## Could I get [something], please?

### Phrase

**Could I get [something], please?** is the main phrase of this episode. Anytime you want to ask for something in a polite manner, you can use this phrase. As mentioned in the episode, this phrase is commonly in restaurants when asking for things such as a menu, extra plates, water, or the bill.

Here's one more example with **could I get [something], please?**:

Waiter: How is everything? How is your meal?

Customer: It's delicious, thank you. However, **could I get an extra plate, please?**

Waiter: Of course. I'll be right back with that for you.

## Eavesdrop

Verb

To **eavesdrop** is to listen in on another's conversation without permission or without them knowing. Kids often try to **eavesdrop** on adult conversations to see what they are missing. In this episode, Andrew says, jokingly, that he **eavesdropped** on people's conversations during his trip so that he could hear their English conversations and find some good tips to share with Culips listeners.

Here are a couple more examples with **eavesdrop**:

Missy:	I can't believe you broke Mom's vase. She's gonna be so angry.
Danielle:	How did you know that?
Missy:	I heard you when you were talking to Beth.
Danielle:	I told you to stop <b>eavesdropping</b> on our conversations! You can never keep your mouth shut about anything!

Janet:	I didn't mean to <b>eavesdrop</b> on your conversation, but were you talking about Richard Park in the accounting office?
Mina:	Yes, we were. I heard that he was convicted of first-degree murder last night. Can you believe it?
Janet:	No, I really can't! He seemed like such a nice guy, a little shy, but not murderous.
Mina:	Yeah, it's always the quiet ones you gotta watch out for.



## Vouch for [something/someone]

Phrasal verb

If you believe in and give your support to something or someone, you are **vouching for** them. A person who recommends his friend for a job is **vouching for his friend** by believing he will be a good employee for the company. A technology company will **vouch for the quality of its products** by providing a warranty on them in case something breaks. Anything you would recommend to others based on its good quality and character is something that you **vouch for**.

Here are a couple more examples with **vouch for [something/someone]**:

Matthias:	Now that Rasheed moved away, we need to find another drummer or our band is finished.
Nicki:	How about Josh? You know, Josh Miller?
Matthias:	Isn't he the principal's son? Pretty lame.
Nicki:	No, man. He's cool and he's a really good drummer. I'll <b>vouch for him</b> . If he sucks, I'll personally kick him out of the group.
Mathias:	Well, OK. If you think he's a good fit, bring him in for an audition.

Judge Brown:	Frances, where were you on Monday night between 9:00 and 11:00?
Frances:	I was at home, sir. I was watching a movie with my friend, Peter.
Judge Brown:	Peter, can you <b>vouch for Frances' whereabouts</b> on Monday night between 9:00 and 11:00? Remember that you are under oath.
Peter:	Yes, Your Honour. I swear that Frances was with me the entire time.



## To touch upon [something]

Phrasal verb

**To touch upon [something]** is to mention a subject quickly and briefly during a speech or piece of writing that is about another topic. **To touch upon [something]** can be used to mention something that is tangentially related to another subject, perhaps to clarify an argument or to give context. In this episode, which focuses on how to politely ask for something at a restaurant, Andrew says that the hosts should also **touch upon the topic of pronunciation**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to touch upon [something]**:

Micah:	OK, everyone, I think that just about wraps up our meeting.
Gina:	Oh, sorry, one moment please. While we're all here, I would also like <b>to touch upon the gossip I've been hearing around the office</b> .
Micah:	Oh, yes, right. Gina, you may do the honours.
Gina:	As you all probably have heard, we are in fact looking to hire internally for our newly opened management position. Any of you who are interested in applying may fill out an application and give it to me by the end of the week.
Micah:	This is an excellent opportunity for one of you. Don't be afraid to apply.

Rena:	What did you think about the book I recommended?
Freida:	I really liked it. It was a light page-turner, but it also <b>touched upon complex issues</b> such as sexual identity, family relationships, and acceptance.
Rena:	I knew you would like it. I'm thinking about nominating it for the library's book of the month in September.
Freida:	You should!

## Quiz

**1. What is the opposite of eavesdropping?**

- a) spying
- b) overhear
- c) ignore
- d) snoop

**2. What does it mean to vouch for someone?**

- a) to betray someone
- b) to insult someone
- c) to do a task for someone
- d) to support someone

**3. Which is the most polite sentence to use when asking for water?**

- a) I want water.
- b) Could I get some water, please?
- c) Water, please.
- d) Do you have any water?

**4. What phrase can you use to say that you finished all of the shampoo in the bottle?**

- a) I let out all of the shampoo.
- b) I removed the shampoo.
- c) I ran out of shampoo.
- d) I cleared the shampoo.

**5. True or false: The word whirlwind can be used as a noun or an adjective.**

- a) true
- b) false

## Writing and Discussion Questions:

1. Do you often ask for things at restaurants? In your country, is it common to ask for things at a restaurant politely or casually?
2. Have you ever eavesdropped on anyone? Did they find out?
3. Do you often run out of things, or do you keep things well-stocked in your house? What is something you hate running out of?
4. Have you ever vouched for someone? Did they deserve your support?
5. What was the most useful thing touched upon during this episode? Why?





## Quiz Answers

1.c    2.d    3.b    4.c    5.a

### Episode credits

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