

Simplified Speech #026 – Math

Episode description

Love it or hate it, many people have a strong opinion about math. In this episode, Andrew and Suzanne share their memories of taking math in school. Join them and learn some interesting new terms and expressions!

Fun fact

Because language is fluid, the meaning of words can change. For example, the word hundred, which means 100, comes from the Old Norse word *hundrað*, which means 120.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- A head scratcher
- To freak out
- No offence
- To bring [something] alive/to life
- An overachiever



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 I am Suzanne.

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

Suzanne: Yeah!

Andrew: How are you, Suzanne?

Suzanne: I'm well, Andrew. How are you?

Andrew: I'm doing excellent here in the nice and warm spring of South Korea.

Suzanne: Oh, that's so nice.

Andrew: Today our episode is a Simplified Speech episode, and this is where we have a natural conversation but we speak slower than we do in our everyday lives. And our topic for today's episode is math.

Wow, math. Suzanne, when you hear the word math, what comes to mind?

Suzanne: Ugh, usually it's **a big head scratch**.

Andrew: Mmhmm?

Suzanne: Like a ... And a panic attack.

Andrew: Yeah, I think a lot of people feel this way. When they think of math, they feel fear or dread or panic.

Suzanne: Mmhmm.

Andrew: And I'm in the same boat as you, I think. I get a little **freaked out** by math.

Suzanne: It's a freaky-outy kind of subject. I think all the memories come back from high school of tests.

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Suzanne: In fact, I was really good at math, and then I moved to Texas, and I was in all honours classes. Like, because the schools in New York City ... I went to a private school in New York City.

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Suzanne: And then I went to a public school in Texas. **No offence** to Texas, but when I arrived, I wound up being in all honours or higher-level classes, and I got so bored. So I stopped trying and stopped listening, and I think that's what happened. I got kind of complacent and, like, kind of, you know, write letters to people during math class because it was so boring. And then I got bad at it because I stopped paying attention.

Andrew: I think this is a real challenge for math teachers—to try and make math interesting. And of course, there are some teachers who can do this, but in my experience, math was always a very boring subject at school. The teachers didn't really **bring it alive** the way that I needed them to.

Suzanne: Mmhmm.

Andrew: I did have one math teacher who's very memorable.

Suzanne: Yeah?

Andrew: He was kind of eccentric. His name was Mr. Adams. This guy would always sing in class, and he would make up his own songs and then sing them. And one that I still remember, and have no idea why he sang this, but he would sing the lyric, "Strangers in my soup. Strangers in my soup."

Suzanne: Weird!

Andrew: To the tune ... I think maybe it's a Frank Sinatra tune or an old tune. He would say, "Strangers in my soup," like this.

Suzanne: I think it's supposed to be "Strangers in the Night," right?

Andrew: Exactly, yeah.

Suzanne: OK.

Andrew: And he would ... He would sing "Strangers in my soup" as he would walk around the classroom looking over our shoulders to see our work. And yeah, I don't know why, but when I think about math, this memory remains with me.

Suzanne: The song?

Andrew: And the song. And when I see my high school buddies, we joke about strangers in my soup.

Suzanne: That's pretty cool. That's nice.

Andrew: I don't know if it's cool, but it's definitely ridiculous.

Suzanne: Well, I had a funny teacher too. When I got to senior year of high school, I decided I was going to be **an overachiever** and take calculus, even though I didn't need it to graduate. So I took it—maybe not my best move—but I did it. And Mr. Rock was my teacher, and he was awesome. He had seen me in all of the school plays, and he was a big fan of my acting. And he said, "I know you're a hard worker, but this stuff is a little bit complicated for you," because I was struggling.

Andrew: Right.

Suzanne: And he volunteered to meet me 3 days a week at 7:00 a.m., before school started, to help tutor me.

Andrew: Wow, what a nice guy.

Suzanne: I know. And he was so funny. And we just sat and went over the homework and went over, you know, the concepts from the day before or something.

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Suzanne: And when I got a B on my test, he said, "When you guys" ... Because I wasn't the only one who was struggling; there were a few of us. And he said, "If you guys get a B on the next test, I'm going to stand on my head for a minute—do a headstand."

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Suzanne: And we were like, "Nah, he's not gonna do it." And he did it!

Andrew: Wow.

Suzanne: We all got B's. There was like maybe five of us, and he stood on his head for a minute, and his whole face turned red, and we'll never forget it. Everyone knows Mr. Rock as being the coolest teacher and just really nice. But he did encourage me to maybe stick to acting instead of ... He said, "Look, you don't need this. You're not going to use this probably in your life. You're an artist. So I support that, and you did good. You managed to get a low B."

Andrew: Mmhmm?

Suzanne: "Good job, but you're already accepted into college for acting, so go enjoy."

Andrew: Yeah.

Suzanne: You know?

Andrew: Teachers like that ... I'm sure you appreciated the extra effort at the time.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: But I'm sure now you really appreciate that extra effort when you think of him having to get up early and come into work at 7:00 a.m. That's the real dedication that a good teacher shows.

Suzanne: It's really true. I mean now being a teacher myself, I know that it's really hard to make those sacrifices for your students on a regular basis.

Andrew: Suzanne?

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: One last thing I wanna talk about today is calculators.

Suzanne: Oh yeah!

Andrew: Of course, right? Calculators.

Suzanne: Yeah!

Andrew: What would we do without them?

Suzanne: You mean the thing I use all the time?

Andrew: These days everybody has a calculator right inside their phone, right?

Suzanne: Mmhmm.

Andrew: A calculator app.

Suzanne: Yup, for sure.

Andrew: In high school, I had a big, clunky, graphing calculator, a very famous model called the TI-83 Plus.

Suzanne: Me too.

Andrew: Do you remember that calculator?

Suzanne: I had to use it in calculus. Hello! Yeah, totally.

- Andrew: It's funny to think about in retrospect, but one of my buddies at high school learned how to load games onto his calculator. And soon enough, everybody had games on their calculator. And I don't think our teacher was aware that students could play games on these TI-83s, so here we are sitting at our desks, really diligently studying and pretending like we're crunching numbers, but in reality, we were just playing games. And that's another fond memory I have of math class.
- Suzanne: So funny, right?
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Suzanne: It's so funny that we totally remember the things we did to avoid doing math, rather than the actual math. This episode should be called, "Everything But Math."
- Andrew: Yeah. Well I think my attitude about math has totally changed. These days I have a great respect for math and people who do math, and scientists, engineers, computer programmers. I really respect these people and I know that math is a big part of what they do. But math just never clicked for me. I never quite understood how to do it well.
- Suzanne: Me too.
- Andrew: And that's why I'm not a mathlete.
- Suzanne: Maybe someday.
- Andrew: OK Suzanne, we're going to wrap it up here, but I want to remind everybody to check out our website, Culips.com—that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com—because our website is the place where you can sign up to become a Culips member and take your English studies to the next level. Members get access to our learning materials, which include full transcripts, detailed explanations of interesting or difficult vocabulary that appears during the podcast, and you get quizzes for each and every one of our episodes. So definitely head over to Culips.com to learn more about becoming a member.
- Suzanne: And you can also find us on Facebook at Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast. And we love to hear from you, so please send us your questions on Facebook in a message or in the comments of this podcast post, and we will get back to you with an answer as soon as we can.
- Andrew: Oh yeah. Hey guys, thanks for listening. We'll talk to you next time. Bye.
- Suzanne: Bye!

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Detailed Explanations

A head scratcher

A head scratcher means a confusing idea, thing, situation, or event. The term originated because some people scratch their head or play with their hair when confronted with something confusing. The idea, thing, situation, or event that causes someone to be confused is called **a head scratcher**. So if you are confronted with something confusing, you can say that thing is **a head scratcher**.

In this episode, Suzanne uses a variant of this expression when she says that the first thing that comes to her mind when thinking about math is **a big head scratch**. In other words, when she thinks about math, she feels like scratching her head in confusion. **A big head scratch** is not a common form of **a head scratcher**, but would be understood by native English speakers. Don't worry about using this variant expression! The important thing to understand from Suzanne's example is that when people talk about scratching their heads, they mean they are confused.

Here are a couple more examples with **a head scratcher**:

Joseph:	Oh no!
Maria:	What happened? Is everything OK?
Joseph:	I just spilled coffee on my shirt.
Maria:	That's not so bad. Just wash it when you get home.
Joseph:	I don't know if this shirt can be washed, though. The washing instructions are so confusing. It says to wash only in hot-cold water.
Maria:	Hot-cold water—that doesn't make any sense.
Joseph:	I know! It's a real head scratcher .

Colin:	When does the next bus arrive?
Sheila:	I'm not sure. The schedule is a head scratcher . It says the bus is arriving at 6:68 p.m.
Colin:	That's really confusing. Do they mean 6:08 p.m.?
Sheila:	I have no idea!

To freak out

If someone **freaks out**, they behave in a very irrational or emotional manner. **To freak out** isn't associated with just one emotion. If someone loses emotional control and displays intense anger, sadness, frustration, excitement, or confusion, then they are **freaking out**."

The key thing about **to freak out** is that it used to describe someone who behaves in an extreme, uncontrollable, emotional manner. For example, if a co-worker loses their job and starts yelling and throwing things, you could say, "They are **freaking out** because they lost their job."

Although **to freak out** can be used to describe positive emotions, such as overwhelming joy, it is often associated with emotional distress. In this episode, Andrew mentions that he gets a little **freaked out** by math. Because he says that he only gets a little **freaked out**, he means that he feels distress when thinking about math, but does not lose control.

Here are a couple more examples with **to freak out**:

Nora:	Do you want to go to the movies with me?
Ted:	Sure! Which movie would you like to see?
Nora:	There is a cool-looking horror film that I was hoping to see.
Ted:	No way! I freaked out the last time that I tried to watch a horror film. I was so scared that I had to leave the theatre.
Nora:	That sucks. I guess that I'll try and find someone else to go with me.

Janet:	How was your weekend? Did you end up going to Nick's party?
Noel:	The weekend was OK, but Nick's party was not.
Janet:	What happened at the party?
Noel:	Too many people showed up! I don't like big crowds. There were way too many people there. I got all freaked out .
Janet:	That's too bad!

No offence

An offence is something, like a speech or action, that causes someone to be insulted, outraged, or hurt. If someone takes offence at something that you say, it means that they are insulted by your comment.

No offence is an informal English expression. People will often say **no offence** before saying or doing something that is likely to offend someone (ie, make them feel hurt, outraged, or insulted). So saying **no offence** is a way of saying that you don't want to insult or hurt someone. It's an expression that is used to signal that something may be insulting or hurtful, even though it is not meant to be insulting or hurtful.

For example, in this episode, Suzanne says, "**No offence** to Texas." Because she uses the expression **no offence**, you know that she is about to say something that could be considered an offence. In this case, what could be seen as offensive is that Suzanne's story implies that Texas has a worse education system than New York.

Here are a couple more examples with **no offence**:

George:	How's it going?
Frankie:	Pretty good, thanks.
George:	Can I tell you something?
Frankie:	Sure!
George:	No offence , but that lipstick looks terrible on you. It makes you look sick.
Frankie:	OK, I thought it was nice. Thanks for telling me, I guess.

Kyle:	I'm so glad we went for lunch today. The food was delicious.
Vicky:	You liked the food?
Kyle:	Of course! Did you?
Vicky:	No, it was awful. No offence , but you always pick the worst restaurants. Next time, I'll choose where we eat.
Kyle:	Ouch! That's a little hurtful.
Vicky:	Sorry, I'm just being honest. It's like you don't have taste buds or something.

To bring [something] alive/to life

To bring [something] alive and **to bring [something] to life** both mean to make something feel real or exciting. **To bring [something] alive** and **to bring [something] to life** can be used to describe something fresh or stimulating that was previously boring or outdated. So when something that was old and dull is made new and exciting, it's been **brought alive** or **brought to life**.

For example, in this episode, Andrew mentions that he didn't have very good math teachers because they didn't **bring math alive**. In other words, his teachers couldn't teach math in a way that made it seem interesting and exciting.

So when something goes from being old and boring to exciting and interesting, you can say that it has been **brought alive** or **brought to life**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to bring [something] alive/to life**:

Anna:	I can't believe that we have to study another play by Shakespeare. I hate Shakespeare!
Carl:	Come on, he's not so bad!
Anna:	I don't know what you're talking about. Shakespeare is so old and boring.
Carl:	You just haven't been in a class with Ms. Smith yet. She really brings the plays alive .
Anna:	Maybe.

Jackie:	Hey Josh, did you have a good weekend?
Josh:	Yup, I played some virtual reality videogames at my friend's house on Saturday.
Jackie:	Cool!
Josh:	I haven't enjoyed playing videogames since I was a kid, but virtual reality brings them to life .
Jackie:	Now I want to try playing!

An overachiever

An overachiever means someone who does more than is expected and who performs above the norm. **An overachiever** is often used to describe perfectionists or people who are very successful, particularly young people who are more accomplished than others their age.

The expression **an overachiever** is often used to talk about people who are successful in multiple areas of their life, such as school, work, and leisure.

In this episode, Suzanne mentions that she tried to be **an overachiever** by taking calculus in school. In other words, Suzanne was trying to perform above the norm and be more successful by taking something that wasn't required and was difficult.

Do you know someone who is notably more successful than others? You can call them **an overachiever**.

Here are a couple more examples with **an overachiever**:

Stewart:	Are you going to go to Mattie's show this weekend?
Laura:	What show?
Stewart:	Didn't you hear? Mattie joined a band, and they're having a record release party this weekend.
Laura:	This girl does not stop! She's 5 years younger than us, she's our boss, she has two kids, and she's in a band! How does she have the energy?
Steward:	Yeah, she's kind of an overachiever .

Harold:	Hey, did you register for next semester yet?
Susan:	I did. I'm taking six core classes. It should be fun.
Harold:	Wait, don't you have a part-time job too?
Susan:	Yes, I do.
Harold:	Six classes and a job—that's nuts! You're quite the overachiever .
Susan:	I'll take that as a compliment.

Quiz

- 1. Which of the following is an expression that means to make something feel real or exciting?**
 - a) to shake alive
 - b) to bring alive
 - c) to bring life
 - d) to bring new

- 2. True or false: No offence is a speech or an action.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

- 3. Which of the following means someone who is more successful than most people?**
 - a) an overachiever
 - b) a calculus student
 - c) a young person
 - d) an underachiever

- 4. Which of the following is a term for something that causes you to be confused?**
 - a) a hand shaker
 - b) a brain tickler
 - c) a head scratcher
 - d) an arm bender

- 5. If someone freaks out, they behave in an emotional and _____ manner.**
 - a) hurtful
 - b) controlled
 - c) irrational
 - d) sad

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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