

Simplified Speech #077 – Books, reading, and reading habits

Episode description

Soft cover or hard cover? Fiction or nonfiction? Bookworms Andrew and Morag answer a listener question by talking about the books they enjoy reading, what types of books they like, and their reading habits.

Fun fact

Though not an official dictionary term, bibliosmia is used by booklovers to refer to that great book smell they all love.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Beat [someone] to it
- Pays the bills
- To wind down
- To take a leaf out of [someone's] book
- To hold out (hope)



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: 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 a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And you're listening to Culips.

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to another edition of Simplified Speech. For everyone who doesn't know, Simplified Speech is the Culips series where we share completely natural, unscripted English conversations with you, but we speak a little bit slower than we do in our regular, everyday lives. And today I am joined by Morag, live from Montreal, Canada.

Morag, how's it going?

Morag: Pretty good. How are you doing, Andrew?

Andrew: I'm doing really well. And, Morag, today we are going to talk about a topic that was suggested to us by a listener. And these are always my favourite kind of episodes, because it's kind of like we get to interact with our listeners a bit, you know, Morag? It's fun. And today's topic suggestion comes from Rosie from Brazil. And Rosie would like us to talk about books, reading, and reading habits. Books, reading, and reading habits. So that is what we will talk about today.

Morag: I think Rosie and I would get along.

Andrew: Yeah, 'cause you're kind of a bookworm, aren't you, Morag?

Morag: I am. Books are definitely near and dear to my heart. I guess that's obvious from me doing two degrees in English literature.

Andrew: All right. So we'll get into this topic in just a moment, but, before we do, I would like to let everyone know about the study guide for this episode. It's probably the best way to study along with us here today, everyone. So if you are interested in downloading it, you just have to visit our website, Culips.com and you can do so. And inside the guide, you'll find a transcript, vocabulary explanations and definitions, and examples of all of the key slang and difficult vocabulary that you'll hear us use today. There's also a quiz and some prompts that you can use for journaling or speaking practice. It's really a useful thing to study along with, and it's available on our website, so check it out.

Morag, you did two degrees in English. I did one. **You beat me.**

Morag: I guess? I guess **I beat you.** I did have a good time, but it's not exactly **paying the bills** at this point, let's just put it that way.

Andrew: Yeah, it's not the most lucrative degree that you can choose, is it?

Morag: No, but you do get to spend a wonderful amount of time reading.

Andrew: So, Rosie wanted us to talk about books, reading, and reading habits. Why don't we break the episode down into those three parts. Let's start with books. What kind books do you enjoy reading, Morag?

Morag: That's a difficult one. I enjoy reading mostly fiction.

Andrew: Me as well.

Morag: But I'm going to turn that question on its head a bit and say that I enjoy reading softcover books, usually ones that are less than 500 pages long but more than 150 pages, and they should have a good smell to them.

Andrew: OK, so talking more about the physical book itself, as opposed to the genre of literature. So, you like a paperback book, a softcover book. Why do you like a soft cover as opposed to a hard cover?

Morag: I like a flexible book. I bend them a lot. I wreck books when I read them. I'm one of those people that you don't want to borrow a book from because it might be falling apart a little.

Andrew: Or even more so you don't want to lend a book to.

Morag: Yeah, definitely that one.

Andrew: Wow, you're similar to me, then, because I destroy my books, too. I write in my books. Do you do this?

Morag: I don't actually, but I wish I did. It's a habit that I've tried to cultivate.

Andrew: Especially if I look at my books from when I was a student, if I was like writing a paper about a book, it just gets destroyed. There's so many sticky tabs and notes and underlines. And these days I still do it, not to the same extent, but if there's a passage that I like or a thought that I have while I'm reading something, then I'll just write directly in the novel and make a note.

Morag: I think that's a wonderful habit, but I think that because I've studied peoples' notes in books, in old books. So marginalia is what it's called, and it's so cool to read what somebody, like, a hundred or hundreds of years ago was thinking about something that they were reading.

Andrew: Yeah, that's true.

Morag: It's like you get to put a little part of yourself and your brain inside an object. It's super cool. But, to go back to the first thing, I really do like reading fiction. I sometimes try to read nonfiction, I will try to read occasionally a self-help book, but I can't get through it.

Andrew: Yeah, I also have a difficult time reading nonfiction. There are so many people that I like to listen to on podcasts or in documentaries or in lectures that are like experts on something because they read about that topic so much. They'll read every book about a certain period of history or they'll read every book about a certain kind of economics, and I think to myself, wow, I should do that too. If I just read 20 books about this period of history, I will know a lot about that thing. But then I have a very difficult time actually doing that, because I kind of get bored by nonfiction. I prefer to hear people talk about it than to read it, I suppose.

Morag: I'm with you. I like stories.

Andrew: Yeah, stories are where it's at.

Morag: Stories are fun. I just finished re-reading American Gods by Neil Gaiman after watching the TV show.

Andrew: OK.

Morag: And, man, storytelling. So good. That man is fantastic.

Andrew: Yeah, he's really talented, right? A very popular writer.

Morag: I'm sure some of our listeners have read him before.

Andrew: Yeah, without a doubt. OK, so you like paperbacks, fiction, stories. And maybe we should transition now into reading habits, because this is another one of the things that Rosie is curious about. What are your reading habits like these days? Do you have much time to read or not too much time to read?

Morag: I am making time to read these days.

Andrew: OK.

Morag: I used to think it was kind of funny that my mom would always go to bed early and read in bed, maybe an hour before actual bedtime. Go have a cup of tea, read in bed.

Andrew: Yeah, my mom's the same.

Morag: I am now finding myself doing this exact thing and loving it. It's fantastic.

Andrew: Oh, wow. So I have a question about this. What do you do with your phone during this reading period?

Morag: It is near me, but not visible.

Andrew: OK. Near you, but not visible. I see. Good. So do you do this every night or a couple times a week?

Morag: I do it mostly on weeknights. I think it's a really good way **to wind down** from screen time, especially as I do work entirely on a computer and video gaming is one of my main hobbies. So **winding down** from that is great. So I try to do that as often as possible on the weeknights, but, you know, I'm only human.

Andrew: Sure, sure. Actually, my reading habits are opposite of yours. I try to dedicate time in the morning when I wake up, 'cause I find at night I'm usually just sleepy and if I try to read, I just end up falling asleep.

Morag: Ah, but you're a bit of an early bird, aren't you?

Andrew: Yeah, I'm a bit of an early bird. This sounds kind of pretentious, but I don't read too much in English these days. I'm just reading Korean books as a way to study Korean and build my vocabulary, and I'm kind of finally at that point where I can enjoy novels in Korean. So I of course have to use a dictionary frequently, but I can understand the story with the help of a dictionary. So it's nice, I can read in Korean and study and also get my story time in at the same time. But this takes more effort than it does in English, of course. So if I do it at night after a day of work, it's just too much. So I do it in the morning when I'm fresh for a bit, usually only like 30 minutes, maybe three times a week, but, yeah, this is what I'm doing these days for reading.

Morag: You know, I think I might have to **take a leaf out of your book** and do French reading in the morning.

Andrew: Yeah, you should try it, it's nice.

Morag: Because part of the point of the before bed reading is relaxation. It's part of the reason, you know, just to have a nice time and become sleepy. But reading in another language does take a lot of focus. So I think I might steal that trick—30 minutes, all right.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, try it out. Let me know how it goes. And, OK, Morag, I have one more question for you here.

Morag: Go.

Andrew: E-books. Yes, or no?

Morag: No.

Andrew: No?

Morag: No, I think I might be too much of a bibliophile. And by that I mean just the physicality of the books themselves. I enjoy them as objects, so much that having an e-book it just doesn't do it for me.

Andrew: I get you. I feel you on that one. I also like having a physical book, holding it, you know, writing in it, as I mentioned, and as you mentioned, smelling it, because books have a very unique, particular smell. There's something about them that's just really nice. But at the same time, living in a foreign country and being kind of anti-stuff because I know where I'm living now won't be forever, I try not to accumulate too many books. Korean books I do like to have the physical copy, but when I do read in English, I do have a Kindle and I just read digital copies of English books.

Morag: I think that's entirely laudable, but I will always be the person who moved 4500 kilometres away with more books than clothing.

Andrew: Yeah, I think my parents are quite angry at me these days because I just have boxes and boxes of books.

Morag: Oh, at their place. Yeah, it's the same with my mom. Oh, no. Oh, dear.

Andrew: I feel bad about that, but it's so hard to get rid of your book collection when you look at them. And I always have it in the back of my mind, like, "Oh, one day, I'll have a house and I'll have a library."

Morag: One day. Maybe.

Andrew: I've been saying that for maybe 10 years now.

Morag: Yeah. But I'm still gonna **hold out**.

Andrew: Yeah, me too. Hold on to the dream. All right, well, Rosie, thank you for the episode suggestion. It was very fun to talk about books. And, Morag, thanks for giving us some insight into your reading life.

Morag: Oh, it was great fun.

Andrew: Keep these episode suggestions coming. We love to talk about what you guys want to hear about. So you can send us an email to our email address, which is contact@Culips.com to let us know your suggestions. And, as well, you can visit our website, Culips.com, to listen to past episodes or to download the study guide for this episode. And, finally, if you haven't already, please follow us on social media. You can stay up to date with all of the news here at Culips and, yeah, just find us wherever you use social media. Instagram or YouTube or Facebook or Twitter. Just search for Culips English Podcast and you can find us.

We'll be back soon with another episode and we'll talk to you then. Bye, everyone.

Morag: Goodbye.

Detailed Explanations

Beat [someone] to it Idiom

Beat [someone] to it is an idiom that means to do or obtain something before someone else. In this episode, Andrew says, “You **beat me**” when he says that Morag has two English degrees. He means that Morag got a second English degree before Andrew did. The “to it” part of the phrase is implied rather than said.

In situations where someone reacts faster than you, you could also say that they **beat you to the punch** or **beat you to the draw**.

Here are a couple more examples with **beat [someone] to it**:

Rasheed: Mom, I’m hungry. Can I have the leftovers from last night?

Mom: Sorry, Rasheed, your brother **beat you to it**.

Rasheed: No! I’ve been looking forward to them all day.

Benjamin: Tough day at work?

Fatima: Yeah ... I was going to suggest an improvement to my boss about those printers, you know, the ones I told you and Carl about yesterday? But Carl **beat me to it**. Now Carl’s the golden boy. Again.

Benjamin: Next time, don’t tell Carl.

Pays the bills

Idiom

Pays the bills is usually used to describe a job, career, or education that provides enough income to cover the cost of one's lifestyle but doesn't provide any fulfillment or excitement.

In the conversation, Morag mentions that her English degrees are not exactly **paying the bills**. This means that even though she has two degrees, they are not the reason she can cover the cost of her current lifestyle.

Here are a couple more examples with **pay the bills**:

Gerard:	Did you fill out your future goals form for Mrs. Agnathia's class tomorrow?
Tom:	Yup!
Gerard:	What did you put for your career goal?
Tom:	Actor, of course.
Gerard:	Dude, being an actor isn't exactly going to pay the bills —not unless you get really famous.
Tom:	Then I'll just have to be really famous.

Christa:	And you, Ivan, what do you do?
Ivan:	I'm the manager at the grocery store on Main Street.
Christa:	Oh. Is that an interesting job?
Ivan:	It's not glamorous, but it pays the bills .

To wind down

Phrasal verb

To wind down is a phrasal verb that means to relax, when used to describe a person's state, or to decrease intensity until it gradually ends, when used to describe a situation or event. Morag mentions that reading is a really good way **to wind down** at the end of the night. She uses reading as a way to relax so she can sleep better.

Here are a couple more examples with **to wind down**:

Adrianna:	So, are you having fun? Are you glad you came out with us?
Marie:	I am! It's been a while since I spend the night dancing.
Adrianna:	Great! I'm glad you've had a good time. It seems like the party is winding down now, though.
Marie:	Yeah. Time to go home, I guess.
Adrianna:	You'll have to come out again next time!

Emil:	You're on vacation starting tomorrow, right?
Yohan:	I am! Our flight leaves at 2 p.m.
Emil:	That's exciting. Where are you going?
Yohan:	Hawaii. I'm looking forward to spending the next week on the beach.
Emil:	I'm jealous. Do you find that the first couple of days are less than relaxing? I find it takes me a few days to wind down from the stress of work when I'm on vacation.
Yohan:	Definitely. That's why we don't have anything planned except going to the beach until the third day.
Emil:	Smart.



To take a leaf out of [someone's] book

Phrasal verb

When you follow someone's example or want to do the same thing as someone else, you **are taking a leaf out of their book**. Morag told Andrew she would **take a leaf out of his book** when Andrew shared his strategy for reading in Korean in the morning. This means Morag wants to try reading in another language in the morning.

You can also say **take a page out of [someone's] book**. This expression sounds like it means to destroy a book or copy someone's work, but in reality there is no negative meaning here. The phrase is a compliment to someone else—you want to follow their example or imitate them.

Here are a couple more examples with **take a leaf out of [someone's] book**:

Mom: Sandeep! What are you doing?

Sandeep: I'm playing video games.

Mom: You still have homework to do! Your sister is doing hers, why can't you **take a leaf out of her book** and do yours before you play video games.

Helga: Sheila seems like she's got everything together. She never misses a deadline.

Nellie: Have you seen her day planner? She's very organized.

Helga: I should **take a page out of her book** and get organized.

Nellie: Couldn't hurt. You're a very disorganized person.

To hold out (hope)

Phrasal verb

When you **hold out** for something to happen, you hope that something will happen in the future, even if it doesn't seem very likely. In the conversation, Morag says she is still gonna **hold out** for the day when she has a house and a library in which to store all of her books. She doesn't say hope, so it is possible she means a variation of this phrase **to hold out** for [something]. This means you refuse to accept something that is not good enough and you are waiting for something better.

Here are a couple more examples with **to hold out (hope)**:

Hassan:	How's your job search going?
Eugène:	I sent a job application to the company 3 weeks ago.
Hassan:	Oh! Did they not call?
Eugène:	They're probably not going to call me back. I'm still holding out hope , though.

Annette:	Did you get the part you needed to fix your computer?
Noemi:	Yeah. But it cost three times more than it was a few weeks ago. I guess I missed the sale.
Annette:	You should have waited and held out for a better deal.

Quiz

1. How does Morag wind down on weeknights?

- a) by reading the newspaper
- b) by reading on her Kindle
- c) by reading articles on her phone
- d) by reading a softcover book

2. True or false? Andrew beat Morag to getting two English degrees.

- a) true
- b) false

3. Which of the following means to wait for something to happen in the future, even if it doesn't seem very likely to happen?

- a) to hold out (hope)
- b) to wait patiently for
- c) to run out of time
- d) to hold a friend's hand

4. To take a leaf out of someone's book means:

- a) to rip a page out of their favourite book
- b) to remove a random leaf from between the pages of their book
- c) to imitate or copy something they've done or are doing
- d) to copy the latest entry from their journal or diary

5. When your job or career pays the bills, it:

- a) involves giving money to people named Bill
- b) pays your bills for you, so you don't have to worry about it anymore
- c) covers the cost of your lifestyle
- d) does not cover the cost of your lifestyle

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Can you name some professions or careers that would pay the bills but may not be very exciting?
2. Who is someone you admire and would like to take a page out of their book? Why?
3. Morag and Andrew are both holding out hope to one day have a house and a library. What is something you're holding out hope to have?
4. Describe a situation where you beat someone to something.
5. Morag reads before bed to wind down. What do you do to wind down at the end of the day?

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

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