

Simplified Speech #116 – Our favourite English words

Episode description

Have you ever thought about what your favourite word is in the English language? In this interesting Simplified Speech episode, Andrew and Kassy talk about their favourite and least favourite English words. Tune in to find out what they are.

This episode is full of interesting English phrases and slang words that are sure to boost your English speaking fluency. Our Simplified Speech series is perfect for intermediate English language learners looking to take their speaking and listening skills to the next level.

Fun fact

In 2016, Oxford University Press ran a survey to find the most hated word in the English language. More than 10,000 people were surveyed, and the word moist was voted the least-liked English word in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Onomatopoeia
- Bookworm
- Zany/wacky
- To make a comeback
- A bunch of malarkey
- Noob



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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello there, everyone. My name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello there, everyone. Welcome back to Culips. We have a Simplified Speech episode for you today. So Simplified Speech is the Culips series that features clear, natural, and easy-to-understand English conversations about an interesting topic.

And before we get started with this episode, I want to shout out one of our listeners, Dnhtien78 from Vietnam, who left us a nice review and a five-star rating on Apple Podcasts. The review says, "Excellent podcasts. Thank you for your podcasts." I like it, short and sweet. So, Dnhtien, thank you for that. And everyone who has been leaving us positive reviews and ratings on Apple podcasts and other podcasts services, thank you so much. Please keep it up, your support really is motivating to us. And it also helps build the Culips community and spreads Culips to other English listeners around the world.

I'm joined today by my cohost Kassy. I should introduce you here, Kassy, so I can stop rambling to myself. Hey, how's it going?

Kassy: I am doing great, Andrew, thank you.

Andrew: Perfect. So, Kassy, today's episode is a fun one. And you suggested it, so I'll let you introduce the topic. What are we talking about today?

Kassy: Today we are talking about our favourite English words.

Andrew: Favourite English words. Awesome. So let's get right into it. But before we do everyone, remember that there is a transcript and a study guide for this episode on our website, Culips.com. And you can get it by signing up and becoming a Culips member. So sign up, become a member, support Culips, and study with the study guide.

OK, Kassy, this is a great topic. I was brainstorming all day about some of my favourite English words. And I made a list in my notebook, actually. So I should open that and take a look. Why don't we start with you while I'm finding that. What are some of your favourite English words?

Kassy: Well, I am a huge **bookworm**, Andrew. So every time I read a book, if I come across a word that just sounds, you know, kind of different and something I've never heard before I write it down. And some of my favourite English words are words that sound weird but have really simple meanings.

Andrew: OK, Kassy, before you give us those words, maybe we should clarify some of the criteria you use for determining whether a word is one of your favourites or not? Do you care more about the meaning? Do you care about the sound of the word and how it feels in your mouth when you say it? Do you care about the obscurity of the word, like if it's really rare or unique? What kind of factors go into making a word one of your favourites?

Kassy: I think the words that I like the best are the ones that sound really unique, but have really simple meanings. Once you hear them, you go, wow, that word is perfect for that.

Andrew: OK, so words that just occupy a kind of very unique place in the English language in terms of their meaning?

Kassy: Yes, or words that sound just like their meaning describes. For example, the word **crisp**, when you say it, it sounds **crispy**, you know? It sounds, like, **crunchy**. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Andrew: Yeah, actually, I was gonna say that this is one of my favourite English words is **crisp** as well. I think we could call that an **onomatopoeia**, right? An **onomatopoeia** is a word that sounds like what it describes. So **crisp** sounds like the sound that gets made when you bite into an apple.

Kassy: Exactly, yes.

Andrew: Or like **buzz** is the sound that a bee makes when it buzzes its wings, right? So that kind of word is called an **onomatopoeia** and I think that is a good example of a nice one, a fun one to say, too, **crisp**.

Kassy: Yes. One of my favourite words is also fun to say and that is **zany**.

Andrew: **Zany**.

Kassy: Yes, and **zany** means, you know, kind of crazy and out there, like you're just kind of goofball-ish. You're **zany**.

Andrew: Yeah. I like that one, **zany**. I should use that more often in my English speaking. I honestly don't say it very much, but it's a fun one. I like it, **zany**. Yeah.

Kassy: Yes. Another one is **plethora**.

Andrew: **Plethora**, **plethora**. So a **plethora** means many, right?

Kassy: Yes.

Andrew: There are a plethora of episodes of Simplified Speech on the Culips.com website, something like that.

Kassy: Yeah. So it sounds like a really weird, out-there word. Before, when I first read it, I was, like, what the heck is that? And then you find out it's a really simple meaning. It just means many.

Andrew: Yeah, I think it's probably related to plenty, plenty, plethora. There's probably some Greek or Latin origin. Maybe some of our listeners that speak a Romance language could help us out with that. That's my general feeling, I think.

Kassy: And then this is not a word, specifically, but I really love palindromes as well, which are words that are the same if you read them forwards or backwards.

Andrew: Right. So a very easy one would be the name Bob, B-O-B. The spelling is exactly the same whether it is forwards or backwards. It's easy to come up with some three letter examples. But it gets much more difficult when you get to longer words, but there are some really cool palindromes in English. What do you got for us, Kassy? What are some of your favourite palindromes?

Kassy: Even if it's just a name. Like I love the name Hannah with an H at the end. And when I was in school, we used to use the phrase, like, a Toyota, the car. If you say a Toyota, it is the same forwards and backwards.

Andrew: Oh, OK, gotcha. So that's a palindrome across words.

Kassy: Yes. I just think it's so **zany** and unique.

Andrew: OK, very good. Well, maybe I could share some of my favourite words with the audience. And I think the reasons why I choose a favourite word is a little different than you can, Kassy. I'm really focused more on the sound and how it feels saying the word. So, yeah, there are some words that have a kind of unique meaning that I like to use. You like to use **zany**, I use **wacky** a lot, that's **wacky**.

Kassy: That's a good one.

Andrew: They mean essentially the same thing. But there's words that just have a kind of unique ring to them. There's something about them, when you say them, it just feels fun. And one of those words is humongous, humongous, which means really, really big.

Now here's one that I do use all the time, too, is terrific. And I like saying it when you kind of drag and elongate the word. So instead of just saying terrific, say terrific.

Kassy: That's great.

Andrew: Just that slight lengthening of it makes it really fun to say.

Now, the current President of the USA, Biden, Joe Biden, he likes to use this word and it sounds really old-fashioned, you know, like, he's the only person that I hear use this word these days. But it is really fun to say and I hope because President Biden uses it that it will **make a comeback**. It is **malarkey**.

Kassy: I've heard him say it, yes. That's **a bunch of malarkey**.

Andrew: Yeah, that's **a bunch of malarkey**, which means that it's, like, nonsense. It's garbage. You shouldn't believe what you hear, it's **malarkey**, it's nonsense. But it's fun to say, **malarkey**. And I did do a Google search on this word. And I learned that it was a popular slang expression in the 20s and 30s. So I know President Biden isn't 100 years old, but he's not young, so maybe, you know, some of the people that he grew up with used to use this word, and he just has been clinging on to it ever since.

Another word that I really like to say is **noob**, **noob**. That guy's a **noob**.

Kassy: Such a **noob**.

Andrew: Such a **noob**, which means newbie, right? Newbie. This is a word that originated out of gaming and playing games online. And so when you spell it online, often people will spell it with two zeroes in the middle instead of Os. So the spelling online is N-0-0-B, which I also think is really funny. Like, I kind of like that leet spelling. Leet is a kind of typing style from gaming where you can mix letters and numbers together. So, yeah, those are some of my favourite words.

Kassy: Yeah, I think these are not words I use often. But I also love playing word games like Scrabble, or my new favourite is called Letter Tycoon. Any words that use letters that are not often used in English are perfect for these kinds of games. So letters with the Qs, Zs, Xs are words that will score you a lot of points in word games.

Andrew: Right. So these games that you mentioned, Kassy, the way that you can get lots of points is by building and spelling a long word that has unique letters in it. And the letters that you just mentioned, Z, Q, X, these are very rare. They don't occur in too many words, so they're worth more points. So when you're playing Scrabble, for example, if you can spell a long word with a Q and an X in it, if that even exists, then you can get a really high score.

Kassy: Exquisite.

Andrew: Exquisite. OK, there you go.

Kassy: So, yes, when I read these days, sometimes I actually keep a mental tally, like, oh, that would be a perfect word to use in my next game.

Andrew: OK, so Kassy, we talked about some of our favourite words, but we have to go and do the opposite, we have to talk about some of the words that we don't like. Now, this is really interesting. I was thinking about this earlier, because when I choose my favourite words, I'm really focused on the sounds and how they feel when I say them. And, at least consciously, there's no real connection to the meaning. But as I made a list of the words that I really hate in English, I realized that they also almost all have a kind of disgusting or creepy or gross meaning. And so that got me thinking, I don't know, is it the sound of the words that I don't like? Or is it the meaning that I don't like? Or is it a combination of the two? Do I not like this word because of its disgusting meaning and then I don't like it, or what? I don't know, there's something psychological happening with this list.

Kassy: I think it's a little bit of both, Andrew. I think maybe yours and my words, some of them will be similar. And I think it's because it's similar to crisp, that the sound and the meaning coexist so well together. I think with some of the words that we don't like, the sound and the meaning also kind of coexist, but in a disgusting way, rather than a, you know, way that we like.

Andrew: Yeah, I think that's what's happening, for sure. So why don't we go through some of the words that we don't like, Kassy. I'll let you start with the first word on your list.

Kassy: I think I've seen a YouTube video about this. And the two most common hated words in English were moist.

Andrew: Yeah, that's number one on my list, moist.

Kassy: And bladder.

Andrew: I don't have bladder on my list, but I have to agree that is not the most pleasant word, is it?

Kassy: No.

Andrew: So moist. Yeah, this is just that kind of wet feeling, you know, kind of hot and wet and just in a bad way. So that's what moist means. And, yeah, personally, I think it's a really disgusting word, as well. Bladder is the part of your body where your urine is stored before you have to pee.

Kassy: Even just saying the word makes me, like, cringe a little bit.

Andrew: Yes, yes. So I also have words that are related to bodily functions or body parts on my list, like the word phlegm. Phlegm is a really disgusting word. And the spelling is also disgusting. So it is P-H-L-E-G-M. Phlegm. And that is like, you know, if you have a cold and you're really stuffed up, you have a lot of snot and really thick spit, this kind of thing, this is called phlegm.

Kassy: Yeah, the word is like an elementary schooler's spelling tests nightmare.

Andrew: It's a tough one. It's a weird word. Also, the word vomit, I don't like.

Kassy: Yeah, I like barf or throw up much better than the word vomit.

Andrew: Yeah, I don't really ever say the word vomit other than, like, in a medical situation. Also the word foetus really creeps me out. And again, it's, like, the spelling is ugly. F-O-E-T-U-S, foetus. And a foetus is an unborn baby. So a baby that is not born yet.

Kassy: Yeah, those are all pretty terrible words, Andrew.

Andrew: Yeah, it's the good, the bad, and the ugly today on Culips.

Kassy: I like how we finished with the bad ones and started with the good ones.

Andrew: Well, maybe we should finish on a high note then, Kassy. Is there any other favourite words that you have?

Kassy: I loved Dr. Seuss as a kid. So this is not a real word. But I love the word splendiferous.

Andrew: Splendiferous. Kind of just an imaginary word, but a fun one to say. Let me think, I have a friend who says this all the time. And I think the way that he uses it is really good. I'm not sure why he uses this word all the time. But I think it's because he wants to be a more polite, positive person. And instead of going around swearing and calling someone, you know, a bad name or a bad word, he uses the word ding-dong. So he'll be like I was driving in my car and some ding-dong cut me off. Or that guy down at the bank was such a ding-dong.

Kassy: It's like calling someone a dummy. You know, like, not really harsh, but.

Andrew: Yeah, it's, like, a kind of gentler way to say that someone is being a jerk. So I always thought that was a funny expression. And I've never really heard anybody else call someone a ding-dong. But it's fun to say, I like it. Like, it's a fun one to say. So maybe we'll leave it at that with ding-dong.

Kassy: Sounds good.

Andrew: So thank you for listening to us today, everybody. We hope that you found this episode fun and educational. And if you did, then please support Culips. And there are lots of ways that you can do that, such as signing up and becoming a Culips member on our website Culips.com. And when you do that, you will get access to our full study guide library that we make for each and every episode. But there are tons of other benefits as well. And our Culips members always tell us that they are so happy that they made the decision to study with us and that it's been really helpful for developing their English listening and speaking. So if you're interested in taking your English to the next level, definitely sign up and become a Culips member.

But of course, that's not the only way you can support us. You could also leave us a five-star rating and a nice review on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. You could follow us on social media or even tell your friends who are learning English to listen to the Culips English Podcast.

Our email address is contact@Culips.com. And if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for a future episode topic, please get in touch.

We'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Kassy: Catch you later.

Detailed Explanations

Onomatopoeia

Noun

An **onomatopoeia**, pronounced ON-A-MAT-O-PEE-AH, is a word whose meaning is simply the sound it represents. For example, the word *buzz* represents the sound a bee makes as it flies. **Onomatopoeia** comes from the two Greek words *onoma*, meaning name, and *poiein*, meaning to make, so **onomatopoeia** means to make a name (or sound).

Many **onomatopoeic** words can also be verbs. For example, the word *crash* is an **onomatopoeia** for the sound of two things colliding against each other, but also the action of two objects hitting each other, such as one car crashing into another. **Onomatopoeia** is a great literary device used to give writing a more life-like feel by incorporating a sense of hearing into the words on a page.

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

Lauren: Weird question for you—what's your favourite **onomatopoeia**?

Kyle: Hmm, interesting question. Probably zap! You know, that sound a bug makes when its body is being fried because it flew too close to a light bulb.

Lauren: That's disgusting.

Kyle: No way. That sound is music to my ears. It means there's hopefully one less mosquito in this world to annoy me.

Karim: My daughter and I watched the Disney movie Tarzan last night and one of the songs is stuck in my head on repeat.

Rylie: Aw, that's cute. Which song is it?

Karim: It's called *Trashin' the Camp*. It's the song where all of the animals sing in **onomatopoeia** and bang on percussion instruments.

Rylie: I love that one! Shooby doop dooby dob dooby doop dooby dah doo dap.

Karim: Yup, that's the one! I've been shooby-doop-dobbin all day long.

Bookworm

Noun

A **bookworm** is someone who loves reading and can usually be found with their nose inside a book, reading the day away. **Bookworm** may also refer to someone who spends a lot of time studying. Being called a **bookworm** was originally an insult. People might have called you a **bookworm** if they thought you spent way too much of your time reading or studying. Nowadays **bookworm** can be used as an insult or in a positive way to describe someone who loves reading.

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

Teresa: Weren't you reading a book with a tree on the cover yesterday?

Kylie: Yeah, I was. I finished that and now I'm reading this.

Teresa: You're a real **bookworm**, aren't you? You go right from one book to the next.

Kylie: I actually hated reading until 4th grade or so. After that, something just clicked and I've been reading nonstop ever since.

Corey: Hey, are you free? Wanna go shoot some hoops with me at the park?

Stuart: No, I have to finish this report and then I want to start reviewing for the Spanish test.

Corey: Man, the Spanish test isn't until Friday. You've got loads of time to study. Stop being such a **bookworm** and come hang with me.

Stuart: OK, fine. Give me 15 minutes to finish this report and then we can go.

Corey: Great!

Zany/wacky

Adjective

The words **zany** and **wacky** both mean to be a bit peculiar and amusing because of that peculiarity. People who are a bit foolish, eccentric, or crazy can be called **wacky** or **zany**. In this episode, Andrew and Kassy say that these two words are some of their favourite words. Both **zany** and **wacky** are very light and playful words. If you call someone crazy, it might hurt their feelings, but calling them **wacky** or **zany** lightens the meaning—it means you consider them to be crazy in a silly or playful way, rather than a strange and abnormal way.

Here are a couple more examples with **zany** and **wacky**:

Franny: You see that guy over there? His outfit is seriously **wacky**.

Didi: Oh, wow! He looks like he's wearing the whole rainbow at once: green shoes, orange pants, yellow and blue striped shirt, a red beanie, purple-framed glasses.

Franny: Wanna go ask if we can take a picture with him?

Didi: Totally!

Roger: So, this might sound a little **zany**, but I'm thinking about getting a pet iguana.

Nigel: A pet iguana? Really? Why?

Roger: I've always wanted one. I think they're cute.

Nigel: Dogs are cute. Cats are cute. Iguanas are not cute. They're creepy.

Roger: C'mon. Look at this picture. Tell me he's not the cutest thing you've ever seen.

To make a comeback

Idiom

The idiom **to make a comeback** has two common meanings. The first is to come from behind in a sport, game, or election to surpass your opponent. The second meaning is to become popular or well-known again after disappearing for a while or going out of style. In this episode, Andrew mentions the second meaning of the phrase **to make a comeback**. He says that one of his favourite words, malarkey, is **making a comeback** these days thanks to the current US president, Joe Biden. In other words, malarkey is kind of an out-dated, old-fashioned word that wasn't used much in recent years, but it's starting to become more well-known because President Biden uses the phrase frequently.

The phrase **to make a comeback** is also used a lot in the entertainment industry to describe performers who try to become popular again after many years of retirement or obscurity. For example, the Jonas Brothers was a popular boy band in the early 2000s, but they split up for several years. In 2019, they **made a comeback** by restarting the band, releasing a new album, and kickstarting a **comeback** tour.

Here are a couple more examples with **to make a comeback**:

Jolie: Have you noticed that bell-bottom jeans **are making a comeback**?

Katherine: Yeah, I've heard that skinny jeans are out and bell-bottom and bootcut jeans are back in style.

Jolie: Fashion trends are seriously like yo-yos. I probably never have to buy new clothes again, because something that's not considered cool now will just come back into style a few years from now.

Katherine: That's so true. Let's hope our skinny jeans will still fit by the time they're back in style.

Jacob: Did you see the game last night?

Ryan: Yes, I did! The Eagles made an amazing **comeback**. I was so sure they were gonna lose.

Jacob: Yeah, I'm kicking myself now. I figured there was no way they were gonna come back from being 20 points behind, so I didn't watch the last 20 minutes of the game.

Ryan: Man, you really missed out! Those last 20 minutes were legendary.

A bunch of malarkey

Slang phrase

The word **malarkey** means nonsense, or words that are foolish or untrue. Therefore, if something is referred to as **a bunch of malarkey**, then it is total nonsense. US President Joe Biden often used this phrase to describe a lot of what former US President Donald Trump had to say during the political debates in 2020. In other words, Biden accused Trump of spreading **malarkey**—political nonsense and untruths—to garner voters in the 2020 election.

Here are a couple more examples with **a bunch of malarkey**:

Jenny: You know, Grandpa, I read an article that says the moon landing was all a hoax; it never really happened.

Grandpa: Well, that's just a bunch of **malarkey**. Of course it happened.

Jenny: How do you know?

Grandpa: For starters, I watched it live on TV when it happened.

Jenny: Really? No way!

Carlisle: Mr. Smith, I'm sorry I couldn't complete my homework last night. My dog died.

Mr. Smith: Hmm ... So your grandma was in the hospital last week, your cat died a month ago, and your dog died last night? I say this is all a bunch of **malarkey**. No one is that unlucky.

Carlisle: No, really, that's what happened!

Mr. Smith: OK, how about I call your mom and see if you're telling the truth. If you are, I'll apologize for not believing you.

Carlisle: Um ... She's busy. I don't think you should call her.

Mr. Smith: That's what I thought. Sit down, Carlisle. You're getting a zero for this assignment.

Noob

Slang noun

A **noob** or a newbie is a person who is new and/or inexperienced at some activity or profession. **Noob** is used a lot in gaming to describe novice players who lack the skills of serious, veteran gamers. The term **noob** can be used as an insult to make a new player feel intimidated, but it can also be used simply as a kind of nickname for new players before they get more integrated into a game, team, or group.

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

Meg: Hey. Who are you? I don't think I've seen you around here before.

Sally: My name's Sally. I'm new here.

Meg: So, **noob**, where are you from?

Sally: I'm from Vancouver. My family and I just moved here last week.

Chris: Wanna come over and play some video games tonight?

Vince: Yeah, sure, but can we invite Tyler and Marco, too? I wanna have a full team so that we don't risk getting stuck with a couple of **noobs**.

Chris: Good idea. I'm texting them now.

Vince: Cool. See you guys after class.

Quiz

1. What do you call a person who loves to read?

- a) bookaholic
- b) bookworm
- c) book badger
- d) bookapolis

2. Which word is NOT an example of onomatopoeia?

- a) buzz
- b) zap
- c) taste
- d) crash

3. Which word is a synonym for malarkey?

- a) nonsense
- b) music
- c) fun
- d) trouble

4. Which TWO words below mean silly and a bit crazy?

- a) superfluous
- b) zany
- c) plethora
- d) wacky

5. True or false? A noob is someone who is experienced at something that they enjoy, such as video games or sports.

- a) true
- b) false

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What is your favourite English word? Why?
2. What is your favourite word in your mother tongue? Why is it your favourite? What is its English translation?
3. What is your least favourite English word and why?
4. Are you a bookworm? What's your favourite genre to read?
5. What's the wackiest thing you've seen or heard lately?

Quiz Answers

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

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