

## Simplified Speech #138 – What do you think about online trolls?

### Episode description

Trolls. No, we're not talking about mean mythical creatures who live under bridges. We're talking about online trolls. They are very real and very mean people who like to anger others by posting nasty and cruel comments online. This has become a big problem associated with social media.

In this Simplified Speech episode, hosts Andrew and Kassy discuss the various ways online trolls operate, and how you can deal with them in your own way.

### Fun fact

The troll character comes from Scandinavian mythology and has been around for centuries. Online trolls, however, date back to the early beginnings of the internet.

### Expressions included in the study guide

- To scratch [one's] head
- To brush [something] off
- To get a kick out of [something]
- To spew
- Tainted
- To solve [something] overnight



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## 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. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

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

**Kassy:** And I'm Kassy.

**Andrew:** And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello, friends. Welcome back to Culips. You're listening to Simplified Speech. Simplified Speech is the Culips series that features natural, clear, and easy to understand English conversations about fascinating topics. Today, I'm joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hey there, Kassy.

**Kassy:** Hey, Andrew. And hey, listeners. Andrew, we have an interesting topic for everyone today, because we're going to talk about online trolls.

**Andrew:** Online trolls. Yeah, I'm really excited for this conversation. I think it is a really interesting topic and we're both going to have a lot to say about it. And some of our listeners may actually be **scratching their heads** right now, Kassy, and might be curious about what we mean by online trolls. But don't worry, everyone, we'll break it down and explain it in just a moment. But before we start our conversation, Kassy, I think we should let everyone know about the study guide for this episode.

**Kassy:** Yes, exactly. There's a great study guide that accompanies this episode. And in it, you guys can find a full transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, and examples of the important vocabulary that Andrew and I are going to use here today in this episode. It has a quiz and much, much more. And you can download it in a PDF file and print it off. Or you can view it in a mobile-friendly version that looks great even on your smartphone. To access it, you just need to visit [Culips.com](http://Culips.com) and become a Culips member.

**Andrew:** We also want to give a shout-out to one of our listeners who is named Nicole So Yeon from South Korea. And Nicole So Yeon left us a five-star rating and a very kind review on Apple Podcasts.

**Kassy:** Yeah. Nicole wrote, "I've been studying with Culips for about half a year. My English is not good enough, so I usually listen to Simplified Speech. My study routine is, one, listen to an episode at least twice. Two, read a translation. Three, memorize the words and phrases I don't know well, and, four, listen over and over. Thank you so much, Culips team, I'm always rooting for you guys."

**Andrew:** Wow, thank you so much to Nicole So Yeon for that awesome review. That sounds like a really great study method, doesn't it, Kassy?

**Kassy:** Sounds perfect.

**Andrew:** Yeah, and we are rooting for you as well, Nicole So Yeon. So please keep up the good work. Now, listeners, leaving a positive review and a five-star rating on Apple Podcasts or, really, whatever platform you use to listen to us helps more English learners from around the world connect with us and improve their English with us. So, even if you leave just a one-word review, we would really appreciate it.

And with that being said, Kassy, let's start with this episode. As we mentioned at the start of the show, we are going to talk about online trolls today. And before we hit the record button and started this conversation, Kassy, you told me that you just recently read something about online trolls. Was it a book or was it a magazine article? I can't remember even though you just told me like 20 minutes ago. I'm sorry.

**Kassy:** That's OK. It's a book. It's not only about online trolls, but it's about, you know, the not-so-great parts of the internet, from lack of privacy, to online trolls, to the killing of mom and pop stores with cheap prices from big businesses.

**Andrew:** OK. So, some of maybe the negative side effects, negative consequences of the internet that we possibly didn't anticipate when the internet first started becoming, you know, a very popular thing that everybody uses every day, back maybe 30 years ago or so. OK. Well, let's start at the start, Kassy, a good place to begin. And we should break down this expression, online troll. So, obviously the online part of this expression refers to the internet, but what do we mean by a troll. Who is a troll?

**Kassy:** When I think of a troll, it's like a little grumpy, kind of ugly, magical monster creature that lives under a bridge and taunts mean words at people as they try to cross.

**Andrew:** Yeah, that is like the original version of a troll, right? It's actually a character that we can find in many old fairy tales and children's stories. Even we can see them in movies, and there's a popular troll doll character, as well. However, that's not what we mean in this instance, everyone. We're not talking about the character from old fairy tales.

When we talk about an online troll, it refers to someone who makes mischief and makes trouble on the internet, usually by leaving negative comments on the comment sections or the discussion sections of websites, right? So if you see somebody trying to start trouble on YouTube in the comment section, maybe they left a comment that seems overly negative or is designed to make people get angry, or maybe that comment is very offensive, that person who leaves that kind of comment, we can call that person an online troll.

**Kassy:** Yes, that's right, Andrew. And, actually, I want to make a distinction between an online troll and an online bully. They're pretty similar. However, when I think of an online bully, I think of it being as someone I know and they're personally victimizing you. They're choosing you to bully online. But an online troll, they are bullying you, they're saying things that are hurtful, but a lot of times these trolls are completely anonymous. You have no idea who they are in the real world and that allows them to make comments that they might never say to your face.

**Andrew:** Kassy, you just brought up something that's really important here, the difference between an online bully and an online troll, and I agree. A bully is someone who personally attacks someone else to make them feel bad, right? So, like, for example, we have a Culips Instagram page and if somebody came to the Culips Instagram page and suddenly left me a bunch of negative comments, "Andrew, you suck. I hate Culips. You should quit. Why are you even doing this?" You know, like a bunch of negativity in the comments, which thankfully, we've never had so far, which is great. Thank you to all the people leaving us positive comments on our Instagram page.

But if we were to receive that kind of feedback through our Instagram, we would say that that is more online bullying, right? It was personally directed at me, like, "Andrew, you suck. You should quit." Right? Those are negative comments directed at me and that would be bullying.

However, trolling is different. And it doesn't always have to be negative. It could even just be something like disinformation, right? Or lying online, or saying something that will cause other people to react, right?

And, you know, we're still going through this COVID pandemic and because of that, I've been doing a lot of reading online about the pandemic, and about vaccines, and about treatment, and everything related to COVID. And I realized that I have to stop reading things online, you know, especially regarding treatment and vaccines. I was doing a lot of reading, and I realized that I can't trust anything that I read online these days.

One of my favourite places to waste time on the internet is Reddit. And Reddit is a discussion community. It's a very active social media page in English. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of different communities on Reddit and millions of users. And there are so many people talking about politics and talking about the pandemic.

And I was reading about treatments for COVID, and I realize all of these users on Reddit are anonymous. Of course, they have a username, but that's all we know about them. They don't have profile pictures or information about who they really are. And I realized, like, I can't tell if these people are telling the truth or if they're trolling and lying. I don't know if they're real people, I don't know if they are, you know, funded by a foreign country, maybe, if they are spies, or if they are bots. I don't know anything about this.

So, I decided that when it comes to the pandemic, I really can't trust anything that I read online, and I think a lot of that is due to the fact that there probably are a lot of people trolling. I think that is just something that people for some reason enjoy doing. They like to spread misinformation, or they like to get other people riled up and angry. And so I've made the decision when it comes to really important things like my own personal health, that I'm going to try and stay off of social media before I make any decisions so that I'm not influenced by a troll.

**Kassy:** Yeah, I think you made a great point there, Andrew. And that's something that I read in the book I mentioned earlier. One of the biggest downsides of the internet, I mean, it's also a plus for some people, but one of the biggest downsides is how anonymous it is. You can create any kind of account and post anything you want, and have no consequences for it, no matter how awful it is.

That's why there are so many online trolls, because people realize that they can say whatever they want and, in their minds, like, it's funny, oh, I didn't really mean it, but everybody's gonna take information differently when they read it online. Some might take it literally, some, you know, might just **brush it off**. But, you know, you can't see a person's face, you can't see their expression, you can just read those words. And those words could be interpreted differently by everyone. And that's why it's such a big problem.

**Andrew:** Yeah, now we have another expression in English that is used all the time when talking about this topic, it's a little bit rude. I wouldn't use this expression in front of my mother, for example, but it's good to know anyways. And the expression is shit posting, shit posting. And I hear this all the time when my friends are talking about online trolls. Now, what shit posting is is essentially posting something on the internet that is garbage, right? It's like a negative, toxic comment, but the purpose of it is to deliberately be provocative, right? I'm posting something on the internet to try and get you to respond, right?

The goal of a shit poster is to post something, maybe on Facebook or on Reddit, that will just make you angry and set you off so that you go on a diatribe. You leave a long comment and start an argument online. If that happens, then the troller feels like they've won, right? They manipulated you, they made you angry, and they get pleasure, they get happiness from doing that. And I think there are a lot of people, I tend to believe that they are probably younger males, maybe high school students or university students, not always, but that's just my gut feeling on this, that for some reason **get a kick**, get pleasure from shit posting and trolling online.

**Kassy:** I do think it's predominantly males. I don't think it's necessarily young ones, either. I think, especially in the US, the last 4 years, you know, we had a president who was very controversial. And you would have, say one person was super pro-Trump, they would go into a web page that was full of people who were anti-Trump, and they would post, like, "Trump for president forever!" And then you would go, and then a person who was super anti-Trump would go into a web page that was full of supporters, and they would say something nasty about him, you know? So, like, there's trolls on both sides of any spectrum. And you're right, they like to go and find these platforms and just **spew** anything they can think of that they know will cause people to react in strong ways.

**Andrew:** Yeah, I think this is a by-product. Something that is a by-product means a side effect. So this is a side effect or a by-product of politics in the USA, but also, I can say, to a good extent in Canada now as well, being very divided. So, you have two sides of the political spectrum, you have conservative people, and you have non-conservative, liberal people, I guess we could say. And those two sides of society are extremely divided and they argue a lot. And they have very strong beliefs that can't really be changed. And we're seeing this about so many different aspects of society these days.

Kassy, you mentioned the presidency before. With the former President Donald Trump, it was like this, but it's also like this with President Biden. We're seeing it with the COVID pandemic, we're seeing it with vaccines, we're seeing it with so many issues. And because of this, I think there is a lot of arguing online, and you have a lot of people from one side of the argument going into the communities—the online communities, where the people on the other side of the argument hang out—and trolling and trying to start arguments and trying to get people to feel angry and feel bad. And I just think it's kind of sad, at the end of the day. It just seems like not a very productive way to use our time.

**Kassy:** Exactly. Like, there's already enough anger and sadness in the world, why do you want to add to that?

**Andrew:** Yeah, I don't really get it myself. But at least one good thing in my own personal life is all of this controversy recently about the politics in North America, about the pandemic, about the vaccines, it has made me realize that trolling and shit posting is a very real thing. And I have to be very, very cautious about what I read online, and it's made me take a step back from spending so much time reading news online, reading social media to get my information, and I've just been a lot more cautious about what I consider to be true or not true. So, I think that's a good perspective to have. And, in a way, I gained this perspective because of the online trolls. So, thank you to the trolls.

**Kassy:** By seeing your bad posts, it makes me become a better person.

**Andrew:** It does cause a difficult problem for people though, right? If the internet is the main place where we get our information these days, and we can't trust the information that we read online because it is **tainted** or spoiled by trolls, then how can we know what the truth is? So it's a big issue and I don't think it's something that we'll **solve overnight**, but hopefully, it works itself out in the future. I'm not going to propose a solution to the problem, though, because I really don't have a solution.

**Kassy:** In the book I read, you know what the solution was? They didn't have Facebook in the book, but they attach the Facebook-like profile of each troll to their anonymous trolling account. Their name was posted to the world, they were no longer anonymous, and it caused chaos.

**Andrew:** I've always wondered about that. You know, that word anonymous that you just used, it is also the name of a famous hacktivist group. So Anonymous is a group of programmers and hackers who are not so active these days. I haven't heard that name used for a few years.

But several years ago, Anonymous, that hacktivist group, did a bunch of hacks and released a lot of data that was supposedly top-secret data. And I've always wondered, like, what would happen if a hacker or a hacker group suddenly released all the data about online trolls? And suddenly all the trolls were not anonymous anymore, but we could link everybody's comments to their real identity. That would be so fascinating to see, like who all the trolls really are. I think that would cause chaos. I totally agree with the premise of the book.

**Kassy:** Well, if anybody's curious about what happened in the book, it's called Version Zero by David Yoon. If anybody's curious, you can see what his take would have been if the trolls went from being anonymous to no longer anonymous.

**Andrew:** Kassy, I think we could record a whole other episode about this topic of being anonymous online, because it's a really good question and one that I think would be a great conversation. And that question is should people be allowed to be anonymous online? But maybe we could save our thoughts on that question for a future upcoming episode, because I think we should wrap things up here.

But, listeners, we'd like to hear your opinion on this topic, of course. What do you think about online trolling? Have you ever encountered a troll online? Or maybe have you ever trolled someone online? If you're a very honest person, maybe you could admit that to us. I'm not sure, but anyways, we'll leave it up to you. To get in contact with us, simply send us an email. Our email address is [contact@Culips.com](mailto:contact@Culips.com).



And if you enjoy listening to Culips and find us helpful for building your English language skills, then we would love it if you could support us. The best way to do that is by becoming a Culips member on our website, Culips.com. But that's not the only way to support us. You could also follow us on social media, tell your friends who are learning English to check us out, and leave us a five-star rating and a nice review on your favourite podcast platform.

We'll be back soon with another brand-new episode, and we'll catch you then. Thanks for listening everyone and take care. Goodbye.

**Kassy:** See ya.



## Detailed Explanations

### To scratch [one's] head

#### Idiom

At the beginning of this episode, Andrew says that today's topic will be online trolls. He also says that some people might be **scratching their heads** when hearing about online trolls. **To scratch [one's] head** is to be confused about something. Since some people don't know what online trolls are, they might be **scratching their heads**.

**To scratch [one's] head** comes from someone's body language when they are confused and thinking of something. This expression creates a visual well-known throughout the world. As a noun, you can use a **head-scratcher** to refer to a puzzling question or event.

Here are a couple more examples with **to scratch [one's] head**:

**Mark:** Here's the report Johnson finished this morning.

**Olive:** Why did he print it out on yellow paper?

**Mark:** I really don't know. I'm **scratching my head** on it that one, too.

**Olive:** Can you please tell him to reprint it on white paper?

**Maria:** Did you answer question 3 from the math homework?

**Eunha:** Not yet. How about you? Is it difficult?

**Maria:** Oh boy. I was **scratching my head** all night. That's why I'm asking you. I was wondering if we could look at it together.

**Eunha:** Sure. Let me get my book.

## To brush [something] off

### Idiom

When talking about mean online comments, Kassy says that many people take them very seriously, while others can easily **brush them off**. **To brush [something] off** is to not be affected by something.

Think of getting some dirt on your kitchen table. You would literally **brush it off**, and now your table is clean without a big problem or a fuss. A common addition to this expression is to say **to brush [something] off your shoulder**. Even as body language, **brushing something off your shoulder** is a well-known gesture that shows you are unaffected by something.

Here are a couple more examples with **to brush [something] off**:

**Hilary:** You don't look too happy.

**Victor:** I had an incident at the supermarket.

**Hilary:** What happened?

**Victor:** Some guy bumped in his shopping cart into mine. I was expecting him to apologize. When he didn't, I said something to him. He didn't like that and started yelling all kinds of names at me for 5 minutes. I got so angry.

**Hilary:** You need to learn to **brush those things off**. Next time, just walk away immediately. It's much better for your mental health.

**Arthur:** How was your tennis match?

**Johann:** It was OK. Actually, I played really badly in the second set. I lost 6-0.

**Arthur:** Wow. How did that affect you?

**Johann:** I simply **brushed it off** and concentrated on the third set, which I won. I also won the match.

## To get a kick out of [something]

Idiom

When talking about some of the motivations online trolls might have, Andrew's gut feeling is that they **get a kick out of trolling online**. **To get a kick out of [something]** is to get pleasure or excitement from doing something. Andrew says that online trolls probably **get a kick out of getting other people angry**.

Even though this episode talks about the negative aspects of online trolling, **to get a kick out of [something]** is usually used in a positive sense. Most people talk about **getting a kick out of their hobbies, events**, or even **loved ones**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to get a kick out of [something]**:

**Benji:** What kind of movies do you like?

**Phil:** I like most genres, but I really **get a kick out of thrillers**.

**Benji:** Thrillers, really? Why?

**Phil:** I love that jolting sensation you get when something pops out unexpectedly, and the tension building throughout the movie.

**Benji:** Oh, that's precisely why I don't like those movies!

**Lara:** Dana is wondering if she can bring her children to the party. What do you think?

**David:** Sure. That would be nice.

**Lara:** Even though this is a party mostly for adults?

**David:** No problem. They're well-behaved, and everyone **gets a kick out of them**. They're pretty funny.

## To spew

Verb

When talking about online trolls and their activities, Kassy says they often **spew** anything they can think of to cause a reaction in others. Usually, **to spew** means to put out a large amount of something, like a liquid or other material. For example, a volcano can **spew** out hot lava and ash.

Informally, **to spew** means to vomit. In that sense, when trolls **spew** their comments online, what they are saying is as unpleasant and undesirable as vomit. If you tell someone they are **spewing** online garbage, you are trying to insult their content and comments.

Here are a couple more examples with **to spew**:

**Mona:** Did you hear what Patrick said to me?

**Kathy:** No. What did he say?

**Mona:** I won't repeat it, but it was really mean.

**Kathy:** Hey. Don't listen to him. Everyone knows that all he does is **spew** garbage all the time.

**Mona:** Yeah. But words can hurt, you know?

**Alex:** Stop interrupting me.

**Hector:** I'm sorry, but your speech is getting a little long.

**Alex:** Do you not find it interesting?

**Hector:** No. Not at all. It feels like you're just **spewing** nonsense.

**Alex:** Excuse me?

**Hector:** You heard me. Can you wrap up your speech so we can listen to another speaker?

## Tainted Adjective

Andrew shares his concerns about the quality of information you can find online. He says that the information is often **tainted** by online trolls. **Tainted** means that something is not in a pure state. For example, you can have **tainted** milk, **tainted** water, or **tainted** meat. Something can be **tainted** because it was mixed with some pollutant, like drinking water mixed with bleach, or because it spoiled through carelessness, like milk left outside the fridge overnight.

Concepts can also be **tainted**. Some event can give you a **tainted** opinion of someone. A person's reputation can be **tainted** because of something that happened.

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

**Tara:** Did you read this research on the new wonder drug for diabetes?

**Jess:** I don't think you can trust that research.

**Tara:** Why do you say that?

**Jess:** It was paid for by the pharmaceutical companies. It's certain that the findings are **tainted** by the people who stand to profit from it. And the research paper isn't even published in a peer-reviewed publication. So I would be sceptical about it.

**Emily:** Who do you think you'll vote for in this election?

**Kirk:** I'm not sure. But I'm leaning against the current ruling party.

**Emily:** Didn't you vote for them last time? What made you change your mind?

**Kirk:** Have you heard of the contracts scandal? They got caught giving construction contracts to friends of the party. It was really unethical.

**Emily:** Yeah. I heard about that.

**Kirk:** So that really **tainted** my opinion of them.

## To solve [something] overnight

Idiom

Near the end of this episode, Andrew and Kassy talk about possible solutions to the problem of online trolls. However, Andrew says that the problems probably won't be **solved overnight**. **To solve [something] overnight** means to fix a problem quickly.

Imagine having a large and complex problem. You work on it a little bit at night and go to sleep. In the morning, almost magically, the problem is resolved! Actually, in real life, that doesn't happen very often.

The idiom **to solve [something] overnight** is always used in its negative form. You are implying that something cannot be solved quickly.

Here are a couple more examples with **to solve [something] overnight**:

**Jake:** You should take a break. You're working too hard on this.

**Nadia:** I can't stop now. I need to finish it.

**Jake:** Take your time and pace yourself. You aren't going **to solve these problems overnight**. It's going to take us months to complete.

**Nadia:** I know, I know. Rome wasn't built in a day.

**Jake:** That's right.

**Harry:** What's your number one concern these days?

**Solange:** Apart from COVID, I would say race relations in my city. I've been an activist for a long time, working toward a better living environment for everyone.

**Harry:** Would you say things are getting better or worse?

**Solange:** The situation is definitely better than 30 years ago, but we still need to work on things. Social change is always a slow process. Despite our best efforts, we can't **solve these issues overnight**.

## Quiz

**1. What does to scratch [one's] head mean?**

- a) your head is dirty
- b) you are confused
- c) you are happy
- d) your head is too hot

**2. True or false? To get a kick out of [something] is a good thing.**

- a) true
- b) false

**3. What does to solve [something] overnight mean?**

- a) to not accomplish something quickly
- b) to solve a problem over a long period of time
- c) to fix a problem rapidly
- d) to think of a problem while sleeping

**4. Which of the following does NOT mean tainted?**

- a) spoiled
- b) impure
- c) perfect
- d) polluted

**5. What does it mean to brush [something] off?**

- a) to not be affected by something
- b) to be deeply affected by something
- c) to brush things out of your hair
- d) to brush up on a particular skill, like your language skills



## Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How do you deal with online trolls?
2. What websites do you think are most affected by online trolls?
3. Are you the type of person who easily brushes things off? Give an example.
4. When is the last time someone you know did something you didn't like and tainted your opinion of them?
5. What is something in life that you get a kick out of?

## Quiz Answers

1. b   2. a   3. c   4. c   5. a

### Episode credits

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