

Simplified Speech #141 – Are you a big playlist person?

Episode description

Are you a big playlist person? That's the question that Andrew and Suzanne discuss in this Simplified Speech episode. Join them as they chat about the kinds of playlists they make, how they make them, and when they like to listen to them.

Simplified Speech is perfect for intermediate-level English learners who are looking to improve their English fluency. Each episode features clear and natural conversations about an interesting topic. Studying with Simplified Speech will help you to improve your English listening skills, conversation ability, and vocabulary knowledge.

Fun fact

Although there are many different music streaming apps available in North America, Spotify is the most popular. A total of 32% of people who use music-streaming apps say they listen to music through Spotify. Other popular apps include Apple Music, Amazon Music, and YouTube Music.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To tweak [something]
- Pump-up jam
- To taper off
- To lean on
- To be spot on
- No pun intended



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, everyone, my name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello, everyone. Welcome back to Culips. Today, we have a Simplified Speech episode for you. Now, Simplified Speech is the Culips series that features clear, natural, and easy to understand English conversations about interesting topics. Thank you all for joining us today to practice English and to learn and grow together with us. Who is us? Well, it's me, but it's also my cohost, Suzanne, who is helping me with today's lesson. Hey there, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew. It's great to be here. Hi, listeners. And today, Andrew, we have a really fun topic that I think both of us love. And we're going to talk about making playlists. So cool. You and I are both huge music lovers. So I think we have a lot to talk about on this topic.

Andrew: I completely agree. And I can't wait for this conversation but, before we get to it, we should let everyone know about the study guide so that they can follow along with the guide as they listen today.

Suzanne: That's right, and the study guide for this episode includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations and examples, a quiz, and a lot more. You can download a PDF file of the study guide and printed off or you can view a mobile-friendly version that looks great on smartphones. So, to access it, you just need to visit Culips.com and become a Culips member. Very easy.

Andrew: We also want to give a shout-out to one of our listeners from Russia with the username Graysiko. Graysiko wrote, "Five stars because it is an awesome, informative podcast. Keep it up." So, Graysiko, thank you so much for that great review and your support. We really do love it.

Suzanne: Yes, that was awesome. Thank you.

Andrew: So, listeners, the reason why we give a shout-out at the start of every episode is just a way to thank all of the Culips listeners who support us in this way. And leaving a positive review and a five-star rating on Apple Podcasts or, really, whatever platform you use to listen to us just helps more English learners around the world find Culips and study and learn with us.

All right, so that is it for today's announcements. They're out of the way, and we're ready to get started with this episode. And, Suzanne, we're talking about playlists today, playlists. So, just to quickly explain what a playlist is, it's just when you take music, take a bunch of your favourite songs or songs that you like and organize them and arrange them into a list that you can listen to, and that list we call a playlist.

So, I have to ask, Suzanne, just to kick things off here. Are you a big playlist person?

Suzanne: Andrew, I am a big playlist person. Not just with music, too. I also make podcast playlists.

Andrew: The podcast playlist. Wow, awesome.

Suzanne: Yeah, I love playlists. I love grouping things into a theme. And putting things that have maybe a similar topic, or maybe just the topic is that I really like them all together in one accessible place, and that's what a playlist is for me.

How about you? Are you a big playlist person?

Andrew: A big playlist person. Well, yes, I am. I suppose I am. And just to break down that expression because maybe some people will find it confusing, a big playlist person or I could say, for example, Suzanne, are you a big movie person? It doesn't mean, like, are you a very tall person, right? It has nothing to do with the size of your body.

Suzanne: Thank goodness.

Andrew: It just means are you interested in this thing. So, are you a big playlist person? Are you interested in making playlists? Do you do this often? Are you big movie person? That means do you have an interest in movies? Are you passionate about movies? It's that kind of question, right? So, yeah, I am a big playlist person. Less so now than I was when I was younger. When I was younger, I was really into making mix CDs, mix tapes, and I loved doing that when I was in high school and my early days at university. But these days, I still make playlists, especially for when I go jogging and running. I have a really awesome, kind of smart fitness watch and I can load my Spotify playlist right on to my watch and then stream the music from my watch to my Bluetooth earbuds.

Suzanne: I like that.

Andrew: Yeah, it's awesome. So I don't need to bring my phone with me when I go running, all of my music is just on my wrist. And I can track my run with the GPS. I mean, technology these days is really amazing. It's so cool that I can do that. So, I'm always **tweaking** and making new playlists for my runs. And it's really fun. I enjoy doing that. So, I guess most of my playlist-making these days is centred around running, right? So, I have a lot of, like, high-energy music. Not too much, like, calm, mellow, chill music, not too much of that. Right now, it's pretty high-energy, **pump-up jams**, I think.

Suzanne: That's great. And also, didn't you make a playlist for your wedding, as well?

Andrew: Oh, yeah, I did. I did make a playlist for my wedding. You're absolutely right about that. And I put a ton of effort and thought into that playlist. I wanted it to be really perfect. So I took my time with it. And I think, in the end, it was pretty good but, yeah, that was kind of a totally different playlist than I usually make, because I had to please other people with that playlist. In fact, I would say that's almost more like DJing where I'm trying to make the crowd happy and it's not just for my personal enjoyment.

Suzanne: It's almost like, you know, a curator at a museum. So, right, you're really choosing items not just for your personal, you know, benefit, but also to please a larger crowd and a larger audience, to give them an experience. So it's like you're a DJ and a curator of sorts, putting together an experience of music for these people.

Andrew: Yeah, that, that's a great way to put it. It was totally more about the other people, but also for myself, too. Of course, I wanted music at my wedding that I liked, but I feel like that was a kind of different playlist, but you're totally correct. I did make a playlist for the wedding.

Suzanne, what about you? I make playlists for exercising. What kinds of reason do you make playlists for?

Suzanne: Yeah, um, I also, I have, like, a meditation playlist. I have my yoga playlist. So, it's the sequence and series of songs that sort of builds the yoga up to a higher energy point, and then it **tapers off**, similar, probably, to your running playlist. It kind of has an arc. It builds and then it **tapers off** and, into a more calm, cool-down sort of feel, with maybe a meditation at the end. So I have a few playlists like that.

I also have a lot of playlists from when I was in my band. So, playlists of songs that we liked, that were inspirational, or that we wanted to cover. And then, gosh, I think I have like a musical theatre playlist, my favourite musical theatre songs from like Broadway and show tunes. And I really **lean on** my Spotify app choices. Their recommendations to me seem to be pretty **spot on, no pun intended**.

Andrew: Spotify is **spot on**.

Suzanne: Spotify. And so, I do enjoy some of their suggestions. And one of the playlists that they suggested for me recently was a playlist of jazz piano music because I was listening to that on recommendation from my partner. And then they kind of crafted and put together a bunch of other jazz piano albums in this playlist. And it was, it's been really nice to put on the speakers when we have a couple of guests over on the terrace, because it's really mellow and chill, but fun. And, you know, it's a nice background to watch the sunset. It's just an, it's a nice playlist of unexpected music.

And I also will just say one more thing about the kinds of playlists. Olivier and I, my partner and I, have a family plan on Spotify. So Spotify has this feature where you can create a family playlist.

Andrew: Oh, cool.

Suzanne: Yeah. So it puts together songs that he listens to and that I listened to into one playlist. And it's fun when we're on a road trip, to go was that you? Or is that me? That's you. That's your song. So, because he's French from France, most of the French songs are his songs. And it's fun, because then I get to be introduced to new French songs. And maybe he'll get to be introduced to more underground, indie singers and songwriters and artists that he wouldn't normally hear. And then there's some crossover. So, there's some that we both like, which is cool. So, that's an interesting feature.

Andrew: Listeners, I swear, this is not a paid advertisement for Spotify. But Suzanne and I both use this app, so it's what we're familiar with.

One of the things that I like about Spotify is, like you said, they have a very good predictive algorithm that can kind of guess what you want to listen to. So, one of the features that I've been taking advantage of when making playlists is, you know, after you add maybe 10 or 15 songs, then Spotify will guess what kind of music would match well with the songs that you've put into your playlist and will make suggestions. So you can just go through the suggestions. And it always comes up with some really good songs that, you know, maybe I wasn't thinking of at the time, but then when they pop up and Spotify says, "How about adding this one to your playlist?" I'm always like, yeah, that's a good suggestion. I would like to add that to my playlist after all.

And you're right, that they also have a bunch of pre-made playlists that you can select and they're really diverse. There are so many different kinds. I think the other day, I was listening to one that was, like, the top hip hop songs from 1996. So, it was like a specific time, really specific genre.

Suzanne: I like that. I want to listen to that playlist.

Andrew: It was dope. It was really dope. There were some great songs on there and it was –

Suzanne: Tribe Called Quest.

Andrew: Yeah, there was a ton of good stuff. So I've also been doing that, just taking advantage of those pre-made playlists that are set for a specific genre, specific mood. It's really an easy way to listen to some great music.

Suzanne, I have to ask. This question popped into my head when I was listening to you speak there. When I make a playlist and then I play it, I always play it on random. I don't really curate a flow. You know, like you said your yoga playlist had a flow, started calm, and then went up in intensity, and then cooled down towards the end. But I always just have a bunch of songs on my playlist that I like, but I don't really care about the order of the playlist. I just put it on random and any song that's on the list I think is good enough for me to listen to. If it made it that far, it's, it's good to go. So, I'm wondering: do you ever do that? Do you ever play things just on random, or is flow of the song, the sequence of the songs important to you?

Suzanne: Yeah, I think it depends on the playlist. For the most part, I will just add the songs I like to a playlist and then it'll usually be on random. Yeah, no, no big deal. And it's fun to get that surprise, like, oh, yeah, this song, right? And it's fun. For example, when we were practicing with our band, we would organize our playlists according to the order in which we were singing the songs, so that we could really hear the flow of how they would end and then begin and how it kind of sounded all connected. So, for that, it was important for us to hear the order. And I think there are some playlists, maybe here and there where I will really, like, we use this word curate an order and really put it together with more intention and thought. But for the most part, I kind of like the surprise of the random song, yeah.

Andrew: That's awesome. And, Suzanne, you mentioned earlier about having podcast playlists as well. And I'm sure we have a lot to talk about podcast playlists, but I think we should leave that for another episode, because we're out of time for today. But I will leave just one comment here before we sign off, and that is that Culips members actually get playlist functionality on our website, Culips.com. So, guys, if you sign up and become a Culips member, that's one of the perks of membership is that it's really easy to listen to playlists on our website, Culips.com. And this is great for when you want to binge listen to Culips or when you want to get a lot of English listening practice in. You can just hit play on the playlist and it will go and go and go. So, to take advantage of it, guys, just visit Culips.com. And you can find out about how to sign up and become a member.

Suzanne: We'd love to hear from you guys and know about your playlist lifestyle. Do you make playlists? Do you have a special playlist that you love that you could even recommend on an app? We'd love to hear from you guys. So please email us at contact@Culips.com.

Andrew: And if you enjoy listening to Culips and find us helpful for developing your English skills, then we'd love it if you could support us. There are many ways that you can do that. The best way is by becoming a Culips member on our website, Culips.com. But that's not the only way. You could also tell your friends who are learning English to listen to us. You could follow us on social media or even leave us a five-star rating and a nice review on your favourite podcast app.

So, that brings us to the end of today's episode, but we'll be back soon and we'll talk to you then. Take care, everyone, and see you next time. Bye, bye.

Suzanne: Bye, guys.

Detailed Explanations

To tweak (something)

Verb

To tweak (something) means to improve something by changing or adjusting it slightly. In this episode, Andrew mentions that he is “always **tweaking** and making new playlists” for his runs. So we can assume that before going for a run, Andrew makes small changes to his playlist. For example, maybe he adds or removes a song or rearranges the order of the songs in the playlist. He uses the word **tweak** in this sentence because he only makes small changes to the playlist. When you only make a small change to something, you **tweak it**.

When we use **tweak** to talk about a body part, it has a different meaning. In this context, it means to get injured because of an awkward twist or sprain. For example, if you lift a heavy box awkwardly, you might **tweak your back**. Or if you trip awkwardly while hiking, you might **tweak your ankle**.

So, when **tweak** is used to talk about body parts, it means to injure yourself. And when **tweak** is used to talk about something different (for example, a report, a plan, a budget, a design, a style, or a recipe), it means to improve that thing by changing it a little bit.

Here are a couple more examples with **to tweak (something)**:

Lila: Can you check my PowerPoint presentation before I email it to the sales team?

Joseph: Sure, no problem. Let me take a look.

Lila: Thanks.

Joseph: It's amazing, but I think it could be better if you **tweaked the colours** a little bit. The yellow text is difficult to read. How about changing it to black?

Lila: That's a great suggestion. I'll do that for sure, thanks!

Giana: I'm so frustrated with my new camera. All the pictures are blurry. Do you know how I can fix it?

Willie: It's easy to fix. You just need to **tweak the settings**. Would you like me to do that for you tomorrow during our lunch break?

Giana: That would be great!

Pump-up jam

Slang

A **pump-up jam** is a song that gives you energy and makes you feel excited. In this episode, Andrew describes the songs on his running playlist and says that many of them are “high-energy, **pump-up jams**.” In other words, the songs on Andrew’s playlist are high-tempo, upbeat, and motivational.

The noun jam is a slang expression that means song. So, a slow jam is a song that has a slow tempo and rhythm. Or if a friend of yours is listening to the radio and a song they like comes on, they might say, “This song is my jam!” meaning that they love that song.

The phrasal verb to pump [someone] up is a casual and informal expression that means to encourage or motivate someone. A coach might pump the team up with a motivational speech before a game, or a teacher might pump the class up before an important exam by telling them they’ll do a great job on the test.

So, when we put these two expressions together, a **pump-up jam** is a high-energy song that makes you feel motivated, determined, or excited.

Here are a couple more examples with **pump-up jam**:

Jaylene: Can you change the music to something more exciting?

Jeffery: I thought you liked this singer, though?

Jaylene: I do, but when we’re cleaning the house, we should listen to some **pump-up jams** or something, don’t you think? It will make doing the chores more fun.

Jeffery: Good idea! I’ve got a great playlist I’ll put on. You’ll love it!

Peyton: Do you do anything special to get ready before a soccer game?

Ruby: Usually I play some **pump-up jams** on my phone while I warm up and stretch. That gets me motivated and in the zone for the game.

Peyton: So, what’s on your **pump-up jam** playlist these days?

Ruby: It changes all the time, but it’s usually a mix of hip-hop, house, and some classic rock.

To taper off

Phrasal verb

To **taper off** means to slowly and gradually become weaker, smaller, slower, or gentler. In this episode, Suzanne talks about her yoga playlist. She describes how the music builds “up to a higher energy point, and then it **tapers off**.” In other words, her playlist starts with calm music, becomes more energetic, and then slows down and becomes calm again.

There are many situations when we can use **taper off**. For example, a smoker might quit smoking by **tapering off** and slowly reducing the number of cigarettes they smoke every day. Another example is fashion trends. A trend starts off popular, but as time goes by, the popularity **tapers off** and disappears. A final example is traffic. In big cities, traffic jams happen during rush hour. However, as time goes by, the traffic **tapers off** and the roads clear up.

Here are a couple more examples with **to taper off**:

Harley: I’m going to go to the park to play basketball later this afternoon. Want to come?

Kayleigh: Isn’t it raining right now?

Harley: Yeah, but I checked the weather app and it says the rain will **taper off** by 1:00. It’s going to be sunny later.

Kayleigh: Oh, great! Yeah, sure, I’d love to play. Just send me a text when you’re going to the park and I’ll meet you there.

Harley: Sure, will do.

Kira: Did you finish reading *The Sky Over the Countryside*?

Johan: I did. I finished it last night.

Kira: What did you think? Didn’t you love it?

Johan: Well, it started off great, but towards the end my interest started to **taper off**. It was too long. If the author cut out 100 pages and made the story a little more exciting, it would have been way better. What did you think?

Kira: I loved every second of it! I couldn’t put it down. I heard it will be turned into a TV series, too. I can’t wait to watch it.

Johan: Oh, cool! I’ll definitely check that out.

To lean on

Phrasal verb

To lean on means to depending on something or someone for help and support. In this episode, Suzanne says, “I really **lean on** my Spotify app choices” when she makes a new playlist. In other words, Suzanne gets a lot of help from the song suggestions that her music app, Spotify, gives her when she is building a new playlist.

You can hear this phrasal verb in the classic song *Lean on Me* by Bill Withers. In the chorus of this song, Withers sings, “**Lean on** me when you’re not strong and I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on.” So, in this chorus, Withers says that if you need help, you can **lean on** him. This means that he will help and support you during a difficult time.

You can **lean on** someone. For example, you might **lean on** a coworker to help you with a project. Or you might **lean on** a friend for advice when you have to make a difficult decision.

Additionally, you can **lean on** something. For example, you might **lean on** a Culips study guide to help you understand one of our podcast episodes. Or you might **lean on** a cup of coffee to help you feel awake and energized in the morning.

So, whenever you depend on something or someone for help, support, advice, or assistance, you **lean on** that person or thing.

Here are a couple more examples with **to lean on**:

Ben: How’s your daughter doing these days? I know she’s been **leaning on** you ever since she lost her job.

Valery: She went through a difficult time after being laid off, but she’s decided to go back to school and become a nurse. She starts next month and I’m so happy for her.

Ben: That’s great! Good for her.

Chris: Congratulations on getting your driver’s licence!

Jayla: Thanks so much!

Chris: You finally won’t have to **lean on** public transportation to get around.

Jayla: That’s right! Finally, I have the freedom to drive whenever and wherever I want without having to depend on the bus!

To be spot on Idiom

To **be spot on** means to be perfectly accurate or exactly correct. In this episode, Suzanne mentions that the song recommendations she gets from Spotify “seem to be pretty **spot on**.” In other words, the song recommendations Suzanne receives from Spotify are perfect and are exactly the kind of songs that she wants to add to her playlist.

This is an idiomatic expression that is used very often in everyday conversations. It is OK to use **spot on** in formal situations too, like a business meeting. However, you should avoid using it in formal writing, such as in an academic essay. Additionally, this expression is most used by speakers of UK English. As we see in this episode, though, even Americans and Canadians use it comfortably.

To summarize, **spot on** is an informal expression that means to be perfectly correct. So, if a guess is **spot on**, then the guess is correct. If a prediction is **spot on**, then the prediction was totally accurate. If a news article is **spot on**, then it reports the news fairly and accurately.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be spot on**:

Brooklyn: I took Mary’s advice and decided to join a yoga class.

Russell: That’s cool. How do you like the class?

Brooklyn: I love it! It’s really helped me to relieve some stress and relax.

Russell: Good to hear! I always listen when Mary gives me some advice. Her suggestions are usually totally **spot on**.

Brooklyn: I completely agree! She’s the best.

Bethany: Can you double check this expense report before I submit it to the accounting department? I want to make sure that I didn’t miss anything and that it’s **spot on**.

Jack: Sure, can you email me the Excel file?

Bethany: Absolutely. Check your inbox in a couple of minutes and you’ll see it there.

Jack: OK, sounds good.

No pun intended Phrase

No pun intended (or **pun indented**) is a phrase that is said after a speaker makes funny, smart, or cringe-worthy wordplay. Wordplay is what we call a sentence that contains similar sounding words that have been put together by the speaker in a clever way, sometimes intentionally and sometimes accidentally.

By saying **(no) pun intended**, the speaker draws attention to their wordplay. In this episode, Suzanne says that Spotify's song recommendations are usually spot on. Following this, she says "**no pun intended**" to draw our attention to the fact that she used the word spot twice, both in the name of the app, Spotify, and in the expression spot on. By indicating that there is **no pun intended**, Suzanne draws attention to her creative wordplay but communicates that she wasn't purposely trying to play with the words. On the other hand, if she purposely was trying to make a creative statement using wordplay, she could say **pun intended**. So, whenever you say something using wordplay and you want to draw attention to it, you can do so with the phrases **no pun intended** or **pun intended**.

Here are a couple more examples with **no pun intended**:

Pedro: Mallory! What happened to your legs? Why are they both in casts and why are you in a wheelchair?

Mallory: It's a long story but to cut things short, I tripped while walking down the stairs and broke both my legs.

Pedro: Oh my god! Are you OK? Is there anything I can do for you to help you out?

Mallory: I'm doing OK, my sister has been helping me a lot. The doctor says it will still be another 6 to 8 weeks until I'm back on my feet, **no pun intended**.

Pedro: I'm glad to see you haven't lost your sense of humour! If you need anything at all, just give me a call.

Hugo: Have you noticed that apartment maintenance hasn't emptied the garbage cans in the lobby or parking garage yet this week?

Elizabeth: Yeah, the maintenance team has been really trash lately, **no pun intended**. We should make a complaint to the administration. The lobby is starting to smell bad.

Hugo: That's a great idea. I'll go down there now and ask the building manager about what's going on. Do you want to come along?

Quiz

1. Fill in the blank with the best response. Your restaurant recommendation was _____! We had an absolutely delicious meal there last Saturday.

- a) spot in
- b) spot up
- c) spot off
- d) spot on

2. What can you call a song that makes you feel energetic and motivated?

- a) a pump-up jam
- b) a break-down jam
- c) a shake-out jam
- d) a wiggle-waggle jam

3. What does taper off mean?

- a) to adjust the size of something by 25%
- b) to quickly increase the amount of something, such as electricity, money, or power
- c) to slowly become smaller, weaker, or less frequent
- d) to slowly become larger, stronger, or more frequent

4. Which of the following things CANNOT be tweaked?

- a) a report you are writing
- b) your pet dog
- c) the ingredients in a recipe
- d) the settings on your computer

5. What does lean on mean?

- a) to get bad advice from someone
- b) to get support or help from someone or something
- c) to trust someone or something
- d) to tell a secret to someone

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What songs are your favorite pump-up jams?
2. Have you ever tried to tweak something to improve it, but you actually made it worse? Describe that experience.
3. Has your interest in something ever tapered off? What was it? Why?
4. Tell about a time when you leaned on someone for help, advice, or support.
5. Do you know anyone who gives spot on advice, suggestions, or recommendations? Talk or write about the accurate advice, suggestions, or recommendations that you've received from that person.

Quiz Answers

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

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