

Simplified Speech #150 – Have you ever been obsessed with something?

Episode description

There are things that we like, and then there are things we really obsess over! But watch out: you don't want your obsession to turn into an addiction. In this Simplified Speech episode, hosts Andrew and Kassy explore expressions dealing with our obsessions.

Simplified Speech is a series featuring easy and natural English conversations. Both beginner and intermediate language learners can benefit from this series. So be sure to go through our full catalogue online!

Fun fact

As our hosts mention in this episode, Obsession is also the name of a famous perfume from Calvin Klein. It became extremely popular in the '80s and '90s, largely due to its iconic marketing campaign.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Flippantly
- Well put
- To the detriment of [something]
- [One's] thing
- To trigger
- Thought experiment



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.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this the Culips English Podcast.

You are listening to Simplified Speech, which is the Culips series which features clear, natural, and easy to understand English conversations about interesting topics. Today, I am joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hello, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey there, Andrew. And hi, listeners. I hope you're doing well. Andrew and I have a great episode lined up for you today. We're going to be talking about obsession, and discuss the question "have you ever been obsessed with something?" Along the way, we'll share some stories related to this topic and teach you some interesting vocabulary and expressions that you can use when talking about being obsessed.

Andrew: Wow, Kassy, I am excited for this topic, I think it's going to be a fun episode. And I can't wait to hear what you have to say about it. But before we get started with our chat, I want to let all of the listeners know that there is a study guide and a transcript available for this episode on our website, Culips.com. It's available to all Culips members and it's a great study resource that we create and design to help you all build your English skills and reach your learning goals faster than ever. So to sign up and become a Culips member and get unlimited access to all of our study guides for this episode and, really, all of the episodes that we've ever made, which is like over 600 episodes—there's a lot of content out there—plus, some bonuses like invitations to our monthly livestreams, and our Fluency File series. There's also some fantastic bonuses for Culips members. Guys, to learn about how to sign up and to sign up, just visit our website, which is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

We also want to give a shout-out to Andre, one of our listeners from Brazil. Andre was kind enough to leave us a five-star rating and a great review on Apple Podcasts. And Andre wrote, "Thank you guys for the podcast. You're amazing and I'm really improving my English-speaking skills by listening to you. The show sounds clear, and the conversation has different subjects that keeps me interested and keeps me listening and learning more and more. Thank you very much." Well, Andre, thank you for that great review and for listening and learning with us. We're happy to hear that your English speaking is getting better and better.

Kassy: Yeah, absolutely. And, of course, we want to say thanks to everyone who has been supporting us with a review and a five-star rating on your favourite podcast app, or by following us on social media. We really appreciate it, guys.

OK, and now, Andrew, I think we are finally ready to jump in and start our discussion about obsession.

Andrew: Obsession.

Kassy: Listeners who don't know this word are probably like, why do you guys keep saying this in such a weird voice?

Andrew: Yeah, well, that's a good point, Kassy. So let's start our chat here by breaking down some of the key vocabulary, because I think this is a concept that everybody will understand once we explain it, but the vocabulary is a little bit higher level. So we should define everything before we start. And let's begin with this word obsession, obsession, which you will hear often in romance novels and romance movies, which I think is why we are saying it in a funny way and kind of giggling when we say obsession. It's a noun, OK? So it's a thing. And obsession means to be completely focused or completely consumed with one thing or one person. So in the context of, like, a romance movie or a romance novel, often a character will become obsessed with someone else, right? They will have obsession for someone else and that means they are just totally in love, totally consumed, totally fixated, totally focused on just one person.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. I think teenagers tend to have a lot of obsessions, especially towards love. Like, they get a new crush on a boy in their class, and they're obsessed with learning everything about him. Or maybe there's a new boy band and all of the girls in the class are obsessed with this band and all the members.

Andrew: Exactly. OK, so the noun form is obsession, but you may have heard Kassy and I use the adjective as well. And that is to be obsessed. So, you could say I'm obsessed, or she's obsessed, he's obsessed, OK? And we use it also with the preposition with and then we can talk about being obsessed with something or obsessed with someone. So, those examples you gave, Kassy, maybe some high school students could be obsessed with a new boy band. Or you could be obsessed with collecting comic books, for example, right? You're just, like, totally focused on one thing, one activity, or one person, or one group, for example.

Kassy: But, Andrew, there are actually other ways to use the word obsessed or obsess as well, correct?

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So we can also use it as a verb. It's one of these words that I really like in English because there are many different forms of it, right? We have the noun, obsession. We have the adjective, to be obsessed with someone or something. But then we also have a verb, so we can do the action, as well. So, you can obsess over something, or you can obsess about something.

So, for example, I think we all know people like this, Kassy, who look in the mirror every time they pass a mirror, or every time they pass, like, a reflective store window or something when walking down the street. And maybe they check their hair every single time that they pass the mirror or the window, and they check their appearance. And you could say to that person, like, why are you obsessing over your appearance? Like, why do you keep obsessing over your hair, fixing your hair every time, right? So when you are doing that action of obsessing about something, we can say to obsess over or to obsess about.

Now I know, I can predict, Kassy, that our listeners are going to ask us this question. What is the difference between obsessing over something and obsessing about something? And to me, my native-speaking English intuition says that there's not really a big difference. Like the nuance is very, very, very tiny, tiny to the point where you can ignore the difference and think of them as being the same thing.

What do you think? Do you agree with me? Or do you feel like there's a difference between obsessing over something and obsessing about something?

Kassy: Yeah, I agree with you, I think they are pretty much the same. And listeners should focus on the fact, though, that obsessed with is different than obsess about and obsess over because that has an E-D. So, make sure you don't combine those two. But if you don't have an E-D, just obsess, then about or over can both be used in the same way.

Andrew: Kassy, another point that we were talking about before we started recording here is that it seems like to obsess over something or to obsess about something, we use in a little more of a lighthearted way. Like I gave that example of being, of obsessing over your appearance or obsessing over your hair or obsessing over your makeup, or obsessing over your diet, right? We use it to almost make fun of people who check their appearance or are really careful about their diet all the time. So it has a slightly lighter feeling to me than being obsessed with someone or being obsessed with something.

Like, if you're obsessed with, like, I don't know, the guy that lives down the road, then that's like a really serious problem. Like, maybe you're a stalker, right? Or if you're obsessed with playing piano, that means to me that you are totally focused on playing piano to almost a negative level where other things in your life will suffer. Like maybe you're so obsessed with becoming an amazing piano player that your personal relationships suffer because you never spend any time with your friends or maybe you forget to pay your bills or something like that. Like it's –

Kassy: Or shower.

Andrew: Yeah, or even take a shower. Yeah, sure. So, I think there is that slight nuance in the meaning between using the adjective form and using the verb form.

Kassy, there are a couple of other ways that we can use this word as well. We could be self-obsessed, which means we are totally focused on ourselves and very selfish, I suppose. And there's another word that is related, which is OCD. OCD, which is a medical condition. Usually, we just say OCD, but it stands for obsessive-compulsive disorder, I believe. And OCD occurs when the patient who has this disorder is hyper-focused on very small things, well, could be big things, but very hyper-focused in a negative way, there's a big negative impact in their life. And it's impacting their life in a way that they don't like usually, right? They want to be able to stop obsessing about something, but it's, it's very difficult for them.

Kassy: Yeah, I've heard that people with OCD really hate it when people without OCD, will say, like, "Oh, I have OCD, I'm obsessed with this thing." But it's not true, it's not the same thing. You should only use the term OCD with people who have that real medical condition.

Andrew: Sure, yeah, absolutely. It is something that you will hear a lot of people say very **flippantly**, without really thinking about the impact of people who actually suffer from that medical condition, and kind of makes a serious medical condition light and that's always kind of a rude thing that we want to stay away from.

Kassy, one final vocabulary question here, before we jump into our discussion for you, and I'm putting on my predictive goggles, again, to think about some questions that our listeners might ask. And that question that I'm predicting that some listeners may ask is what is the difference between obsession and passion? Obsession and passion. So, let's go back to the piano example again. If you're obsessed with playing piano, or you're passionate about playing piano, you know, in both of those situations, you really, really like piano. So, what's the difference then between obsession and passion?

Kassy: The difference between obsession and passion is kind of in the feeling behind those words. When you say you're passionate about piano, it means you really love it but you don't have to do it every second of every day. When you play piano, you're happy. You like thinking about playing piano, but you're more than happy to do other things. But if you're obsessed with piano, it means it takes such a huge chunk of your concentration and brain space and time that you can't really focus on anything else.

Andrew: Very **well put**, yeah, I love that. So, passion is just a strong enjoyment, a strong love for playing piano, but obsession is, like, 100% of your mental energy and your physical energy is put towards playing piano. You're always thinking about it, always wanting to do it **to the detriment of other parts of your life**. So other parts of your life suffer because you are just too focused on playing piano.

So, listeners, I hope you can tell by the way that we have described this vocabulary that obsession is usually not a good thing, right? And maybe that's a good way to start our conversation part of this episode, Kassy, is to ask you about your feeling, like, do you think obsession is a good thing or a bad thing?

Kassy: I think obsession could lead to amazing results or discoveries, but on the flip side, it's really bad for the mental and physical health of the person who does these amazing things. So, for example, if you have, let's use piano again, if you have someone who's obsessed with piano, they could be this amazing piano player that has fans all around the world. But, on the downside of that, on the other side, this person might be depressed and stressed and anxious because they always feel like they have to be better and better and better because they're so obsessed with playing and making sure that everyone loves their performances.

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. I like that you brought that up, because I think the same way. And I'm wondering if obsession is a requirement for any extremely high achievement. Like, can you ever get to be the best ballet dancer in the world, could you ever get to be the fastest marathon runner in the world, any kind of high-level achiever without being obsessed? I don't know.

Like, obviously, there are many factors that play into being the best in the world at something, right? If you're the fastest marathoner in the world, you need to have natural talent and a whole list of other things, right, that go into that. But I think obsession has to be one of them, as well. So, although obsession usually has a negative aspect to it, I think it's also a part of becoming the best at something. And so in that way, sometimes I have to respect obsession in some people, right? If you want to be the best at something, you need to be obsessed with it. And that's really interesting, I think.

Kassy: Yeah. I guess there's always a grey area, two sides to every coin.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, for sure. So, Kassy, what about you personally? Have you ever been obsessed with something or someone, even, perhaps?

Kassy: I don't think I've ever been obsessed with someone. That's not really **my thing**. But I tend to have a lot of very short-term obsessions, especially with books. I think listeners know, I'm a huge bookworm. And sometimes I just get into this phase where I just read book after book after book all hours of the night, and I'm just exhausted for days. And it doesn't last very long, maybe like a week or two tops, but during that time, yes, I would say I am very obsessed with reading on occasion.

Andrew: Well, that seems like a perfect example of obsession, because to an extent it has a negative effect on your life, right? You're staying up late at night reading books and then as a result, you're tired the next day and you feel sluggish all day. That's a perfect example of an obsession. But that's also a great way to use this expression is a short-term obsession. So, it's not for your whole life, it's just while you're reading that book or that book series. Nice.

Yeah, I guess I have short-term obsessions as well, then. You made me think of some that I also have, and it's usually to do with TV for me. So I'll get obsessed with a TV show or a TV series and I'll binge-watch it. I started watching a show on Netflix called Vikings and I watched like three episodes in one day. And I'm kind of obsessed with that show right now. I can't wait till later in the day to watch it some more.

Kassy: I don't know, Andrew, I think that obsession is weak. Only three episodes in a day? You have some people who can watch a whole series in a day. Now that's obsession.

Andrew: I have too many things to do in the day. I would love to be able to sit around and watch TV all day. Believe me, I would. But, unfortunately, I have other responsibilities. So maybe that's a fair point, Kassy, maybe I'm not truly obsessed to the point where I'm letting other things slide. Maybe I have my obsession in check. But, yeah, I do think that I get obsessed with things in the short term like that, but I don't really feel like I've ever been obsessed with a person. Yeah, I agree with you, that's not really my style either. And I don't really think I've been obsessed with something ever, as well.

And I wish I was, you know, like, we were talking earlier about world-class achievers and how they can get really successful by being obsessed with something. I'm like, wow, you know, if I was really obsessed with only one thing in my life, would that mean that I could get really good at that thing? If I was really obsessed with running or really obsessed with playing guitar or really obsessed with learning Korean, like, I wonder how much more I could achieve if I had an obsession. But I don't think I do, so I'll never find out.

Kassy: I think that brings up a good point, Andrew. You said you wish you could be obsessed with something so you could be the best at something. That brings up another question. Do you think that there are any obsessions that are healthy, or some obsessions that are better than others?

Andrew: Yeah, definitely there has to be some obsessions that are better than others, right? Here's an interesting question. We talked about the difference before, about the line between obsession and passion. But what about the line between obsession and addiction, right? Because there are some things that you could be obsessed about. You know, there are, for example, and I don't want to **trigger** anybody, because we might have some of these listeners in our audience.

But, like, I know some of my friends who are obsessed with animation, and Japanese anime, and comics, and all of those things. And I'm wondering, it's almost like an addiction for them. It's like passed obsession and into addiction. And so, I think with some things, with gaming, with different TV shows, you can get almost addicted to these things and that obsession cannot be very healthy. It can have a negative effect on your life.

But at the same time, there are other things that, you know, could be very beneficial if you have an obsession. Like, if you can become a world-class achiever, or maybe if you could turn your obsession into a career or start a business around that obsession, and then actually have that obsession benefit your life in some way, then it could be good.

So I think it goes back to that point you made earlier, Kassy. There's two sides to every coin. And it's not black and white, just to say, all obsession bad or all obsession good, there's nuance between the two viewpoints.

So, with all that being said, Kassy, I have one fun question here to ask you before we wrap things up. And that is if there were an obsession pill, I know there is an Obsession fragrance. I think there's a famous like perfume called Obsession, I think. But if there were like a medicine, an obsession medicine, or a pill that you could take that would mean that you could become obsessed with one thing of your choosing, OK? So, if, Kassy, you wanted to learn how to play violin, for example, and you could just buy the violin obsession pill, you took it, and then, voilà, you are obsessed with violin. Do you think you would ever try taking a pill like that?

Kassy: You know, I think if you asked me that question when I was younger, like, a high schooler, I think I would say yes. But as a well-rounded adult now I would say, "Heck, no, no way, Jose." I love myself just the way I am. I don't want that pressure of being obsessed with something all the time.

Andrew: Yeah, I think we're on the same page here, Kassy. It's an interesting thing to think about, but I'm worried that the negative consequences about being obsessed with something at this point in my life, as a 37-year-old, could be too serious. And I might not want to live with the negative side effects of something like that. So I don't think I would take the pill, but it does make for an interesting **thought experiment**, I think.

Kassy: Yeah, I wonder what listeners would do. Listeners, would you take the pill or not?

Andrew: Yeah, you guys should let us know. And also let us know what you thought of this episode. And you know, Kassy and I have answered the question have we ever been obsessed with something? And we would like to know your story. Have you ever been obsessed with something? You can leave us a comment on our Instagram page or leave a comment on the discussion forum on our website, Culips.com, or on the comment section of our website, as well. And we would definitely love to hear your opinion and what you have to say.

Kassy: Well, that brings us to the end of this episode, everyone. Thanks for listening, and congratulations on doing some English listening practice today. Go ahead and pat yourself on the back.

Andrew: Yeah, great job, everyone. Thank you for listening to this episode. And we'll be back soon with another brand-new Culips episode. We'll talk to you then. Take care and bye for now.

Kassy: See ya.

Detailed Explanations

Flippantly

Adverb

At the beginning of this episode, our hosts talk about the difference between saying you have OCD and actually having the condition. Andrew mentions that many people **flippantly** say they have OCD, even if they don't. To say something **flippantly** is to say it without much seriousness or concern for the impact of your words.

Someone who is not careful with their words will often say something **flippantly**. They might end up saying hurtful or disrespectful statements that affect others. However, **flippantly** can also be light-hearted. In that case, you are joking when others expect you to be serious.

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

Vicky: Did you hear about this weekend?

Damian: No. What's the matter?

Vicky: The boss said we'll probably have to work overtime this weekend.

Damian: Oh, that? No. No. I'm pretty sure he said that **flippantly**. I think he was just trying to get a funny reaction out of you.

Lauren: I just had the worst conversation with Mark this afternoon.

Patty: What's wrong? Why was it so bad?

Lauren: He's funny, I know, but he tries too hard. He says everything so **flippantly**. It's difficult to take anything he says seriously.

Patty: I know. That can be a problem with him.

Well put Phrase

Early in this episode, Kassy talks about how being obsessed with something might cause you to not focus enough on other things. Andrew agrees and says that Kassy's words were **well put**. **Well put** is another way of saying **well said**. You can say this to someone when you think they have said something in an intelligent or clever way. It is common to add very to the phrase, as in **very well put**.

Well put can also be turned into an adjective. For example, you can talk about a **well-put** argument, a **well-put** point, or a **well-put** joke.

Here are a couple more examples with **well put**:

Rita: What do you think of the upcoming elections?

Erik: To tell you the truth, I don't think about them much. I'm not very political.

Rita: I know. But voting is extremely important.

Erik: Why do you say that?

Rita: Free and fair elections are the foundation of democracy and of our organized society.

Erik: You know, that was **well put**. I guess I tend to take our democracy for granted, but you've convinced me! I'll do some research on the candidates this evening.

Nathan: Don't forget to invite Sarah to the party.

Freddy: Oh, that's right. I haven't talked to her yet.

Nathan: She's always a hit with everyone.

Freddy: For sure. She's always ready with a **well-put** joke or comment, and she really makes other people feel at ease.

To the detriment of [something]

Phrase

When talking about how an obsession can cause someone not to focus enough on other things, Andrew explains it in a different way. He says that your obsession can be **to the detriment of other parts of your life**. **To the detriment of [something]** means that something is harmful and making a situation worse.

The noun detriment means damage or harm. So if an action or a word is **to the detriment of [something]**, then that action or word is doing something harm.

Here are a couple more examples with **to the detriment of [something]**:

Winnie: What do you think of the government's new oil deal? Have you had a chance to look at it yet?

Stuart: I have, and I'm a bit torn on the issue.

Winnie: Me too. It's not so simple.

Stuart: I know. On the one hand, it's going to create a lot of financial opportunities for communities that really need the help. But on the other hand, I think making all that money for oil development will be **to the detriment of the environment**.

Winnie: That's right. That's always the issue with oil.

Claude: Good news! I made it on the school's football team.

Samira: That's great! Congratulations!

Claude: It looks like I'm going to be super busy this semester.

Samira: Looks like it. Watch out, though. Make sure that all this football isn't **to the detriment of your studies**. Keep your priorities straight.

Claude: I will. Don't worry.

[One's] thing

Noun

Talking about being obsessed with a person, Kassy shares that it's not **her thing**. In this sense, **[one's] thing** means it is something you like and are interested in. For example, if you are really interested in comic books, you could say that comic books are **your thing**. For Kassy, being obsessed with someone has never been something of interest to her.

Shortly after, Andrew says that he's like Kassy on this point. He shares a similar expression by saying that it's not **his style**. **[One's] thing** usually refers to a thing or idea, whereas **[one's] style** talks more about the way you do something.

Here are a couple more examples with **[one's] thing**:

Benji: Do you think Jane would want to go to an amusement park this summer?

Ethan: Why are you asking me?

Benji: Because you know her pretty well. I'm asking for your opinion.

Ethan: OK. So what kind of amusement park are you thinking about?

Benji: One with a lot of roller coasters.

Ethan: Oh. I wouldn't suggest that. Roller coasters are totally not **her thing**. If you really want to go to an amusement park, try one with animals or nice, natural scenery. That's more **her thing**.

Kelly: Hey! We're going to an internet café to play some online games. Do you want to come?

Ernest: No, I'd rather not. Video games aren't exactly **my thing**.

Kelly: Oh. I thought you played them.

Ernest: I play chess online. But I have the feeling that the games you'll be playing are a bit different.

Kelly: True. Maybe next time we'll play some chess.

To trigger

Verb

In talking about the obsession some people have with animation and comic books, Andrew first says that he doesn't want **to trigger** any of our listeners by what he is going to talk about. In this sense, **to trigger** is to cause distress or strong negative emotions in someone else. Andrew doesn't want to offend or hurt people's feelings with his words, particularly since he's talking about some of his friends.

To trigger has recently become very common when talking about politics and social issues. Topics such as abortion or war can **trigger** people. In that sense, those topics might bring up painful memories.

However, it is also common to use **to trigger** informally. As a joke, many people will say that they've been **triggered** by something.

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

Jisoo: Did you get a chance to review my presentation yet?

Mandy: I did. I have a few notes for you.

Jisoo: OK. I'm listening.

Mandy: It's mostly about the middle section. I found the language a little insensitive. To avoid **triggering** anyone in the audience, I think it would be best if you rephrased some sentences. I have highlighted them for you.

Jisoo: Oh, I didn't realize. OK. I'll change that right away.

Julie: How was the party?

Patrick: Mostly fun, until they brought out the dessert.

Julie: What happened then?

Patrick: They brought out this amazing-looking chocolate cake, which is my favourite. But I promised myself that I wouldn't have any for the rest of the year. I was so **triggered** with everyone around me enjoying such a delicious cake. I had to get out of there.

Thought experiment

Noun

Near the end of this episode, our hosts talk about the idea of being able to take a pill that would cause you to become obsessed with something in particular. Both hosts agree that they wouldn't want the negative side effects of such a pill. However, Andrew says that it is nonetheless an interesting **thought experiment**.

A **thought experiment** is when you think of something in a hypothetical way. You are thinking of the possible outcomes of a situation.

It is common to put interesting in front of this expression, as in calling something an interesting **thought experiment**.

Here are a couple more examples with **thought experiment**:

Sheila: How was the conference downtown?

Howard: It was pretty intense. I went to a workshop where we talked about the pros and cons of corporate sponsorship.

Sheila: That sounds interesting to me.

Howard: For sure. It was.

Sheila: Did you reach a conclusion?

Howard: Not really. But it was an interesting **thought experiment** nonetheless.

Yukiko: Did you do anything interesting in class today?

Tommy: Yeah. The teacher had us play "would you rather."

Yukiko: Is that a game or something?

Tommy: Kind of. It's like a strange **thought experiment**. She asked us questions like "would you rather have no legs or no arms?" or "would you rather live in the desert or in the jungle?" We then had to explain why. It was pretty funny.

Quiz

1. What does it mean when something is well put?

- a) it is well said
- b) it is physically well assembled
- c) it is put down a well
- d) it is incomprehensible

2. If something is to the detriment of something else, is it good or bad?

- a) good
- b) bad

3. Which of the following is NOT a good example of something being your thing?

- a) your favourite jogging route
- b) a dessert you really like
- c) something you have to do, but would rather not
- d) playing your preferred video game

4. True or false? I'm very serious when I say something flippantly.

- a) true
- b) false

5. What does it means if something is triggering you?

- a) it makes you happy
- b) it makes you very uncomfortable
- c) it makes you sleepy
- d) it makes you forgetful

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What is something that you are obsessed with?
2. Please explain the difference between an obsession and an addiction.
3. What's your thing? What is something that you really like to do?
4. What was the last good thought experiment you tried?
5. What is something that can trigger you?

Quiz Answers

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

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