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Simplified Speech #174 – What do you think about remakes?

Episode description

Do you like remakes, or do you believe that nothing can beat the original? In this Simplified Speech episode, Andrew and Kassy discuss remakes of movies and video games, and whether the remakes can be better than the originals of our childhoods. They also talk about why remakes have become so popular lately and share their own opinions on this matter. Tune in to find out what they think while improving your English conversation skills!

Fun fact

“Perfect Strangers”, a 2016 Italian comedy-drama directed by Paolo Genovese, is holding the Guinness World Record for the most remade movie in the history of cinema. Within three years since it was first released, it was remade 18 times in many different languages!

Expressions included in the study guide

- To drive someone up the wall
- Let alone
- Right up [one's] alley
- Off the top of [one's] head
- Top-notch
- Up to snuff



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: Today joining me for this episode is my cohost, Kassy. Hello, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew. And hey, listeners, hope you're all doing well. Great to be here.

Andrew: So, Kassy, today, actually, this morning, we were talking about what we should talk about on Simplified Speech for this episode, and you came up with a great idea. So, maybe I'll throw things over to you to let us hear about what our topic is for today.

Kassy: OK, so we are going to talk about remakes. I don't know exactly when this episode will come out, but when we were talking about the idea, *The Little Mermaid* live-action remake has just been debuted, like a week ago. And *The Little Mermaid* has been getting a lot of attention in the media. Some people are really excited about this remake, some are not. And I thought this would be a good topic to talk about, not just *The Little Mermaid*, but remakes in general.

Andrew: Yeah, and as soon as I heard your suggestion, I thought it was amazing, because I was also reading about video game remakes this week, in fact. So, it was kind of a coincidence that you brought this topic up. And I have been thinking about remakes as well. And so, I think we'll have a lot to talk about. And with that being said, I think we should jump into our main topic for today. So, Kassy, our topic is remakes, remakes. And like you mentioned at the top of the show, there is a brand-new remake of *The Little Mermaid*, the classic story, *The Little Mermaid*, which was originally a Disney animated film. I guess originally it was a book, right? A children's book.

Kassy: That's true, yes.

Andrew: Yes. And then the book was remade into the animated movie in the early 90s. And then, finally, now just this year in 2023, we have the live-action movie. And maybe we should talk about what a live-action movie is. What is the difference between an animated film and a live-action film, Kassy?

Kassy: An animated film is just made through artwork animation. However, a live-action film is made completely through live actors and CGI for the animal characters, usually.

Andrew: Now, have you seen this movie yet, Kassy, *The Little Mermaid*, or are you planning to?

Kassy: I am planning to see it. I have not seen it yet. But I have seen several of the other somewhat recent Disney remakes such as *The Jungle Book*, *Lion King*, *Aladdin*.

Andrew: You're a little bit more knowledgeable about this than I am because I haven't seen any of those remakes, unfortunately, but I have seen the originals and I'll try my best to follow along. Maybe, Kassy, you can answer more of the questions about the differences between the originals and the remakes. But let's go back to *The Little Mermaid* for a second because there is a lot of controversy around this film. And I think right off the bat, when I hear about a remake, I think it's going to be a little bit controversial because there are the purists. And a purist is someone who just really believes that the original is best, right? So, there are maybe Little Mermaid purists who are like, there's no way that you can beat the original. The original animated movie is so good. It's perfect. It's a classic. And if you remake that story again, then it will maybe ruin the story a little bit or ruin the kind of nostalgia that person has about the original animated film. So, I think right off the bat, it's controversial, but this movie in particular is extra controversial, and maybe we should talk a little bit about why that is. Could you give us some details?

Kassy: Yeah, sure. This one is a little bit more controversial because the main actress that was hired, Halle Bailey, is extremely talented and makes a perfect mermaid. But she looks very different from the original Ariel. The original Ariel has flowing red hair, blue eyes, pale skin and Halle Bailey is an African American young woman. And so, they look very different. And people, the purist, as you say, are like, we want her to look exactly like the animated character. And others are saying *The Little Mermaid* is a fictional character and mermaids are not real. Whichever actress best fits the role should be allowed to play it. And that's the controversy that's happening right now.

Andrew: Right? And so really, in my opinion, kind of a stupid controversy because it's a mermaid, right? Mermaids aren't real, sorry to break it to everybody. At least, as far as I know, ocean scientists have never discovered a mermaid. So, I think yeah, this is stupid, like, doesn't matter the race of the person playing the role because mermaids aren't real. So, I don't really understand the controversy. But some people I think there are the purists, right, who don't want the original story changed. Also, our kind of racial element with some racist people who are, you know, against having a black actress play the role, which, yeah, is extra stupid, in my opinion. In fact, Kassy, I was reading today that, you know, IMDb, you're familiar with that website, right? IMDb, I believe it stands for the Internet Movie Database. And it's a place where many English speakers go if we want to find a review or a rating for a movie. I think it's owned by Amazon.com, actually, so it has an affiliation, that's what I read in the article. I just learned that today too. And so, the IMDb actually had to change their algorithm for the reviews that they receive because on this website, you can upload your own review after watching a movie. So, the website shows you reviews of people who have watched the film who are not like professional critics, right? They're just like, what the audience thinks generally. Well, the IMDb, they announced that for this movie, *The Little Mermaid*, they had to switch their algorithm, because they were receiving so many negative reviews, like one-star reviews, which is the lowest review that you can give on that website is a one-star review. And they said that it wasn't necessarily individual users, but it was like a bot attack. So, somebody went out of their way to like program some kind of bot attack to give this movie a bunch of one-star reviews. And we don't know why exactly. Like it might be, there's like some *Little Mermaid* purist who thinks that the

live-action remake goes away from the original story. But it could also be about the racist element with maybe some racist people hating that a black character is so prominently displayed in the film. So yeah, I don't know exactly why that is happening. It's interesting, but it's also kind of sad, I think.

Kassy: It is. For me, I didn't have a problem with Halle Bailey being the main character, but from the commercials that I've seen, I'm a little horrified by how Flounder looks in the live remake. Flounder is so cute in the animation. And a real live fish is just not as cute as an animated fish. And he looks kind of creepy in the trailers that I've seen so far. I don't know why people aren't debating about the creepy Flounder rather than the beautiful actress we have singing for us.

Andrew: Well, you know, like *Finding Nemo*, Nemo is an animated fish that's cute. So, maybe they could do it like, well, in some areas. But yeah, I haven't seen anything about this movie other than the poster. So, I can't really comment, but I'll have to check that out and get back to you Kassy. I'm sorry to hear about Flounder.

Kassy: He might give you nightmares.

Andrew: You know, Kassy I was thinking about this issue today and I realized something a little bit strange. Like, I want to know your opinion about this. And maybe my opinion, my feeling is wrong, and I need to check it. I'm not sure. But for a fictional movie, like *The Little Mermaid*, I don't really care if they change the race or the place, you know, if they want to change some elements to remix and retell the story, and especially an old story if they want to update it for a modern audience, because a movie that's 30 plus years old, something that we love from our childhood. But if we were to show it to kids today, maybe they would say, "Oh, it's old fashion." They don't want to watch it, right? So, it could be like a way to connect with children these days too, right? To share our stories with them is by remaking a movie. But for remakes that are fictional, I don't care, change the characters, change the place, change the setting a little bit, tweak it, make it relevant for today. That's cool. But if it's an historical story, you know, if it's not fictional, but it's like a real story, then

that kind of makes me wonder, like, should we be tweaking the characters? Should we be tweaking the languages? This especially drives me crazy if it's like a story that takes place, you know, maybe in Spain, or Japan or China, and the characters are speaking English. I hate this. Like it almost makes me want to not watch the movie. I'm like, why are they speaking English in Japan? Like they should be speaking Japanese, you know? So, that kind of thing really **drives me up the wall** a little bit. What are your feelings about that? If it's not a fictional story, but a non-fictional story?

Kassy: Honestly, even for fictional stories, I think it depends on the context because there was actually a controversy a few years ago for *Ghost in the Shell*, which is a—I mean, I don't know much about *Ghost in the Shell*, but I believe it started as some sort of Japanese sci-fi franchise or comic.

Andrew: Yeah, I think it's an anime, originally.

Kassy: Anime, yeah. And that one, the main character in the live-action remake was played by Scarlett Johansson. And that caused a bit of an uproar as well but in the reverse. Instead of a white character being replaced by a person of colour, it was an Asian character being replaced by a white character. And it got the same hate, not quite as much hate as this one, but a lot of hate. So, I don't know, I think it's hard—the world we live in, like, there's so many different cultures that we're all blending together. And, you know, as we progress into the 21st century, we are trying to be more diverse in our roles but because of that, you're gonna run into conflicts in whatever scenario you do. So, in my case, I like to watch films and entertainment for that entertainment value. And I'm not really angry, whoever plays the character, that's not really my style. But I understand people who do get angered by that, because they want to be represented correctly, or you don't want your culture to be changed. So, if you have an original that you feel like a deep connection to, and then the character has changed into something that is not what you expected, I can understand that. But we all have to kind of step back and also realize, as you said, these characters are fictional and we should try to take it at face value and just know we're here to enjoy it and have fun, no matter who is playing the lead.

Andrew: I can't ever imagine personally getting that upset over a fictional series, like there's no movie that I love so much that if they remade it, that I would be upset enough to even leave a review on the internet, **let alone** you know, get angry. And it's not like the original is suddenly gone, right? It's like the original still exists. Like you can always go back and watch that.

Kassy, what do you think, like, as you mentioned a little earlier, there are so many Disney remakes these days, like they have been kind of going into the archive and selecting those films that are maybe now around the 30-year-old mark, but that were really successful in the 80s and 90s and they've been remaking them. And it's not just Disney, there are other movie production companies doing this as well, like we've seen, you know, all of the comic book characters being remade from comic books into their own movies as well. And yeah, as I mentioned, also, video games, there's a lot of old classic video games that are getting remakes these days. Do you think that this is just a money grab? Are the production studios just doing this to make money? Or is there something else motivating them to make all these remakes?

Kassy: Yeah, honestly, I kind of think it is a money grab. I don't know if this is true. But I heard the reason why they're making all of these remakes is because of copyright issues, like the copyright contracts for those films were coming to a close. So, for Disney to keep full rights of those films, they had to produce something new that use those same characters. Again, I don't know if that's true, but that's what I've read. And it makes a lot of sense to me if that was the case, why they're making all of these remakes. I also think that they realized how much of a hit it was for our generation, or the generation before us. And our kids are now growing up and they think, ah, who do kids watch movies with?

Andrew: Their parents.

Kassy: Us, this generation, yes. So, if you make a remake of a movie that your parents loved, maybe it'll sell more movie tickets, because your parents can go back and watch the characters they loved in the past. And now the kids can fall in love with them, too.

Andrew: They gotta milk those franchises for every penny, I suppose. But it does make a lot of sense from a business perspective, in my opinion, like, I'm sure in those board meetings that they had, they were like, "Yeah, this is a good idea. Let's do it. Let's remake these movies." And, yeah, I think it has been financially successful for them as well. I was talking about video games earlier. And I think video games are a little bit different because you know, a lot of the games from my childhood that I grew up with, when you try to play them now, they're still good from a nostalgia perspective, but, like, the graphics are outdated, often it's hard to play them because the video game machines themselves are kind of outdated and don't work very well, or sometimes are just slow or chunky. Or sometimes it's even hard to hook them up to your TV these days, because the technology has changed so much. So, to update a video game, and to remake it with new graphics and for a modern video game console, that is really exciting to me, I'm all for that. And often in that situation, too, they just remake the game or maybe they add some, like, bonus levels at the end or something. But they're not changing the story. They're not changing the character. It's like the same game, just modern. So, I love that. And there's been a slew of announcements about video game remakes. Although I played games when I was younger, a lot. I haven't played any for a long time. But one game that I heard is getting remade is *Metal Gear Solid*, which was a favourite of mine when I was younger, so I thought maybe I'll have to go and buy a PlayStation so I can play the new Metal Gear Solid.

Kassy: Yeah, I think the cool thing about video games is they don't really feel like remakes because even though you use the same characters, you have slightly different storylines. And you can take the nostalgic parts and meld them really well with the more modern parts. For example, the *Super Mario World* with the Yoshi characters and Princess Peach and Daisy, they're timeless. *Pokémon* is another one that's timeless. Whole new island, whole new adventure, same style, fighting Pokémon. And what's another one? *Zelda*.

Andrew: Talking about milking a franchise, Nintendo is good at that as well. Agreed.

Kassy: So good. Almost no one has bad reviews about them. I mean, it'll get like, I like this better in the old version, but people still play it.

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely. It's always exciting when your favourite franchise comes out with a new version. Speaking of *Zelda*, there's a brand-new *Zelda* game out as well. And some of my friends back home in Canada have been playing it and it's made me again want to go out and buy a Nintendo just so I can play the new *Zelda*. So, I don't know, I'll see if I can find the time to do that. But yeah, it's exciting to have things that we grew up with that are nostalgic, remade. And it's nice that in a way that the companies don't let these stories die, right, that they're continuing on. But also, I can see the other side of the coin, where it's like maybe some new stories and some creativity could go a long way in the future as well.

Kassy: Yeah, or, you know, taking a fusion of the young and old, some of my favourite works of entertainment in the past few years were in a movie, *Wreck-It Ralph*. I mean, even this is several years old now but *Wreck-It Ralph* took all of the best video games and arcade games from the 80s and 90s and put them into a film where Wreck-It Ralph is like an 80s arcade game character and then he becomes best friends with Vanellope who is, you know, early 2000s arcade game character and the way that they meld and coexist with Donkey Kong and Pac Man and all the other modern characters was so fun to watch.

Andrew: Sounds **right up my alley**. I'm surprised that I haven't heard of it. But I'll have to check that out. *Wreck-It Ralph*, all right.

Kassy: Yeah, and then also *Ready Player One* was a really famous book and movie. I think that takes you know, nostalgic pieces from the past and then really livens them up with a whole new setting and idea.

Andrew: I'll leave on this note, Kassy, because I'm sure we could go on and on and on about this topic. But the trailer for the new *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie was just released, which I think is being produced or created by Seth Rogen, the comedian, and I didn't watch the trailer because I was worried. So, maybe I'm contradicting myself now

because you know, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was a big part of my childhood. I even have photos of me dressing up as a teenage mutant ninja turtle for Halloween. So, I loved it when I was a kid. I loved the video game. I loved the cartoon. I loved the live-action movie as well. But now they're remaking it and I didn't watch the trailer because I thought, "What if it's bad, maybe it'll kind of spoil the franchise and my nostalgia for me." So, yeah, I guess maybe I am a little bit more passionate about this topic than I originally stated now that I think of it.

Kassy: It depends on which character it is.

Andrew: Yeah, and you know, Seth Rogen in general is a pretty funny guy. So, I'm gonna put my faith in him that he's true to the original.

So, Kassy and I are keeping our conversation going for a little while longer here, and we've prepared some fun rapid fire style questions. And let's jump into them Kassy. Number one, I don't know if you have an answer for this **off the top of your head**, but that's what makes rapid fire fun. What's one movie or video game that you think should never be remade?

Kassy: I do have an answer because I read the question ahead of schedule. So, I got one in my brain. This movie was pretty low budget, and it's kind of a cult classic. I never want it to be remade and that is, *The Princess Bride*.

Andrew: Good answer. Yeah.

Kassy: Such a good movie. And, I mean, it's not even like an amazing movie, but it's just so full of great one-liners and the characters are so quirky, they cannot be remade, impossible. Inconceivable.

Andrew: I agree with you completely. That's a great choice. And I think, you know, that movie is very funny. It's got a lot of comedic elements to it. And it also has a lot of like, really unique actors, like Andre the Giant, you know, like, where else are you gonna find a

guy like that? So, I think any comedy, you know, some of my favourite movies are those like 90s comedies. I think I've talked about *Dumb and Dumber* on Culips a lot, it's my favourite comedy. And like you could never remake that, like Jim Carrey, he's such a unique comedic actor that there would be nobody that could play him to the same extent. It just would never work. And all of my favourite, like, comedies from when I was younger, I wouldn't touch them. I would never try to remake them.

Kassy: I agree. The actor was born to play that role, and nobody can replace them.

Andrew: Kassy, have you ever seen a movie remake that you think is better than the original? Is it possible to improve on the original? Or do we always just think that the remakes are not as good?

Kassy: That's a good question. I saw a remake, this one is not super recent, but it was a Disney remake. It was the *Mulan* remake. I really liked some of the new songs in that remake. I love the old songs too. But I thought some of the new songs were like a head bopper. So, yeah, that remake, the song choice, **top-notch**.

Andrew: I haven't seen the original. But many people have told me that the new *Dune* movie is better than the original *Dune* movie. So, I saw the newest *Dune* movie, and it was cool. I kind of thought it was a little bit boring, like, cool, but boring and a little bit long. But, you know, I don't know if I want to go back and watch the original per se because I heard that it was just much better than the original. So, that's one example I've heard of.

Kassy: This is something that I've never watched. But I'm actually curious about your opinion. Have you seen all of the *Star Wars*?

Andrew: Yeah, I've seen all of the original trilogy, and I've seen some of the prequels. But I lost interest in *Star Wars*. They just started coming out with too many. There's too many movies and too many characters. And I was never like a huge, passionate fan of the series to start with. So, yeah.

Kassy: OK, I know like the originals were life changing for some people. When the prequels came out, which were made a lot later, did you think they were **up to snuff** with the originals? Were they as good?

Andrew: No, they were so terrible. I remember when the prequels came out like *The Phantom Menace*, and I don't remember exactly the name. It might have been *The Phantom Menace*, but there was a character named Jar Jar Binks and Jar Jar Binks was just laughable. Yeah, I just knew right from the start that they weren't anywhere near the quality of the originals.

Kassy: Yeah, I've never seen them. But I was wondering if you'd seen them, and you had an opinion.

Andrew: Kassy, I would love to know our listeners opinions about this topic because I think it does bring out a lot of passion in people and I was surprised to see in myself even how strong my opinions were about this topic. So, guys, we're gonna throw things over to you. We would love to know what you think. Please let us know by leaving a comment on our website or discussion forum or even by sending us an email you can reach us at contact@culips.com. So, take care everyone, and we'll talk to you in the next episode. Goodbye.

Kassy: See ya!

Andrew: That brings us to the end of this lesson. Talk to you next time, bye!

Detailed Explanations

To drive someone up the wall

Idiom, informal

To drive someone up the wall means to make someone very annoyed and angry. If someone or something drives you up the wall, it irritates you to the point that you feel like you're going crazy. This expression is used to talk about things and people that are extremely annoying and irritating.

In this episode, Andrew talks about remakes of non-fiction movies. He says that it **drives him up the wall** a little bit when the original language is changed in a remake. Although he adds "a little bit" to soften the expression, it still means that he finds it annoying when too many things are changed in a remake of a story.

The expression **to drive someone up the wall** is quite strong and may sound rude depending on the context. For this reason, it's important to use it carefully and in appropriate settings, such as casual conversations, and to be mindful of other people's feelings.

Here are a couple more examples with **to drive someone up the wall**:

Leo: Hey, is everything OK? You seem a bit off.

Emma: I haven't been sleeping very well lately.

Leo: Why?

Emma: You know my neighbours? They recently got a dog, and every night when I go to bed, their dog keeps barking non-stop. It just **drives me up the wall!**

Leo: Have you tried talking to them?

Emma: Well, yeah, but they haven't done anything about it.

Andy: How is the project going?

Lisa: My computer keeps freezing, it's **driving me up the wall!** I can't get any work done.

Let alone Phrase

When talking about people's reaction to remakes, Andrew says he doesn't have any strong emotions about them, and he wouldn't be upset enough to even leave a review on the internet, let alone get angry, if a movie he loved was remade.

Let alone means the same thing as *not to mention*. We use this expression to show that something is even more unlikely to happen compared to something previously mentioned. **Let alone** is usually put between two statements to emphasize that something mentioned in the second statement is highly unlikely or impossible, especially when compared to the first statement, which is usually less strong. For example, if you don't have enough money to order a taxi, and somebody suggests that you buy your own car, you can say, "I can't even afford a taxi, **let alone** buy a car." The first statement helps to emphasize the improbability of the second one.

In this episode, Andrew uses this phrase to express that it was unlikely that he would get upset or angry over a movie remake. He emphasizes this by saying that he wouldn't even bother leaving a review, which is a less intense reaction.

Here are a couple more examples with **let alone**:

Holly: Thank you so much for letting me stay for dinner.

Aaron: No problem!

Holly: It was delicious! Did you make it yourself?

Aaron: Are you kidding? I can't even boil an egg, **let alone** make a three-course dinner! I ordered it from the restaurant across the street.

Mike: Now, we need to choose who will lead the marketing team. Any suggestions?

Linda: How about Sarah?

Mike: Sarah? I don't think so. She can't even meet her own deadlines, **let alone** handle the entire team!

Right up [one's] alley

Idiom, informal

Right up [one's] alley is an idiomatic expression that is used to refer to something that is suitable to someone's interests or skills. If something is right up your alley, it's the perfect thing for you; it's exactly what you like and what you're good at.

When someone says, "it's **right up my alley**", it means that they feel excited about this thing, because it's something they enjoy and know a lot about. For example, if you're a big fan of thrillers, and someone suggests watching a Hitchcock movie, you can respond by saying, "Those movies are **right up my alley**!" to show your enthusiasm.

In this episode, Kassy tells Andrew about the movie called Wreck It Ralph. In response to this, Andrew says, "sounds **right up my alley**." This means that the movie description matches Andrew's interests, and he expects to enjoy it.

A variation of this expression is *right down [one's] alley*, which means the exact same thing.

Here are a couple more examples with **right up [one's] alley**:

Gina: Do you have any plans for the weekend?

Mark: Not really, why?

Gina: I have an extra ticket to a jazz concert. You've mentioned this type of music is your favorite, so I thought it might be **right up your alley**.

Mark: Sounds great! I'd absolutely love to join you!

Ben: What are you listening to?

Lucy: It's a new podcast, a friend of mine recommended it to me. It's very interesting! It's all about personal growth and mindfulness.

Ben: Sounds **right up my alley**! Could you send me the link?

Lucy: Sure!

Off the top of [one's] head

Idiom, informal

Off the top of [one's] head is used when you say or do something without much thought or preparation. It's often used when you need to answer a question immediately, but you're unsure of the answer. It's a good way to express that what you're about to say might not be accurate and is based on your memory.

This expression can also be used when we can't answer the question at all. You might hear someone say, "I can't think of anything **off the top of my head**", or "I can't tell you **off the top of my head**". This means that they either don't know or don't remember the answer and need to check the facts before responding.

In the final part of the episode, when Andrew asks Kassy the first question, he says, "I don't know if you have an answer for this **off the top of your head**." It means he isn't sure if Kassy will be able to answer immediately without preparation.

Here are a couple more examples with **off the top of [one's] head**:

Sasha: I'm going to Helsinki for a couple of days. Have you been there before?

Dan: Yeah, but it was like a decade ago!

Sasha: Can you recommend any places to visit?

Dan: Well, I can think of a couple of places **off the top of my head**. I would recommend checking out the Helsinki Cathedral. Also, make sure to visit the Market Square. You can try some nice Finnish food there. Let me check my old photos, and I'll let you know if I think of something else.

Sasha: Thanks!

Scott: Could you tell me when exactly our next meeting is?

Ruby: I don't remember **off the top of my head**, but I think it's sometime next week. Let me check my calendar and get back to you.

Top-notch

Adjective, informal

Top-notch is an adjective that means the best. If something is **top-notch**, it's excellent, outstanding, and of the highest quality. If a person is **top-notch**, it means they're highly skilled and have exceptional qualities, expertise, or talent.

You can use this expression in many different situations when you want to talk about something you admire because it's exceptionally good. For instance, if you bought a new smart watch and you think it the best among other watches, you can say it's **top-notch**. Similarly, if your English teacher is very professional and exceptionally talented, they can be described as top-notch.

When telling Andrew about the Mulan remake, Kassy says that the songs in it are **top-notch**. It means that Kassy's really impressed with the songs and considers them to be of the highest quality.

Here are a couple more examples with **top notch**:

Nick: How is your first day going? Do you need any help?

Dina: It's going great, thanks! I have one question, but it's not work-related.

Nick: Go ahead!

Dina: I don't mean to be rude, but the coffee in the machine is terrible! Is there a place where I can get something better?

Nick: I know what you mean, I'm a big coffee person myself. There's a café downstairs and their coffee is **top-notch**! We can go there for lunch if you want.

Dina: Absolutely!

Kate: You look amazing! Have you been working out lately?

Jeff: Yes, I've been going to the gym three times a week for the past couple months. It's a small gym, but the trainer is **top-notch**! He creates personalized workouts, gives nutritional advice, and keeps me motivated.

Kate: I can see the results! Very impressive. Keep it up!

Up to snuff

Idiom, informal

Up to snuff is an informal expression that is used to describe people or things that are good enough and meet expectations. If something is **up to snuff**, it's satisfactory and of good enough quality, though not exceptional.

The phrase originated from the practice of testing *snuff*, a powdered tobacco. If the tobacco was of good enough quality, it was described as **up to snuff**. These days, this expression is used figuratively and can be applied to various things.

In this episode, Kassy asks Andrew if the prequels to Star Wars were **up to snuff** with the originals. In other words, she's asking if they were as good as the original movies.

This expression is often used in the negative, as in not **up to snuff**. If something isn't **up to snuff**, it's not good enough, or not as good as you expected. For example, if your teacher says that your essay isn't quite **up to snuff**, she means that it doesn't meet the standard criteria and isn't written well enough.

Here are a couple more examples with **up to snuff**:

Christy: How's the new game? Have you played it already?

Matt: I gave it a try, but to be honest, the design isn't quite **up to snuff**. The graphics are outdated, you know.

Christy: That's too bad. I was looking forward to playing it. I guess I'll pass then.

Nate: Can you help? The risotto recipe says beef stock, but I don't have any. I don't know what to do.

Ann: Just replace it with a beef stock cube! I do it all the time.

Nate: And is it going to be **up to snuff** with the real stock?

Ann: Absolutely! You can barely tell the difference.

Quiz

1. If someone says, “I can't even run a mile, let alone a marathon”, it means _____.

- a) they can easily run a marathon
- b) they can only run alone
- c) there's no way they can run a marathon
- d) they've run a marathon once

2. If you enjoy playing chess and are good at it, you can say playing chess is _____.

- a) right on your alley
- b) right up your alley
- c) your kind of alley
- d) lives on your alley

3. If someone says “off the top of my head” when answering a question, it means that _____.

- a) they're not sure about their answer
- b) they know the exact answer
- c) they didn't understand the question
- d) they learned it recently

4. If someone describes a car as top-notch, it means they think that _____.

- a) the car is too big
- b) the car is too expensive
- c) the car is the best
- d) the car has no roof

5. If someone says that the service in a restaurant wasn't up to snuff, they mean that _____.

- a) the staff were smoking
- b) the service was as good as expected
- c) the service met their standards
- d) the service wasn't good enough

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about movie remakes? Have you ever watched a movie remake that you enjoyed more than the original?
2. Is there anything or anyone that drives you up the wall?
3. What is something that is right up your alley?
4. Describe a situation when you couldn't give an answer off the top of your head. What happened?
5. Can you think of something or someone you would describe as top-notch?

Quiz Answers

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

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