

My strong suit

Episode description

In this bonus episode, Andrew talks about why his dog Pinky is a conversation starter and shares some stories about what he did over the weekend. Plus, in the vocabulary lesson, he teaches you the idiomatic expression **to be someone's strong suit**.

Support Culips and take your English to the next level by becoming a Culips Member. To sign up, visit Culips.com.



Note: The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Welcome to bonus episode number 26 of the Culips English Podcast. I'm Andrew, your host, and I'm sure glad that you decided to hit play and join me for this English study session. I can't believe that we're already on episode number 26 of the bonus episodes. Now math has never been my strong suit, but we've released a bonus episode every week for 26 weeks in a row now. And since there are 52 weeks in a year, and half of 52 is 26, well that means that we've been releasing bonus episodes now for six months, it's our half-anniversary. I think that's a cool milestone, and I'm shocked at how quickly the time just flew by. And I'd love to know if there are any of you who have listened to each bonus episode and haven't missed any of them. Just like me, I've been here for each one. You can let me know in the comments section on our website Culips.com.

But maybe there are some people tuning in to Culips for the very first time right now. And if that's you, then welcome aboard. It's great to have you here. I'm an English teacher from Canada, but I now live in South Korea. And in each bonus episode, I share some stories about what's going on in my life recently, I tell you about what we're working on behind the scenes here at Culips, and I also teach you a useful English expression. Each bonus episode also comes with a free transcript. And you can download it as a PDF file, or you can use the interactive transcript feature on our website. To get the transcript, just visit our website, which is Culips.com or click the link in the description.

So happy Monday, and welcome to the start of another new week. How did things go for you last week? What did you get up to? What's new in your world? I had a full and busy week. But unfortunately, my Monday to Friday was busy in the bad and boring kind of way, the go to work and come home kind of way. With one small exception that is, and that is because on Tuesday night, I hosted a live stream for Culips members. And we do this each month here at Culips and it's always a blast. So, what happened during the stream is I just hung out with the Culips community and we chatted about what we got up to in October, we studied together with a news article about a cafe in the UK that charges rude customers more than polite customers, which was interesting to read and study, and we also had a couple of Culips members call in, join the stream, and actually hang out for a bit with me. And it was great to talk directly with those two Culips members and overall, it was just a really fun time. So, for those of you who don't know, I do host a live stream once a month for our members. It's just a way for me to connect with the community directly, and also a nice benefit that we want to give to the people who support us financially. So, if

you're a Culips member, do make sure that you join me for the next live stream. The details will be announced soon, and you'll be able to see the date and time it will be happening on our website, we'll make the announcement on our website.

I have to be honest, though, other than the live stream on Tuesday, the rest of the workweek was pretty uneventful for me. The weekend was better, though. And for those of you who work Monday to Friday, you'll probably agree with me that the weekend is always better, right? Well, on Saturday morning, I woke up early because my dog Pinky also woke up early. He's a senior dog. He's 15 years old. And his morning schedule is somewhat unpredictable. Although he usually goes to bed around 11pm each night, he wakes up anywhere between 7am to 10am. And my wife and I have noticed that if it's a cloudy day, he usually sleeps later. But if it's a nice day, he usually gets up early. Now that's not a firm rule and he's not like that every day, but it's something that we've noticed and that he tends to stick to. Well, Saturday was a beautiful day and accordingly, Pinky got up early. So, I also got up early too to take him for a walk because he likes to go outside pretty much as soon as he wakes up. Now since we adopted Pinky, which was almost two years ago now, in fact, his two-year anniversary with us is coming up in a couple of weeks.

Since we got him, my interactions talking with strangers has gone up around 1,000%. If I had to just pick a number randomly off the top of my head. Before Pinky, I would very, very, very rarely talk with strangers. Occasionally, there might be an outgoing middle-aged guy who'd come up to me and ask me where I'm from, or what I'm doing living in Korea. And I say, middle aged guy, because 99% of the time, it would always be a middle-aged guy asking me these kinds of questions. But after Pinky, tons of people come up and talk to me and talk about Pinky, talk about the dog. People from all walks of life, from kids, to grandparents, and everyone in between. It turns out that Pinky is a real conversation starter. And it's been nice for me because I get to practice my Korean conversation skills and it's also nice to get to know some of my neighbors in the neighborhood. And a tip to all of you who are living in English speaking countries. If you're looking for a new way to meet people, and practice your English conversation and English speaking, then I highly recommend getting a dog because once you have a dog, people talk to you all the time.

Anyway, pretty much as soon as I walked outside on Saturday morning with Pinky for his morning walk, one of my neighbors came up to me. Now, this neighbor is an older guy, he's in his late 60s or so, and he lives down the street and he's a real chatterbox. He loves talking. He started off asking me a few questions about Pinky and how Pinky's doing, but

then he quickly transitioned to talking about boxing and his favorite boxers like Muhammad Ali, and Sonny Liston. And then he started talking about playing the trumpet, and about Louis Armstrong. And then the conversation changed to fishing of all things. And personally, even though I'm an introvert, and somewhat shy, I do like having these kinds of conversations, and getting to know the people who live around me a little bit better. It's also a nice way for me to practice speaking Korean, with a wide range of people. As you probably know, from learning English, there is a huge range in the way that people speak, vocabulary usage, accent, speaking speed, speaking volume, this all really varies from person to person. And I think the best way to make sure that you've got all of your bases covered, so that you can understand as many people as possible, is simply to talk with as many people as possible. And if that's impossible, which it can be if you're from a place where there are not too many English speakers around, I totally understand that. But in that case, there's the Internet, there are podcasts, there's YouTube, and these things can help us out.

Come to think of it, I had another funny interaction last week when walking Pinky. There's a European guy who lives in my neighborhood who I see walking around from time to time. I'm not exactly sure what country he's from, but I imagine he's been living here for a while, because he speaks very fluent Korean, much better than I do. I'm actually a little bit jealous, to be honest. Anyways, from time to time, when I see him, we'll exchange a few words as we pass each other on the street. And the funny thing is, we always do this in the Korean language. I don't know, maybe he doesn't speak English, it's a possibility. But I think it's pretty cool that we do get to do that in the Korean language. As English learners, you guys are probably very used to talking to non-native English speakers in English. But as a Korean learner, it's a very rare occurrence for me that I get to speak in Korean with another non-native speaker, especially someone who doesn't speak English. So, it's always fun to talk with that guy, and it's just another one of the cool benefits that comes along with owning a dog.

Most of the day on Saturday, my wife and I were busy planning our house remodeling project and meeting with contractors. But after we finally finished all of that, we made our way to Seoul Station, which is one of the biggest train stations in the city. There's a modern Seoul Station where you actually go if you want to travel on the train. But there's also the old station that was built in the 1920s during the Japanese imperial period of Korea's history when Japan occupied this country, and it's one of the few buildings still standing from that period. Anyways, these days, the old Seoul Station is used as a cultural

complex. And there are art shows and exhibits and cultural events that take place there. Well, last weekend, the Seoul Record Fair took place at the old Seoul Station, and my wife and I went there to go check it out. As you probably know from listening to Culips, we're big music fans. And over the last year, we've been slowly but surely starting to build up our record collection. And we both enjoy listening to vinyl records together and usually play records in the background when we eat dinner or hang out in the living room. So, a record fair like this seemed to be right down our alley. And in fact, it really was.

By the way, that's a great expression, "to be right down your alley". If something is right down your alley, then it means it is interesting to you. It's something that you find interesting. Sometimes people also say right up your alley. And in the UK, they usually say "street" instead of "alley".

Anyway, all the expressions mean the same thing. And the record fair was right down our alley, because there were a ton of different vendors selling all sorts of used records from every genre you can imagine and at all kinds of price points ranging from budget, you know, there were records, they're being sold for only \$1 all the way up to the ultra-rare collectibles that were selling for hundreds of dollars. So, the record fair was really cool, and at the same time, rather overwhelming. I know some people enjoy digging for treasures when they go shopping for antiques or used books or used records. And they enjoy the hunt and spending a lot of time carefully going through everything, looking for a surprise hidden gem.

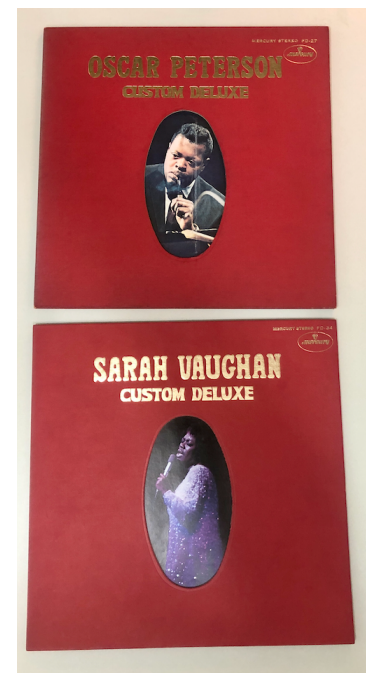
But, I'm not that guy. I personally get very overwhelmed at the huge selection and at all the options. I had a few records on my list that I wanted to try and find, but I wasn't able to find any of those records, unfortunately. My wife also had a goal in mind, and she wanted to find a record by the late great American jazz singer, Sarah Vaughan. Thankfully, it was easy to find a lot of her albums. One thing that I noticed, which I find fascinating, is that there's a big difference between record shopping in Canada versus Korea. In Canada, you have a lot of imported American records. While here in Korea, although there are a ton of American records, there are also a lot of Japanese records for sale, imports from Japan. And the Sarah Vaughan album my wife found was from a Japanese record label. Now right beside the Sarah Vaughan record was a matching album from the same label by the Canadian jazz pianist Oscar Peterson.

You could make a very, very strong argument that Oscar Peterson is one of the greatest pianists of all time, and definitely one of the best Canadian musicians of all time. He was

just an absolute wizard behind the keys and is just a joy to listen to. Peterson was born in Montreal in 1925. And oddly enough, that was the same year that construction was completed on the old Seoul Station. Now, Oscar Peterson unfortunately passed away two days before Christmas back in 2007, in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, which is a suburb of Toronto, and it also happens to be the place where I was born. I don't know if I've mentioned that on Culips before or not, but I was born in Mississauga, Ontario. I only lived in Mississauga for a few years before my family moved to western Canada. But I seem to remember my parents telling me a story, that when I was a little toddler, one of my first friends was one of Oscar Peterson's grandkids who lived in the neighborhood and who used to play at the same playground as I did. Now, according to Wikipedia, I didn't know this, but I had to google it and find the information on Wikipedia, Peterson was married four times and had seven kids with three of his wives. So, I imagine that that means that he probably grandfathered a bunch of kids also. And it may just happen to be that one of them was my playground buddy back in the day. I'll have to check with my folks and see if that is true or not next time I talk to them, but it sounds like it could be a likely story. And if it is true, I think that's pretty cool.

So anyway, my wife found the Sarah Vaughan record that she wanted, and I saw this matching Oscar Peterson record. And so I thought, "it looks awesome, let's just pick it up." And the guy who was selling them at the record fair, gave them to us for a great price, we only paid a few bucks each for them. And those were the only two records that we ended up buying. Although there were some rare and collectible records that were really tempting to buy, we passed on them because they were just too expensive. And we're not really hardcore record collectors or anything. But overall, we had a great time at the record fair.

And then on the way home, we stopped at this little cafe, which is actually inside of the modern Seoul Station, to eat some ice cream of all things. Even though it was cold on Saturday, my wife suggested that we have an ice cream sandwich from this little cafe inside of the station because it is famous for ice cream sandwiches. Now, I'm never one to say no to an idea like that, so even though it was cold, we went inside the cafe, we had an ice cream sandwich, and then we went home, we had some dinner, and we listened to our new records, which turned out to



be absolutely wonderful. And they make great soundtracks for this lovely time of the year in late fall, where it's cold outside, but nice and warm and cozy inside.

If you haven't browsed our website recently, I'd love it if you could take a look. We just added a new feature that should make finding episodes that are a good fit for your level of English even easier than ever. For each episode, there's now a color-coded rating bar that shows you the difficulty of the episode as voted on by Culips members. So, the bar will be green if most listeners think that the episode was easy to understand, the bar will be orange if it's an intermediate-level episode, and if it's red, that means that it's a higher-level episode that's more difficult to understand. Now, I hope this new rating system will help you find Culips episodes that are the best fit for you to learn with.

And I'd also really love it if you could help contribute to the community by adding your rating after you listen to one of our episodes. So please check out the website. Take a look at this new feature, and if you have any feedback or comments, just let us know by writing a comment on the website or sending us an email to contact@culips.com.

And now it's time for this week's vocabulary lesson.

Before I let you go for today, I'd like to teach you about a nice idiomatic expression. It is strong suit, strong suit. And suit is spelt S-U-I-T. The full expression is "to be someone's strong suit". And if something is your strong suit, it means that you're very good at it. Of course, the someone in this part of the expression can be replaced with any possessive pronoun or name. So let me give you an example. OK, I could say, "Although Oscar Peterson loved playing baseball, playing piano was his strong suit." Or I could say, "Sarah Vaughan's strong suit was singing." Perhaps my strong suit is teaching English. What would you say your strong suit is?

If you answered by saying that your strong suit is math, then you're a much different person than I am. In fact, earlier in this episode, I said that math isn't my strong suit. I used the expression in the negative to focus on how I'm really not very good at doing math. And that's another way that we can use this expression when we want to put the emphasis on how we are not talented at doing something. You know what, let's rewind this episode and go back to the beginning when I used strong suit, and we'll listen to that part a couple of more times. Here we go.

Now math has never been my strong suit, but we've released a bonus episode every week for 26 weeks in a row now.

Now, you may be wondering what "suit" means in this expression? Well, it's not talking about clothes, like a man's suit, right? It's not that OK, instead, in this context, the word "suit" refers to playing cards. The 52 cards in a deck of playing cards are divided into four suits. There are clubs, jacks, hearts, and diamonds. Now, there are many different card games, but in games like bridge, having high cards is a good thing and that can help you win the game. And when you have high cards, well, then this is called a strong suit. That's the origin of this expression. But it's not really needed to understand how English speakers use this idiom in daily conversation. The most important thing for you to know right now is that your strong suit means that you are good or talented at doing something. Now, as always, I've prepared some example sentences that will help us understand how to use this expression more deeply and in a natural way. So, let's take a listen to those three examples right now.

Example sentence number one

Even though I love flowers, I don't have a green thumb. In fact, killing plants seems to be my strong suit.

Let's break this example sentence down. In that example sentence, the speaker was talking about flowers and how he loves flowers. But unfortunately, he doesn't have a green thumb. If you have a green thumb, it means you're a good gardener. And you can grow plants and flowers really easily. Some people have a green thumb, and they're amazing gardeners, and other people don't. And the speaker in that example doesn't, and in fact, he says the opposite is true. Instead of having a green thumb, killing plants seems to be his strong suit. So, he's kind of making a joke, but essentially saying that he's not a good gardener, and in fact, he's more talented at killing plants than he is at growing them.

Example sentence number two

I started off by majoring in astronomy at university but after realizing that science isn't my strong suit, I switched to majoring in world literature.

Let's break that example sentence down. In that example sentence, the speaker was

talking about his university major, and he said that he began his university student days as an astronomy major. But then he realized that he's not very good at science. In fact, he said science isn't my strong suit. And because of that, he switched majors and ended up majoring in world literature.

Example sentence number three

I don't want to say that Jerry's a bad programmer, but I will say it's not his strong suit.

Now, let's talk about this final example sentence for a moment. So, in that example sentence, we heard about a guy named Jerry and Jerry's not a bad programmer, but it's not his strong suit. It means that programming is something that Jerry's not really talented at doing.

That's it for this bonus episode everyone. Thanks for studying English with me today and congratulations on making it all the way to the end of the episode. Nice job. If you enjoyed this lesson, please support the work that we do at Culips by following us on social media, or telling your friends who are learning English to check us out, or by becoming a Culips member. You can find all the details about the great benefits and bonuses Culips members get by visiting our website. So, take care everyone, have a fantastic week, and I'll talk to you next time, goodbye!

Episode credits

Host: Andrew Bates

Music and sound effects: Pixabay.com

Thumbnail image: Canva.com

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Operations Tsuyoshi Kaneshima