

Culips Community Update - March 2025

Episode description

In this episode, Andrew and Alina share updates from the Culips community and introduce the April challenge. They read a thoughtful comment from a listener, announce the March challenge winner, and talk about a helpful new feature that will make learning English with Culips even better for you.



Note: The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone, and welcome to the April edition of the Culips Community Update. Joining me here today is our Discord mod, and study guide writer, and English teacher, small-group discussion class teacher extraordinaire, Alina. Hey there, Alina. How's it going?

Alina: Hi, Andrew. It's going pretty good. How are things with you?

Andrew: I'm doing pretty good myself, Alina. We're recording here on Friday, so one of my favorite days of the week. I'm always in a good mood on Friday, TGIF. And in this episode, guys, we're going to talk a little bit about what's been going on over the last month here in the Culips community on our Discord server. And also, we're going to preview the April challenge because we have a monthly challenge each and every month that practices a specific English skill. It's free for everybody to participate in. And Alina has planned another fun challenge for us for April. So, we're going to talk all about that. But before we do, we wanted to do a shout out, a shout out. A shout out to one of the Culips listeners out there who left us some great feedback and a nice comment either on our Instagram or our YouTube page or our Discord community. And in fact, Alina, this month's shout out comes from our YouTube channel. So, I'm just going to pull up the comment here and I'll read it. Pardon my pronunciation. Alina and I, before we started recording, we were like, how do we say this username? And Alina, do you remember what we decided on? I think we are going to go with Xuansangen. Xuansangen.

Alina: Something like that, yeah.

Andrew: Something like that.

Alina: You nailed it. Hopefully.

Andrew: Hopefully. So Xuansangen left us this wonderful comment on our YouTube channel. And it's quite a long comment. So, I'm just going to shorten it a little bit. But they said, "Thank you so much for the authentic and natural content. It's exactly what I'm looking for. I'm exhausted of oversimplified content. So, I want to look for lessons that have more complex words put in context so that I could decode them. And I want content that's natural, authentic, and doesn't really line up with explicit standards." You know, Alina, like when you buy a textbook from, you know, a language learning bookstore or something, it will have the level, right? The C-E-F-R level, like A1, A2, et cetera. I think this person just wants, you know, kind of a mix of natural English. So, the comment goes on to say, "Anyways, keep it up, stay energized, stay creative, healthy, active, and smiling. Please."

Alina: So sweet.

Andrew: Very nice. So, I think, I was really happy to read this comment because it felt like an affirmation kind of of what we're trying to do here at Culips. And that's trying to bring everybody natural, authentic English. And of course, sometimes we do try to explain things so that you can pick them up in context. But we want you guys to learn this kind of natural English that you'll hear around you in your everyday life. And yeah, I think this comment was kind of like an affirmation that we're doing that. So, I was really happy. And thank you so much, Xuansangen, once again, for the comments. This month's shout out goes out to you.

Alina: Thank you so much.

Andrew: OK, Alina, let's get to our April challenge. And yeah, I'm excited for this challenge. I'll throw things over to you. Do you want to break it down and let us know what the challenge is all about for April?

Alina: Absolutely, I do. Of course, I'm excited myself, to be honest. Every time, you know,

because coming up with an idea for the next challenge is always kind of a bit of a, hmm, can we, you know, think of something cool and fun?

Andrew: It's a challenge to come up with the challenge.

Alina: Yeah, I'm always a little bit nervous. Like, oh, you know, can I do it again? But then, you know, never really. It's never really a problem, to be honest, because we always have a lot of ideas coming from the listeners, coming from, I don't know, all over the, yeah, server. So actually, the idea for this one kind of, I could say, yeah, came from me. I was just kind of looking at the whole, like, glossary thing that you do, you know, and you use all these wonderful expressions in the bonus episodes. And I feel like they're kind of being neglected a little bit because we don't do, you know, study guides for them or anything like that. And nobody really mentions them. Because they are my favorite part, to be honest. I always go, before I even listen to the episodes, I actually go to the glossary, you know, and I'm like, OK, let's see what the expressions are, because as a teacher, you know, plus, you know, I myself am a learner as well. So, I do learn new things there sometimes as well. So, I feel like we do need to kind of maybe work with those expressions a little bit more. And yeah, I thought of creating a challenge with these expressions.

So, I just picked three bonus episodes, the recent ones, you know, so that, you know, all you guys still remember what, you know, the story was with those episodes. And picked five expressions from each, from the glossary, because, you know, we have 15 tasks for each challenge. We do it every other day. And yeah, the idea is that we're going to take a close look at how, you know, Andrew, how you use these expressions in the context of the episode. And then we're going to take it to the next level and go and see how else we can use, you know, these expressions, maybe other contexts, situations. Look at the synonyms, some, you know, related expressions. And of course, you know, the most important part is for everyone to try and come up with their own sentences, maybe even short stories.

We actually did a challenge last year where the task was, you know, the task was to create short stories, and they were hilarious, amazing stories. I, to be honest with you, feel like it's, you know, one of the best things you could do as a learner to just kind of, yeah, you know, go crazy. And yeah, think of something, even if it doesn't really make sense, you know, if it doesn't really apply to your life, but especially if it does, I feel like it's always, you know, it works for the best when you can apply a new phrase to your own, you know, life, some situation in the past. And so eventually, you know, we want you to spend so much time with these expressions that they're just like ingrained, you know. And then when you need them in real life, you will just like think of them instantly, naturally, you know, they'll just kind of pop into your head. And yeah, that's the idea behind the new challenge.

Andrew: Awesome. OK. So just to break it down a little bit more and to explain to everyone what they need to do. During the month of April, then we're going to spend, I guess it's one week per bonus episode, and we have three bonus episodes. So just for, I guess, listeners out there who don't know, each and every week I create a bonus episode. And I tell you a story about something from my life that I've been up to recently. And when I make these bonus episodes, Alina, I just kind of hit record on my camera and on my audio recorder and just talk. So, I don't have a script. I don't know what I'm going to say. And sometimes idioms or difficult expressions come out of my mouth, because that's just what happens, right? You're just talking, and you say these expressions. And then I hear myself say it and I'm like, oh, that actually might be a little bit difficult. If I were learning English, I would probably find that difficult.

And so, I try to select, you know, not too many. I don't want to overwhelm people, but I try to select maybe, I don't know, 8 to 10 expressions. And then I make a little glossary to accompany the bonus episode so that you can get an example sentence and get a definition about what that phrase or what that expression means. So, Alina, you've then prepared 15 of those interesting expressions from three bonus episodes. And guys, the

task that you have to do is for each day, you have to make an example sentence with that expression, right? So, I would imagine, Alina, that people would like to go to that episode and check out the glossary, see the meaning, see how I used it in context, read the example sentence, and then try and make their own example sentence. Or, you know, you could even go more advanced if you wanted to leave an audio note with a sentence like that you're speaking instead of writing. We'd love that. If you want to write a short story, like you said, or a kind of funny situation, if you want to share something from your real life, just like I do in the bonus episodes, share like a fact or a little tidbit of information for your real life. Whatever you want to do, it's fine. But the goal is, the goal of the challenge is that you must use that key expression for that day. And like you said, there are 15 of them. So, it's not an everyday thing.

And Alina, we should maybe explain when it will start exactly because there's a little bit of confusion last month about the start. It's hard because we're all in different time zones, everybody on the Culips team and listeners from around the world too. So, could you tell us when exactly the challenge will start for April? When will people expect to see it posted on the Discord community?

Alina: Yeah, so because these update episodes kind of come out a little bit earlier, I feel like a lot of people get excited and they really want to get started, just like before April even starts. But it's important, you know, I would like to let you all know that we're going to start on the 1st of April. And again, depending on, you know, your time zone, this could actually be the second, you know. Because, you know, I live in Ireland, and it could be like in between. But the plan is to post it on the 1st of April. So, before that, you could just take a quick look, like, you know, especially if you're new to the challenge, if you're not sure how it works. Because they all kind of similar enough, you know, you can go and take a look at what everyone else is doing right now with the previous challenge. Just to get the idea, you know, to get into the swing of things when you have to jump into the next one, so.

Andrew: Sure, cool. So, guys, to join the challenge, you don't need to sign up for anything extra, you don't need to pay, you just need to be a member of our Discord community. And of course, the link to join the Discord is in the description for this episode. If you're totally new to Discord, you do need to make an account with Discord. And Discord is the name of the app that hosts our server. So, you have to make an account with them. That's free too. You need to download the app onto your computer or onto your phone. Again, everything's free. And once you have your account made, once you've downloaded the app, then you just log in and you join our server. And then you're going to look for the monthly challenge channel. And then you just look in the channel, there will be a little thumbtack icon. And if you click that icon, that's where you can see the saved posts. And that's where you'll see the instructions for what to do for the April challenge. If you need help with that, you can send me a DM or Alina a DM, and we'll try to help you. And also, Alina and I are going to try and make some little tutorial videos to explain. We'll try our best to do that.

Alina: We'll see.

Andrew: Kind of to guide you through step by step. And of course, everybody on our server is also very friendly. So, if you need help from somebody, just write a comment, say "Help me!" and somebody will help you. If Alina and I are sleeping, maybe, and we're not there, somebody from the community will help you and we'll get you started. And yeah, we'd love to have many, many people join us for the April challenge. Alina, was there anything else we needed to say about the challenge that we may have overlooked?

Alina: Yeah, I feel like, you know, one more thing, if you're, you know, really nervous about missing it, just make sure you have your notifications on, once you get the app, make sure you have the, you know, thing that notifies you of all the announcements active. Because I am going to be posting, you know, this information about the challenge into the announcement channel. You probably have noticed, if you've been a Discord member for a while, that I do them like weekly to just let you know and remind you of the new episodes

or anything else that is, you know, new and exciting happening on the server. So yeah, just make sure you have notifications enabled on your app, on your phone, especially. So yeah, you won't miss it.

Andrew: All right, very good. And I guess we should also say that if you complete the challenge, then you'll get a special digital completion certificate, right? I've got the last two, so it's in my trophy case.

Alina: Building a collection.

Andrew: Yeah, in my collection. And out of all of the people who finish the challenge, then we are going to select one finisher randomly, and we're going to send them a special Culips prize package, which includes a Culips tote bag and some Culips stickers. And also, previous guest on Culips and my very good friend, Luke, he's an artist. And he's created some postcards of my hometown, Kelowna, because we both have the same hometown. So, I'll send you a little handwritten postcard on one of Luke's creations, his postcard, and that will be the Culips swag bag package. So, we're going to draw the winner and select the winner for the March challenge here at the end of the episode in just a minute. So, guys, stay tuned for that. It's probably going to be the most exciting part of the episode, but yeah, there's that kind of extra little thing that you could win if perhaps if you finish the challenge and you have luck on your side.

Alina, I guess there's one more thing that I wanted to talk about, and that was kind of a new feature, a new update here at Culips that we've added to the interactive transcripts. So many listeners out there, guys, you'll know that for all of our episodes, we have an interactive transcript. I think it's a really awesome learning tool, but there was one thing that was kind of missing from the interactive transcript, and that was the words that are in the study guide, or the expressions in the study guide, or the words or expressions in the glossary for the bonus episodes, they weren't really highlighted. So, I guess it was a little

bit inconvenient for some people to have to go back and forth between the study guide and the interactive transcript to try and find where in the episode those expressions were. So, one of our wonderful Culips members by the name of Chalupinka sent me a message and she told me about this and asked me to try and find a solution to this problem. And so, yeah, actually it was pretty easy to find a solution and it's fixed.

So that's good news. We've updated our interactive transcripts. It might be too much work for me to go back and change all of the old episodes, but for all episodes going forward, now we have it really clear and easy to see when a word from the interactive transcript is included in the study guide or included in the glossary. You'll see it highlighted in orange, actually, so you can't miss it. And I hope that will improve everybody's learning experience with the interactive transcript.

Alina: That sounds amazing and great news for all of us out there.

Andrew: Yeah. Thank you to Chalupinka for that wonderful suggestion. And guys, anytime if you have a suggestion or an idea, we'll definitely take it into consideration. And if it's something that we can do and it is a helpful suggestion like this one, then yeah, we'll do our best to make it a reality. OK, Alina, we got to go quickly here. We got to wrap up because I have my... I have my Culips small-group speaking class here starting in just a few moments. So, I'm going to need to log off of the recording and log into Zoom for the class. But we need to select our winner of the Culips swag bag prize package. I'm spinning. Big spin. There it goes. And it looks like the winner is going to be Tetsu.

Alina: All right, Tetsu, congratulations.

Andrew: Yeah, nice job. So Tetsu, I'll be in touch through DM on the server. And if you send me your address, then I'll prepare the Culips swag bag package, prize package for you and get it sent your way. I think Tetsu is in Japan. So, it should be pretty easy for me to send it to Japan.

Alina: It shouldn't take too long to get there.

Andrew: Yeah, good. All right. Well, Alina, I think that brings us pretty much to the end of this episode. Did you have anything else that you wanted to say before we sign off and say goodbye to everyone?

Alina: Yeah, sure. I guess, as always, I would like to thank you all for participating and especially completing the challenge because I can imagine you have your own lives going on. And this is just an extra thing you have to do on top of everything else. So, kudos to you. You're doing great. And yeah, thank you so much.

Andrew: Yeah, awesome. Well, everyone, we'll see you on the Discord for the April challenge. And Alina, we'll talk to you next month, well, really at the end of April, and you'll introduce the May challenge. And yeah, who knows what it will be, but I'm sure you'll come up with a good idea.

Alina: I don't. Not yet.

Andrew: Not yet, but we'll come up with a good idea. And yeah, we'll talk to you in the next Culips community update. OK, everybody, thank you. And we'll talk to you soon. Take care. Bye-bye.

Alina: Bye.

Episode credits

Hosts and preparation: Andrew Bates and Alina Morozova

Operations: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima