

Curious Question #11 – Are we on for tonight?

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp...

Robin: And Robin...

Harp: With the **Curious Questions** podcast at Culips.com, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Robin: OK, this podcast is a special one that we do at Culips—we take one of your questions and we answer it. All the transcripts can be found on our website if you check out the Lipservice section. And what's the question that we have today, Harp?

Harp: The question is about plans and I love plans because that means I'm doing something. The question is: *What does “be on” in “Are we on for tonight?” mean? And what words can “be on” be replaced with?*

Robin: OK, so that question was from... from whom?

Harp: From Chan-Seung Lee in Korea. Thanks for the great question and I'm sorry if I pronounced your name wrong.

Robin: OK, indeed. Well, there are many ways to talk about plans and making plans and asking someone to do something with you. There are more professional ways and casual ways and indirect ways. The question today is about making plans.

Harp: “**To be on**” can have different meanings depending on the context. In this case, to say to someone, “**Are we on?**” is a very casual way of confirming plans. Saying “**Are we on?**” is just like saying, “Do we have plans?” or “Are those plans confirmed?” To give you an example, for this Culips meeting I called Maura and said to her, “**Are we on** for tonight for the Culips meeting?” and she said, “Of course.”

Robin: And that would mean, “Do we have plans? Are we going to meet tonight?” And of course, yes, we are going to meet tonight.

Harp: Exactly, because we had discussed it through email and I called her just to confirm.

Robin: So **are we on** for coffee tomorrow before work?

Harp: No.

Robin: No?

Harp: No—yes, yes, of course. I'm just joking.

Robin: OK, there we go. So when you want to be specific about making plans you can say “**Are we on** tonight?” or “**Are we on** for Thursday at 6 o'clock?”, etc. We can also refer to the activity, “**Are we on** for lunch tomorrow?”, like I said before, “**Are we on** for coffee tomorrow?” or “So, **we are on** for dinner next Friday?” for example.

Harp: Exactly. “**Are we on** for tonight?” means “Do we have plans tonight?” but I wouldn't use them exactly the same way. “**Are we on** for tonight?” is a lot more casual, and is a way of double checking or checking that the plans you previously discussed are confirmed.

If you want to replace “**Are we on** tonight?” with another expression, I would say something like, “See you tonight, then.”

Robin: To answer Chan-Seung Lee's question directly, she asked, “...*what words can 'be on' be replaced with?*” I would say “Are we doing something tonight?” or “Are we seeing each other tonight?” These are the closest examples I can think of. The sense is a bit different, though, and saying “Are we doing something tonight?” is much more direct.

Harp: I also wanted to mention another way that we can use “**to be on**.” This way is quite different than the one we were just talking about. In “**Are we on** for tonight?” we always use “we,” or “they,” or the plural “you” because for making plans we always need more than one person.

Robin: “**To be on**” is also a way to talk about a great performance. Maybe I went to see a concert and the singer was really good. In that case, I could say “He **was** really **on** last night.” It means simply that he was performing at 100% of his potential. He put a lot of energy into his performance and it was great.

Harp: For example, I could say, “She had to do a presentation last night. She **was** really **on** and so it went well.” In this way, any subject, plural or singular, can be used when “**to be on**” is used to describe someone's great performance.

Robin: We'll end this episode by repeating the answer we gave at the beginning of this episode. So when we say “**Are we on** tonight?” it is a way of

confirming plans with someone. It is a pretty casual and familiar and not very direct way of doing so.

Harp: You can be more direct and say, “Do we have plans tonight?” or casual, like me, and say “See you tonight, then.”

Robin: And I think that about wraps it up for this week’s Curious Questions at Culips.com. Thank you once again for joining us.

Harp: Don’t forget to check out the Lipservice where you can find the transcript for this podcast as well as the Detailed Explanation and the quizzes.

Robin: So, signing off, this is Robin...

Harp: And Harp...

Robin: And we will see you next time at Culips.com.

Harp: Bye everyone.

Detailed Explanation

Are we on?

This expression is a fixed expression that is used casually to confirm plans. We gave you tons of similar expressions in this episode, so check out the transcript if you want to see more examples.

Are we on? (In radio)

“**Are we on?**” can also be an expression used in radio or podcasting. If Robin asks Yoshi, “**Are we on?**” he is asking if we are recording. It comes from the radio expression, “to be on the air.” When you are “on the air,” you are recording.

Are we on? (In a bet)

“**Are we on?**” can also be used to challenge someone in a **bet**. A **bet** is when you wager money, mostly done at horse races or gambling at casinos.

I will explain “**bet**” more simply, but here’s an example. Jack and Jane are looking at a tall building. Jack says he thinks it is 400 metres high. Jane thinks it is 300 metres high. So, they decide to make a **bet**, maybe the **bet** is five dollars. If the building is 400 metres high, Jack wins five dollars and if the building is 300 metres high, Jane wins five dollars.

A friendly **bet** is when nothing is wagered. The only thing you win is the pleasure in knowing that you are right!

You can also say, “**You’re on!**” This means, “I **bet** you.”

So, if we are discussing something and decide to have a **bet**, I could then ask you, “**Are we on?**” which means “Are we going to **bet** on this?”

Are we on? (Performing at your best)

Or, like in this episode, we can use a statement like, “He **was** really **on** last night,” which means, “He gave a great performance.”

Are we on for...?

When we use “**Are we on?**” it is usually followed by “**for**” when we specify when or what we are going to do.

Here are some examples:

- **Are we on for** dinner tonight?
- **Are we on for** 6:00 on Thursday?
- **Are we on for** Saturday?
- **Are we on for** tennis?

Are other people on?

For asking about plans, you could also use this expression with “you” and “they.” In these cases, you are asking about other people’s plans.

Here are some examples:

Are they on for Friday? (You are asking a friend about two other people’s plans.)
Are Sally and Jim on for Friday?

Are you on for dinner? (You are asking a friend about him/her and another person.)
Are you and Doug on for dinner?

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)

1. **Joseph:** **Next Saturday could work for me. We need to get together and I am busy all this week.**
Sean: **I'm free Saturday too. Are we on for Saturday then?**

Is this a good situation to use “are we on?”? (Circle one)

Yes No

2. **Jeff:** **I gotta go now, but I am looking forward to seeing you buddy.**
Daniel: **Yeah, me too.**
Jeff: **Are we on for Friday then?**
Daniel: **We're on for sure!**

Which of the following best describes what Daniel means by “We're on for sure!”?

- a) Daniel has not decided what he will do on Friday.
- b) Daniel will meet Jeff on Friday.

3. **In a formal situation, which is the best expression to use when confirming plans?**

- a) Are we on?
- b) Are those plans confirmed?
- c) See you then?
- d) Plans?

4. **Which expression could replace “Are we on tonight?”?**

- a) See you tonight then?
- b) She was on tonight.
- c) Are we on for tomorrow?
- d) To be on.

5. "She was really on last night." What does this sentence mean?

- a) She was on stage last night.
- b) She gave an amazing performance.
- c) She had plans last night.
- d) She went to bed early last night.

Answers:

- 1. Yes
- 2. b
- 3. b
- 4. a
- 5. b