

Real Talk #054 – Joining a gym

AD-FREE

Episode description

Joining a new gym can be intimidating. There are a lot of things you need to think of. You have to ask about their membership fees. You have to ask about the length of their membership contracts. And you also need to see if their environment is a good fit for you. Fortunately, in this Real Talk episode, Andrew and Kassy help you with all those questions and more!

Real Talk is a series designed to help you in real-life, everyday situations. Our hosts break down the type of dialogues you encounter in an English-speaking environment.

Fun fact

The gym industry is big business. In the United States alone, gyms make about \$35 billion annually. You would think everyone would be fit, right? But according to the website RunRepeat, about 6.3% of Americans never even use memberships they have already paid for!

Expressions included in the study guide

- Do you need a hand with anything?
- Let me tell you about
- 24/7/365
- Month to month
- To break a contract
- Cancellation fee
- A free trial / trial membership
- A good fit
- Release form



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: Real Talk #54. Hello there, everyone. My name's Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello friends, welcome back to Culips. You're listening to Real Talk, which is the Culips series for beginner and intermediate English learners, where we teach you the English expressions that you need to know for real-world situations. Joining me today is my cohost, Kassy. Hello there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew, and hey, listeners. Guys, today we're going to talk about useful expressions and vocabulary that you need to know when joining the gym.

Andrew: That's right. So, Kassy, could you tell us what the plan for this episode is?

Kassy: Sure thing. So more than ever, people around the world are interested in living healthy lifestyles, right, Andrew?

Andrew: Yes, absolutely.

Kassy: And a great way to accomplish that is by regularly working out and exercising at a gym. So, we're going to start by listening to an example conversation where a guy visits a gym to sign up for a membership. After we listen to the example, Andrew and I will go through it again to break down and explain the key parts and important expressions in this conversation.

Andrew: Perfect. OK, let's get started by listening to that example.

Gym employee: Hey there, how's it going?

Customer: I'm good. How are you?

Gym employee: I'm great. **Do you need a hand with anything?**

Customer: Yeah, actually, I want to sign up for a membership.

Gym employee: Sure, no problem. I can help with that. **Let me tell you about** our membership plan.

Customer: Great.

Gym employee: So basically, we keep things simple. We only have one membership option. And with it, you get **24/7/365** access to our gym, swimming pool, and sauna. Plus, you can sign up for as many classes as you'd like. We offer yoga, Pilates, and spinning classes.

Customer: What about personal training?

Gym employee: We have some great personal trainers, but they're an additional charge.

Customer: OK, I see. So, how much does the gym membership cost, then?

Gym employee: It's \$50 a month if you go **month to month**, or \$480 a year if you sign a 1-year contract.

Customer: OK, great. And let's say that I signed a 1-year contract. What would happen if I quit after a few months? Are there any **cancellation fees**?

Gym employee: Ah, good question. You can cancel anytime with the monthly membership and there are no fees. If you **break a yearly contract** within the first 6 months, you can get a refund, but you have to pay a \$200 early **cancellation fee**.

Customer: OK, fair enough. Now, do you offer a **free trial** or something like that, so I could test the gym out and see if it'd be a **good fit** for me?

Gym employee: Yeah, absolutely. We offer a 3-day **trial membership**, which is good for this location or the location downtown. It's a full **trial** so you can enjoy any classes you'd like and use all the facilities as well.

Customer: Wow, that sounds awesome. Could I sign up for the **trial membership** then, and then maybe later make a decision about becoming a full member?

Gym employee: Yeah, absolutely. I'm just going to pass you the iPad here and I'll ask you to fill out the form with your information and then sign the **release form**.

Customer: All right. I'm finished. Here you are.

Gym employee: OK, so here is your **trial membership** card. You just need to scan the barcode at the front door to enter. You'll find the changing rooms on the right, you'll be locker #52. If you need a towel or workout clothes, you can find them right beside the entrance to the changing room.

Customer: Great. Thanks so much.

Gym employee: You're welcome. Enjoy your workout.

Andrew: So in that conversation, we just heard a guy visit a gym and ask about different membership options at the gym. And he learned that the gym offers a variety of services and that they have monthly membership options or a yearly membership option. You can save a little bit of money by becoming a yearly member. And he also learned that there was a **trial membership** at the gym. And that's what he decided to do, was to sign up for a **trial membership** so he could test the gym to see if it's a **good fit** for him.

So, Kassy, we're going to go through this conversation now one more time, and take a look at some of the important expressions and key vocabulary that we heard in this conversation.

So at the start, it's just like a pretty normal conversation, right? The guy arrives at the gym, he talks to the front desk staff, "Hey, how's it going?" "I'm good. And you? How are you?" This is kind of like the little small chat that you have to have when you have a conversation of this kind. You can't really just walk in and say, "How much is the gym membership," right? You have to be a little friendly, "How are you?" "I'm good, how are you?" "I'm good." That kind of thing.

But then, eventually, the customer, he asks about a gym membership. And he said, "I wanted to sign up for a membership." I wanted to sign up for a membership. We've talked about this on Real Talk in the past. And that's when we are making requests like this, we sometimes put it into the past tense, because it sounds a little bit more polite, it's indirect. And because it's indirect, it feels more polite. So he's not saying, like, I wanted to sign up for a gym membership last year and I didn't and now I want to, it doesn't have that feeling of being in the past tense. It's just how we communicate politely that we want to do something in this kind of situation. I wanted to sign up for a membership. So I came here, right? It's kind of that that meaning.

So, Kassy, after he explains that he wants to sign up for a membership, the staff tells him about some of the different membership options. And, thankfully, this gym has a very straightforward membership plan. You get unlimited access to everything in the gym, all of the equipment, the swimming pool, the sauna, classes, everything. And there are just two different ways to pay for that service. You can pay monthly or you can pay yearly. One of the perks of this gym is that you get **24/7/365** access to the gym. We heard the staff members say that, that you can get **24/7/365** access to the gym. Now some of our very intelligent members may already have guessed what this means, but maybe some people are still scratching their heads. What does it mean, **24/7/365**? Could you break it down, Kassy, and explain it to us?

Kassy: Sure. So, 24 stands for 24 hours in a day. 7 stands for 7 days a week. And 365 stands for 365 days a year. So, **24/7/365** access means this gym is open rain or shine, day or night, all year, all day long.

Andrew: Yeah, it's just another way of saying they never close, right? It's always open. OK, excellent.

And now when it comes to the membership options, there are two different ways to pay for joining the gym, there's a **month to month** plan and a yearly contract plan. Kassy, what does it mean **month to month**? If you join a service, like maybe Netflix or a gym or even sometimes if you rent an apartment, you can pay **month to month**. What does this option mean?

Kassy: **Month to month** means that you have a monthly subscription fee, which means you're paying a small amount each and every month instead of a large amount once.

Andrew: Exactly. And usually when you join a service and you pay **month to month**, there are no contracts, right? So, for example, I'm not sure if it works the same way in the United States where you're from, Kassy, but where I'm from in Canada, when you rent an apartment, you always have to sign a contract for the first year. But then after that 1-year contract is finished, then your housing agreement automatically goes to a month by month agreement where you or your landlord, the owner of the apartment, who you are renting it from, can change the agreement at any time. So it starts with a contract but then after the contract is finished, it goes **month to month**. So, that is one of the characteristics of a **month to month** agreement is that there's no contract and anybody can cancel at any time.

Kassy: Yeah, it's similar in the US. It depends on the landlord, but a lot of situations are like that.

Andrew: Personally, I like **month to month** options. It's very flexible.

Kassy: Flexibility is always nice.

Andrew: Especially at a gym, where maybe I think a lot of people are like this, maybe I'm not alone in saying that you start with big goals and big plans but then, you know, after a few months, it can get hard to keep your motivation up. And sometimes, unfortunately, we stopped working out as much as we want. So, yeah, in this kind of situation, a **month to month** plan can be a great deal. However, there's also a yearly contract option at this gym. And we heard the staff member tell the customer that he can save some money, the price is only \$480 a year, if he signs a 1-year contract. But then the customer, he asks a very good question, Kassy. What question does he ask the staff?

Kassy: He asks if there are any **cancellation fees** if he wants to quit early.

Andrew: So, a **cancellation fee** is some money that you are required to pay if you want to **break your contract**. And **break your contract** is just another way of saying cancel your contract, right? And a lot of services will have **cancellation fees** in place because they don't want the customer to take advantage of them, right? They don't want the customer to sign up for a 1-year contract, pay the cheaper rate, and then **break the contract** and just save money that way and kind of take advantage of the goodwill of the gym. So to protect themselves and make sure that they can still make an income, the gym has a requirement that if you **break the contract**, if you cancel it early, then you do have to pay a \$200 early **cancellation fee**. Early **cancellation fee**, that's what we call this kind of money that you're required to pay if you **break your contract**.

Kassy: After they talked about the **cancellation fees**, the customer asked if there were any **free trials** available. Sometimes it's hard to part with your hard-earned money. You don't know, is the facility worth the \$50 a month or \$480 a year? Can I test it out first? Can I do a **free trial**?

Andrew: Exactly. So a **free trial** is just another way of saying a test, right? And I think many gyms in North America have a **free trial**. When I did some googling to prepare for this episode, Kassy, I noticed that most gyms offer a 3-day **free trial**. It seemed to be the standard of having 3 days for free. So, I thought that was really great. Next time I need to sign up for a gym membership, what I'm going to do is just do a 3-day **trial** at many different gyms around the city. That should give me at least a free month of workouts.

Kassy: Yeah, that's not bad. I know a lot of gyms, even if they don't have **free trials**, they also have a very nominal **trial** fee. For example, you could test out the gym for a daily fee of \$3 or \$5 instead of paying, like, a whole month upfront.

Andrew: Yeah, that's a great point. And we usually call that a 1-day pass, a 1-day pass. So if you're interested in maybe just going to the gym for 1 day, you could go to the front desk and ask the staff, "Do you have a 1-day pass?" "Do you have a 1-day pass?" And

see if that's an option at that gym. Or, of course, if you wanted a **free trial**, you could ask, "Do you have a **free trial** and can I try it?"

Kassy: And if that doesn't work, then move to the day pass question.

Andrew: Yeah, so first asked about the **free trial**. And then if they don't have the **free trial**, then you can ask about the day pass. Exactly.

So, Kassy, the customer eventually decides that he would like to sign up for the **free trial membership** and test the gym and see if it's right for him, see if it's good for him and his workout goals. So he asks to sign up and the staff member says, "Yeah, sure, absolutely. You can have a **free trial membership**." She passes him an iPad and asks him to fill out some information on the iPad form. This is usually pretty basic stuff, your name, your phone number, your email address, where you live, how old you are, etc, etc. But then he also has to sign a **release form**. OK? The staff member says, "Please sign the **release form**." What exactly is a **release form**?

Kassy: **Release form** is a release from liabilities. And liabilities are, you know, fees or damages that could occur by getting injured at their gym. So if you sign that form, you're saying that the gym is not held responsible for any injuries that you may receive at this facility.

Andrew: Yeah, so, if this customer signed up for the **free trial** in the gym and then went into the gym and tried to pick up an extremely heavy dumbbell, and then dropped the dumbbell on his foot, because it was too heavy, and then broke his foot, he couldn't then say, "Oh, you guys are responsible, you owe me money, because now I'm injured," right? He can't sue the gym, because he signed the **release form**, which says, if I get injured in this gym, it's my responsibility, the gym is not responsible. That's what **release form** is all about.

Now, usually **release forms** are very dense and thick and long, and big legal documents. And if you want to try, you could read the whole thing, but these kinds of documents, we actually call them legalese. They're written in legalese. And to be honest, even for English native speakers, they're very difficult to understand. So, unfortunately, most people usually just skip to the bottom and sign without really reading the details very closely.

Kassy: I'm sure we've all done it.

Andrew: Yes, I definitely have. So, Kassy, that was pretty much it for this conversation. The staff signed the customer up, and then gave him a gym card. And to enter the gym, he has to scan his barcode at the front door to enter. And I guess that is because it's a **24/7/365** gym. So they probably don't have staff working at the gym **24/7/365**, maybe some of the early-morning hours, for example, are with no staff and if you want to enter the

gym, then you just have to scan your barcode. A barcode is the information that's displayed with a bunch of black and white lines that you can see on the back of many different kinds of cards, maybe your identity card, or your driver's licence, or your credit cards, even. All of these kinds of cards will have some kind of barcode on the back. So, you just need to scan that on the computer, and then you can enter the gym and begin your workout.

Kassy, I've got one question for you before we wrap this episode up. And that is the difference between the words workout and exercise. I know many English learners find this distinction to be a little bit difficult. What's the difference between working out and exercising?

Kassy: You know, it's pretty darn similar, but I guess the difference I would say is, like, a workout I would think of as like a routine of some sort. Like going to the gym and doing a weightlifting workout or a full body workout or a leg workout, leg day, you know. An exercise could be any form of movement.

Andrew: Yeah, Kassy, exactly. I pretty much see them as being exactly the same. And I personally use them interchangeably all the time. So, listeners, there's no real big difference between workout and exercise. You can consider them as having exactly the same meaning.

Kassy: Yeah, I think workout maybe just sounds more colloquial sometimes. There's a song where the singer goes, "Ah, ah, I workout." So, every time I hear that word, it pops into my brain. That's the only difference, in my opinion.

Andrew: Yeah, I think workout does sound a little hipper, a little cooler compared to exercise. And so for that reason, maybe I tend to use workout more but, in terms of meaning, they both have exactly the same meaning.

Kassy: Well, we're almost at the end of today's episode, but before we go, let's summarize what we've covered.

Andrew: Yeah. So today we learned about how to join a gym using English.

Kassy: Yes, we talked about some of the expressions and vocabulary you'll hear and use when doing that, such as **24/7/365**, a **free trial**, cancel any time.

Andrew: **Month to month**, an early **cancellation fee**, and scanning a bar code to enter.

So, everyone, that brings us to the end of this one. Thank you for listening. We hope you learned a lot with us today.

Detailed Explanations

Do you need a hand with anything?

Sentence

After their initial greeting, the gym employee asks the customer, “**Do you need a hand with anything?**” This means the same thing as **can I help you?** It is most common to say **do you need a hand with anything?** when offering to help someone with a physical task, such as helping them to carry something or helping them to clean the dishes.

Here’s one more example with **do you need a hand with anything?**

Harry: Do you need a hand with anything?

Astrid: Actually, I’m just looking. Thanks.

Harry: Well, if there’s anything I can help you with, my name’s Harry. I’ll be just over there.

Astrid: Great.

Let me tell you about

Phrase

At the beginning of the example conversation, the gym employee says to the customer, “**Let me tell you about** our membership plan.” **Let me tell you about** is a common way for salespeople to introduce what they are offering. They could be talking about special offers or regular services and products.

Here’s one more example with **let me tell you about**:

Jennifer: Hello. Welcome to Johnny’s Burger House. My name is Jennifer.

Franklin: Hello, Jennifer.

Jennifer: Before I take your orders, **let me tell you about** today’s specials.

Franklin: OK. Let’s hear them.

24/7/365

Idiom

The gym in the example dialogue is open **24/7/365**. That means the gym is open 24 hours a day and 7 days a week for all 365 days of the year. It basically means the gym is always open.

You can also break the idiom **24/7/365** into different parts. Something can be open **24 hours a day**, but with exceptions. For example, you can say your store is open **24 hours a day**, Monday through Saturday. That means your store is open at all hours, except on Sunday. If you say your store is open **7 days week**, that means that it is open every day, but probably operates during regular business hours. You can also say something is **365 days a year**. For example, if you have a job where people contact you every day, your job is **365 days a year**. Parenting is a **365 days a year** job.

Here are a couple more examples with **24/7/365**:

Vicky: There's a spa in a rural town nearby that I've been wanting to visit. Do you want to go on the weekend?

Tina: Sure. Sounds great.

Vicky: Cool. I'll make the reservations online.

Tina: Wait. It's a holiday this weekend. Do you think they'll be open?

Vicky: They should be. Their advertisements say that they're open **24/7/365**.

Tina: Then we're good. Let's go!

Bill: How was your vacation?

Josie: I would hardly call it a vacation. I spent most of my time answering my phone and writing emails.

Bill: Are you serious? How come?

Josie: I'm the CEO. It's a **365 days a year** job. I don't get real vacations.

Month to month

Phrase

A benefit of a **month to month** membership is that you can usually cancel at any time. A disadvantage is that it costs more over the long run.

Month to month is slightly different than monthly. **Month to month** is when you make a decision every month as to whether you want to continue the membership. However, you can have a yearly membership but actually pay it monthly, as opposed paying everything at one time at the beginning of your year-long membership.

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

Mary: Do you want to come and do yoga with me? I go to the gym downtown.

Dom: You know, I'm not the biggest fan of yoga. I would feel bad making a commitment and cancelling later.

Mary: It's no problem. There is a membership fee, but it's only **month to month**. So you won't be on the hook for longer than one month if you don't like it.

Dom: That sounds reasonable. You know what? I'll try it.

Nick: Nice car! When did you buy it?

Gita: I didn't buy it. I'm just renting it.

Nick: Oh, I see. How long is the term of your contract?

Gita: Actually, I'm renting from a new company. You can rent it **month to month**.

Nick: I've never heard of that. What does it mean exactly?

Gita: I didn't sign a multi-year contract. When I no longer want the car, I just have to give them a month's notice and that's it. No strings attached. It's just a little more expensive.

To break a contract

Phrase

To break a contract is the most common way of saying you no longer want to continue honouring the contract you have signed. Other similar expressions are **to terminate a contract**, when you want to end it, or **to breach a contract**, when you do not honour a part of the contract.

Here's one more example with **to break a contract**:

Rick: Are you still using that terrible phone?

Manny: Yeah.

Rick: Why don't you get rid of it?

Manny: I hate **to break a contract**.

Rick: The company doesn't care about that.

Manny: Well, I got it from my uncle's shop. I would feel really bad doing that to him.

Cancellation fee

Noun

A **cancellation fee** is a penalty you have to pay if you want to break a contract before the agreed-upon end. Companies want to protect themselves against people who break their contracts in a way that only benefits the customer but hurts the company.

Here's one more example with **cancellation fee**:

Jerry: Are you still going to that gym on 2nd Street?

Isla: Yes, I am.

Jerry: I thought you were going to cancel your membership.

Isla: I was, but then I found out that the **cancellation fee** was way too high. It made no sense for me to cancel, so I figured I might as well continue going.

A free trial / trial membership

Noun

In the example dialogue, the customer asks if there is some kind of **free trial** available. A **free trial** is when you can test a product or service for free. It is usually for a very short period of time.

Another kind of membership mentioned in the example dialogue is a **trial membership**. In the dialogue, the gym employee offers the customer a 3-day **trial membership**. The term **trial membership** only applies to membership services and not to the temporary use of products, such as test driving a car before buying. Also, a **trial membership** can either be free or offered to you for a fee, so it isn't the same as a **free trial**.

Here are a couple more examples with a **free trial / trial membership**:

Ivan: Are you watching Netflix? Didn't you tell me you would never pay money for a streaming service like that?

Sandy: That was before I found out they offer a **free trial**.

Ivan: How long is the trial?

Sandy: It's only for 1 month. So I'll be binge-watching everything I can for the next month.

Ivan: Be careful. You might like it so much that you'll actually end up paying for it. That's what happened to me!

Steffy: Why didn't you tell me you bought a car?

Bernard: Because I didn't buy one! I signed up for a **trial membership** at a car sharing service. It wasn't free, but at least I can test out the service.

Steffy: What exactly is a car sharing service?

Bernard: It's a service where you can borrow and drive any one of their cars if you're a member. I only need a car on some days, so this kind of service is perfect for me. We'll see how it goes. Like I said, it's only a **trial membership**.

A good fit

Phrase

In the example dialogue, the customer asks if there is a free trial that the gym offers. He wants to know if the gym is **a good fit** for him. **A good fit** is when you match two things that go well together. You can be **a good fit** with your spouse. You can be **a good fit** with a particular situation, like a specific type of gym membership.

Here's one more example with **a good fit**:

Logan: Have you seen the new forward our team acquired?

Ines: What's his name again?

Logan: Newcastle.

Ines: That's right. Yeah. I think he'll be **a good fit** on our second line. What do you think?

Release form

Noun

In the example dialogue, the customer had to sign a **release form**. A **release form** is legal paperwork that you fill out for security reasons. If you are going to be doing something potentially dangerous, like skydiving or weightlifting at a gym, the **release form** is meant to legally protect the business operators in case you get injured. If you do get injured and you've signed a **release form**, you can't sue the business. However, the **release form** often mentions the business' responsibility for providing you with a safe environment.

Here's one more example with **release form**:

Lois: I heard Grant got hurt lifting weights at the gym.

Hyojin: Yeah. He's still in the hospital.

Lois: Poor guy. Can he sue the gym?

Hyojin: I don't think so. There was nothing wrong with the equipment. Besides, everyone signs a **release form** when they join the gym.

Quiz

1. What is the purpose of a release form?

- a) to release you from a contract
- b) to form a friendship
- c) to protect the business operators from getting sued
- d) to terminate a contract

2. What does it mean if your membership is month to month?

- a) you have to pay monthly for a certain number of years
- b) you can cancel your membership at any time

3. What does it mean if a store is open 24/7/365?

- a) it is always open
- b) it is open 24 hours a day most days
- c) it is not open on weekends
- d) it is open 7 days a week, but only during certain hours

4. What is something a gym employee wouldn't say to a customer?

- a) Let me tell you about our membership plan.
- b) Do you need a hand with anything?
- c) Please fill out this release form.
- d) I don't work here.

5. True or false? A free trial is the same as a trial membership.

- a) true
- b) false

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Are you the type of person who prefers cheaper year-long contracts or more expensive month to month contracts? Explain why that is.
2. When is the last time you thought of breaking a contract? Did you go through with it and break the contract?
3. Are you the type of person who likes to take advantage of free trials or trial memberships? Give a situation that explains your style.
4. Do you usually read release forms when you sign a contract? Why or why not?
5. Are you or anyone you know responsible for anything 24/7/365? If yes, what is it?

Quiz Answers

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

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