

AD-FREE

Real Talk #052 – Making an appointment to see the dentist

Episode description

Not everyone enjoys going to the dentist's office. However, there are certainly many people who fear making an appointment over the phone more than the dentist's drill! Fear not. In this Real Talk episode, Andrew and Kassy help you with the vocabulary and expressions you'll need to make a dentist's appointment.

Real Talk is a series designed to help you in real life situations. Although this episode focuses on making an appointment to see the dentist, you can use what you'll learn in this episode to make many different kinds of appointments.

Fun fact

Even though you may be apprehensive to visit the dentist, dentistry has come a long way from its early days. Anaesthetics and precision tools have made going to the dentist a much safer and more pleasant experience. Just take a look at medieval paintings showing what dentists did centuries ago and you'll agree!

Expressions included in the study guide

- To work for [someone]
- The sooner, the better
- To fit [someone] in
- After next
- To double-check
- Walk-in
- Cavity
- Scaling



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 #52. Hello there, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hello and welcome to the Culips English Podcast. You're listening to Real Talk, which is the 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 co-host, Kassy. Hello, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey Andrew! And hey, listeners. Guys, today we're going to be teaching you how to make an appointment at the dentist.

Andrew: That's right. So Kassy, could you let us know what we'll be covering in this episode?

Kassy: Yeah. So as I mentioned, we're going to learn how to make an appointment at the dentist. So in Canada and in the US, walk-ins are not common. A **walk-in** is when you just go to a doctor's office or a dentist's office without an appointment. But instead, you should make an appointment in advance over the phone or on the dental clinic's website if that option is available.

Andrew: Exactly. And sometimes it is and that's really convenient. But it all depends on the dental clinic. And Kassy, when I was preparing for this episode, I visited my old dentist in Canada's website to see if they had an option to book online, and they did, so I clicked to make an appointment just to see how to do that, so I could tell our listeners, and their appointment service was not working. I just got an internet error. So yeah, in that kind of situation, you'd have no other option but to call them and make an appointment. So even though many things we can do online, and maybe we can avoid making phone calls. Many times it's still good to know how to do it just in case you ever have to do it in the future. So guys in this episode then, we're going to focus on making an appointment over the phone. And the plan for this lesson is that we're going to start by listening to an example conversation where a man calls a dental office to schedule an appointment with the receptionist. And then after we listen to the conversation, Kassy and I will go through it again and break it down and explain all the key parts and the key expressions that you need to know when you call a dentist office yourself.

Kassy: Sounds like a great plan. So let's get started by listening to that example.

Andrew: All right, let's do it.

Receptionist: Good morning, Downtown Dental Center, how can I help you today?

Brian Turner: Hello, I'd like to make an appointment for a dental checkup and **scaling**.

Receptionist: OK, sure. Could I have your name please?

Brian Turner: Brian Turner.

Receptionist: Thanks, Mr. Turner. I don't see a record of you in our system. Have you visited our clinic before?

Brian Turner: No, this will be my first time.

Receptionist: OK, no problem. When you come for an appointment, please make sure to arrive 20 minutes early. We'll need you to fill out some new patient forms about your medical and dental history.

Brian Turner: OK, yeah, no problem.

Receptionist: So when would you like to make the appointment?

Brian Turner: **The sooner, the better.** I'm available on Wednesday afternoons after 4:00pm and Friday mornings until noon.

Receptionist: OK, just a moment while I take a look. We could fit you in on the 23rd at 4:30pm. That's the **Wednesday after next. Would that work for you?**

Brian Turner: Let me just **double-check** my schedule. Ah, sorry, no, that won't work.

Receptionist: OK, then. How about the Wednesday after that? The 30th. Same time 4:30pm.

Brian Turner: Yeah. OK, that'll be perfect.

Receptionist: Excellent. So I've scheduled you with Dr. Smith for 4:30pm on Wednesday, the 30th for a checkup and scaling. Please remember to arrive 20 minutes early to fill out the new patient forms. And please make sure to bring a piece of photo ID and your insurance information if you have it.

Brian Turner: All right. Thanks so much.

Receptionist: You're welcome. Have a great day.

Brian Turner: You too, bye.

Andrew: All right, so we just listened to that example conversation between a patient and a receptionist and the patient phoned the dental clinic to make an appointment. So Kassy, now what we're going to do is go through this conversation one more time and highlight the key parts and explain them to everyone, so that in the future when our listeners are making their own appointment for a dental visit, they'll have no problems. So why don't we begin at the start of the conversation? Kassy, you know, this guy, his name is actually Brian Turner, we hear that in the conversation. Brian Turner calls the Downtown Dental Center, which is the name of the dental clinic. And the receptionist says "Hello, how can I help you today?" And Brian Turner replies, "I would like to make an appointment for a dental checkup and a scaling." And I think this is the best way to actually communicate that you want to make an appointment, all you have to say is I would like to make an appointment for and then say your reason, right? So there are many, many different reasons why you might want to visit the dentist. If you are a new patient at the dentist, like Brian Turner is we also learn that later in the conversation, that he's new to this clinic, then probably the best thing to do is to schedule a checkup. So the dentists can meet you and take a look at your situation going on in your mouth, and make some recommendations. But I think this is a really good sentence structure to know, right? I would like to make an appointment for a checkup. I would like to make an appointment for a cleaning. I would like to make an appointment for a whatever you need to get fixed in your mouth. Kassy, are there any other ways we could achieve this goal of making an appointment? What are some other things we could say as a first sentence when talking to the receptionist?

Kassy: I think similarly, instead of saying I would like to, you could turn it into a question like, can I make an appointment for a dental checkup and a scaling? Or if you have an issue with your mouth, which a lot of people do, that's why they want to go to the dentist, maybe you can start with the problem first, and then ask about an appointment. For example, I have some tooth pain, can I make an appointment to get it checked out?

Andrew: Exactly. And that's a great point. I think if you have an urgent problem, something that needs care quickly, like maybe you have a toothache or a cavity or an emergency, then it's probably best to start with that, right? I have a dental emergency, I need to make an appointment immediately. Or, I have a toothache I would like to make an appointment as soon as possible, right? If you say that, then that will communicate that the problem is serious. So I think that's a great tip.

Kassy: So after that, later in the conversation, the receptionist asks, "When would you like to make the appointment?" You know, this is the first question they're going to ask, "What time works for you?"

Andrew: Yes, indeed. So the receptionist is always going to ask you a kind of question like this, like, "When would you like to make the appointment?" "When would you like to see the dentist?" "When's a good time for you?" "What time works for you?" Some kind of variation on this question. And I think this is a key expression that our listeners should understand here Kassy, when negotiating a schedule, is using the expression **work for you**, right? What time works for you? Does that time work for you? No, it doesn't work for me. OK, so we use work for you meaning like, does it fit your schedule, right? So Kassy, I could say, you know, if we're gonna like, meet tomorrow, I could say, "We're meeting tomorrow, right? Does 9:00am work for you? Is like having a morning coffee together, OK?"

Kassy: I could say "Oh, yeah, that works for me."

Andrew: Exactly. So it matches my schedule. It's a good fit for me. And I think we use works for me or doesn't work for me in these kinds of situations all the time. So Brian Turner our patient, he communicates with the receptionist that he wants to make the appointment as soon as possible, he says, "**The sooner the better**, right?" The receptionist asked, "When would you like to make the appointment?" And he replies, "The sooner the better." And I think the strategy that Brian Turner uses to make his appointment is really the best way for negotiating a schedule over the phone because it can be confusing going back and forth, like is this day, OK? Is this day, OK? Is this day, OK? He just says, all of the times that he's available, and lets the receptionist find a time that fits with the dentist's availability. So Brian says, "I'm available on Wednesday afternoons after 4:00pm and Friday mornings until noon." And then he leaves it in the receptionist's hands, it's her job to go through the schedule and to find an opening on one of those times that matches the dentist's availability.

Kassy: Yeah, exactly. If you don't give specific regions of time where you're available, you could go back and forth, you know, four or five times before you can find a time that works for both of you. But if you pick, you know, a ballpark like, you know, "I'm free any day after 3:00pm." Well, then the receptionist at the dentist office can very quickly look through her available times that week, after 3:00pm or whatever time that you said you preferred.

Andrew: Yeah, so I would highly recommend trying to schedule any appointment could be for a dentist or, you know, taking your car to the mechanics or visiting the doctor's office, anytime you have to schedule an appointment. It's always just much easier to negotiate. If you say which times you are available, and then let the other end find an opening that works for them. And that's the easiest way to do it.

Going forward in this conversation, the receptionist hears Brian Turner's availabilities, and then searches in her computer to try and find an opening. And she comes back and says, "Oh, Brian, we could **fit you in** on the 23rd." So fit someone into their schedule, we could fit you in. That means that there just is an opening in the schedule for that time. And they could schedule you, right? So to fit someone in to your schedule means to make an appointment for that time to make an appointment for someone to fit them into your schedule, same thing. However, that doesn't work for Brian, does it, Kassy?

Kassy: No. He says that won't work. And so the receptionist has to come up with another time that hopefully will work for Brian.

Andrew: Right. So they come up with a time for the **Wednesday after next**. The Wednesday after next. And Kassy, that's a really interesting way to talk about an upcoming Wednesday, right? The Wednesday after next. Could you just break that down for us? Because I think some listeners may be confused about how to talk about this type of future time situation. So what does that mean the Wednesday after next?

Kassy: So in this case, it means not the Wednesday that's coming up. It's the one after that, a week later, OK? So it'd be the Wednesday after the closest Wednesday to you at that point in time.

Andrew: Yeah, so for example, Kassy just to give a real example here, we are recording right now it is a Thursday, right? So the Wednesday after next from today for us on Thursday is actually almost two weeks away, right? It's like 13 days away, because next Wednesday, next week, that's six days from now and then we have a week after that. So that is another seven days. So it can be, you know, almost up to two weeks from the day that you are talking. And we can use this kind of expression to talk about any future time, right? The week after next, the month after next, the year after next even, it's a great kind of expression for scheduling future appointments.

Kassy: Yeah, that's right. And then later in the conversation after they've planned the schedule. The receptionist reminds the patient one more time that he must remember to arrive 20 minutes early to fill out new patient forms, and he should bring a piece of photo ID. It's really common when you go to a new dentist office or doctor's office to fill out these forms they need it to, you know, have your insurance on record and have all of your information on record with your name. And in order to do that, a piece of photo ID, meaning a passport, or a driver's license is necessary in order to fill out and verify that paperwork.

Andrew: Exactly. If you're like me, and you forget all of your important numbers, like your insurance numbers, and your postal code, and all of these things, it's nice to have your ID there, so that you can check it when you need to write on the form all of that information down again. And yeah, if you're a new patient, at a clinic, dental clinic, doctor's clinic, maybe visiting your vet's any kind of situation like that it's common, it's almost 100% certain that you're going to have to fill out some kind of form to share your information with the doctor or the dentist just about your medical history, or your dental history, and insurance information like you mentioned, Kassy. So be prepared, everyone, to fill out that kind of form. Of course, if you're a returning patient, you're not a new patient, but you're a returning patient, well, then you don't have to fill that out because it will already be in their computer files and on record.

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

Andrew: Yeah, so today, we learned about how to make a dental appointment over the phone.

Kassy: And we talked about some of the expressions you can use when making the appointment, along with some of the reasons why you might need to make a dental appointment.

Andrew: That's right, like a **scaling** or a checkup, maybe getting a **cavity** filled. Or if you have a toothache or an emergency, you could mention that too.

Kassy: And we also learn some expressions you can use when scheduling such as, Does that time work for you? And, That time works for me. Or, That time doesn't really work for me.

Andrew: In the next episode, we'll continue this dental adventure and join Brian Turner one more time as he arrives at the dental office for his appointment.

Kassy: It's gonna be great. I can't wait.

Andrew: Well, Kassy that brings us to the end of this episode. Thank you for listening everyone. We hope that you learned a lot with us today. Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To work for [someone]

Phrasal verb

In this episode, Andrew and Kassy talk about how to schedule an appointment at a dental clinic. In the example dialogue, the receptionist asks Brian Turner if an appointment on the 23rd **works for him**. **To work for [someone]** is when something is acceptable or doable for that person. If you are available, you can say that it **works for you**.

If fact in the example, the first option given to Brain was not suitable for him, so he says that it doesn't **work for him**. You can use **To work for [someone]** when scheduling any kind of appointment or meeting, whether it is professional or personal.

Here are a couple more examples with **to work for [someone]**:

Marcy:	We're thinking of having Jimmy's birthday party on the 12 th . What do you think?
Joshua:	The 12 th ? Isn't that a Saturday?
Marcy:	Yes, it is.
Joshua:	Oh, you see, that doesn't work for me . I'm busy every Saturday this month. Would it be possible to change it to a Sunday instead?

Vicky:	Did you call me earlier?
Momo:	Yeah. We need to set a time and a day for our weekly study group meetings.
Vicky:	OK. Well, I'm not working right now and all my classes are online, so my schedule is very open. How about you tell me what works for you ?
Momo:	All right. Looking at my schedule, I would say Tuesday evenings are best for me.
Vicky:	Great!

The sooner, the better Idiom

In this episode's example conversation, the receptionist asks Brian his preferred appointment time, and Brian answers by saying **the sooner, the better**. When you say **the sooner, the better** when scheduling an appointment, you communicate that the appointment you want to make is not an emergency, but you also don't want to leave it too far in the future.

The sooner, the better is a polite way to say you want something quickly without being too insistent or demanding. Other similar expressions are *sooner rather than later* and *as soon as possible*.

Here are a couple more examples with **the sooner, the better**:

Tyler:	What's the matter with you?
Priya:	I have a sore tooth. It's been bugging me the past few days.
Tyler:	You should head to the dentist's office. I have found in the past that it's always better to take care of dental problems quickly and before it becomes a bigger problem. The sooner, the better.
Priya:	Yes, you're right. I'll make an appointment this afternoon.

Francis:	We need to talk about our renovations.
Erika:	OK. What's on your mind?
Francis:	I know we said we were going to fix all the small things around the house before fixing the kitchen, but I think we should do it the other way around.
Erika:	Why do you say that?
Francis:	I feel that the house will be far more comfortable if we redo the kitchen first. The sooner, the better. And after that, we can take our time on the small things.

To fit [someone] in

Phrasal verb

In the example from this episode, the receptionist tells Brian that they can **fit him in** on the 23rd and asks if that works for him. **To fit Brian in** means to schedule an appointment for him. This expression is usually used when you have a busy schedule. In this case, the dentist's clinic has many appointments already booked.

To fit [someone] in comes from the idea that it's difficult to make room for an additional appointment. It's like a puzzle. You have to find the right piece that will fit in the open space. Similarly, you can also say **to squeeze [someone] in**. If you are **squeezing [someone] in**, that means your schedule is very tight and without many free spaces. Unless you are joking, you wouldn't use these expressions if you had a lot of free time.

Here are a couple more examples with **to fit [someone] in**:

Han:	I was wondering if it's possible for me to have a one-on-one meeting with the director.
Billy:	Oh, he's really busy this week. When do you want to have this meeting?
Han:	Actually, I was really hoping we could have it this week. I'm available any time.
Billy:	Let me check. OK, I can fit you in on Thursday at 2 p.m. for a 30-minute meeting, but not one minute over that. Is that all right with you?
Han:	Great. Thank you so much!

Monica:	Did you finally get a date for your surgery?
Nate:	I'm still on a waiting list.
Monica:	That's too bad. I heard there were some openings at the General Hospital. They might be able to fit you in .
Nate:	I see. You're right. I should call them just to check.

After next Phrase

In the example conversation, the receptionist first offers Brian an appointment on the 23rd, which would be the Wednesday **after next**. The receptionist says this to avoid confusion. It's not the upcoming Wednesday. It's the Wednesday after that one.

You can use **after next** for units of time, such as days, months, seasons, and years. For example, if we are in January right now, and you say we'll meet the month **after next**, that means you want to meet in March. The next month is February and the one after that is March.

Here are a couple more examples with **after next**:

Jordan:	I can't wait. I'm so excited for this weekend.
Grace:	Excited for what?
Jordan:	Don't you remember? It's the music festival downtown this Saturday.
Grace:	I think you got your dates wrong. They didn't say next Saturday. They said Saturday after next . So that's two weekends from now.
Jordan:	Man, I have to wait an extra week now?
Grace:	What's a few more days? You'll be even more excited this time next week.

Kirk:	Are you almost finished your bachelor's degree?
Olivia:	Kind of. I still have a few classes to take.
Kirk:	When do you think you'll be graduating?
Olivia:	The year after next . So, in about 3 or 4 semesters. There are some classes that I have to take that aren't offered every year. It's pretty annoying.

To double-check

Verb

In the example conversation, Brian says he needs to **double-check** his schedule when the receptionist offers the 23rd for his appointment. **To double-check** something means to check something one more time. You do this to make sure you don't make a mistake.

To double-check is often used in business settings and schedule making. It is important to let the other person know that you are focused on the accuracy of what you have previously said. Similar expressions include: **to reconfirm**, **to verify again**, and **to re-examine**.

Here are a couple more examples with **to double-check**:

Sam:	I was looking over the numbers this morning. I'm a bit worried.
Pete:	Worried about what?
Sam:	I'm not sure we have enough funds to finance this project.
Pete:	Actually, I double-checked the number just last week. I didn't see any problems. Trust me.
Sam:	All right. Thanks for the confirmation.

Sarah:	Are you still available to work on the 14 th ?
Polly:	Yes, no problem.
Sarah:	All right. Oh, and I have an additional favour to ask. It's possible that we might need you on the 28 th as well. Are you free then?
Polly:	The 28 th ? That's a bit far from now. I'll have to double-check my schedule once I get home. I can't really give you an answer right now.
Sarah:	OK. Take your time.

Walk-in

Noun

A **walk-in** is a person who comes to a medical clinic without an appointment. You can also be a **walk-in** at an automobile garage, a tailor shop, a restaurant, or any other business that often has scheduled appointments.

Here's one more example with **walk-in**:

Janice: Wow, that customer was super friendly. Did you know her beforehand?

Winnie: No. She was a **walk-in**. And I'm happy that she walked in!

Janice: Absolutely! She was so happy with her haircut.

Scaling

Noun

A **scaling** is when the dentist scrapes the base of your teeth to get rid of plaque and bacteria. This is a deep cleaning below the gum line and can sometimes be painful.

Here's an example with **scaling**:

Mark: How was your visit to the dentist's office?

Dave: Not bad. It was just a simple check-up and a **scaling**. No pain at all.

Cavity

Noun

A **cavity** is a hole in a tooth that is the result of tooth decay. Chipping a tooth, for example, is not a **cavity**. However, a tooth with a **cavity** will break and chip more easily.

Here's an example with **cavity**:

Gina: I hate going to the dentist. I always have so many **cavities**.

Flo: Me too. You know, I got my first **cavity** at the age of 30. Now I have some every year!

Gina: We're getting old.

Quiz

1. Which of the following does NOT mean to double-check something?

- a) to verify it again
- b) to check something for fun
- c) to reconfirm it
- d) to check something again

2. What do I mean if I ask you, “What time works for you?”

- a) I want to know what time is good for you
- b) I want to know what time you start working

3. True or false? A walk-in is a client who has an appointment.

- a) true
- b) false

4. When would you say the sooner, the better?

- a) when you know you can wait a long time
- b) when your preference is sooner rather than later
- c) when you urgently want something
- d) when you have no preference about the time

5. If this is the year 2021, when is the year after next?

- a) 2020
- b) 2021
- c) 2022
- d) 2023

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. How comfortable are you when you have to speak English on the phone?
2. Talk about a recent situation where you had to schedule an appointment or a meeting in English.
3. How well do you know medical terms in English? Where are your strengths and where are your weaknesses?
4. Are you a “the sooner, the better” kind of person? Do you like to take care of things earlier rather than later?
5. Do you like to double-check or even triple-check things before confirming? Or are you confident that you usually do things correctly the first time?

Quiz Answers

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

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