



ESL Podcast 236 – An On-Site Estimate

GLOSSARY

building contractor – a person or company that is hired by someone else to build homes or offices

* The Patils were very happy with their building contractor because he built their home faster and for less money than they thought he would.

on-site – at the location of the project; at the place where the project is being done

* Natasha offers on-site computer services, going to her customers' homes to help them with their computer needs.

estimate – a guess about how much something will cost, without calculating it exactly; a quote

* The mechanic gave us a \$450 estimate for repairing our car, but it actually cost more than \$1,000! Needless to say, we weren't happy.

to inspect – to look at something carefully; to examine

* Before buying our house, we got someone qualified to inspect homes to make sure there were no major problems.

quote – a formal guess or estimate about how much something will cost, usually before a service is provided

* The company chose Penelope to do the project because her quote was the lowest.

to expand – to make something bigger

* We want to expand the living room by taking out the wall between the living room and the extra bedroom.

square feet – a measurement of area; 1 square foot = 0.09 square meter

* Jason's apartment is really small – only 300 square feet.

to double – to multiply something by two; to make something 100% bigger

* The bamboo plant grows very quickly and can double its size every year.

say – for example; perhaps; maybe

* I'd like to have a lot of children, say five or six, by the time I'm 35 years old.



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delay – taking longer than expected; a period of time that a project or person has to wait because of a problem

* There was a delay in the project because the project leader was seriously ill for almost a month.

materials – things that are needed to build something, such as wood or glass

* Once we buy the paint, we'll have all the materials that we need to do this art project.

to set (someone or something) back – to cause a delay; to make a project take longer than expected

* The rainy weather set the company back in their delivery schedule.

cost overrun – the extra money needed to finish a project that is more than what was expected

* Tobiah was angry when he heard that the project had more than \$2,000 in cost overruns.

upfront – honest and open; not hiding anything

* Latisha was very upfront with her boss and told him that she was unhappy in her job and wanted to leave the company.

breakdown – a detailed list; a list of each individual cost in a total

* The tour costs \$1,650, but without a breakdown, it's impossible to know how much of the money is for hotels, food, or plane tickets.

labor – physical work by people

* Many American companies have call centers in Asia because labor costs are cheaper there than in the United States.

in writing – written on paper

* The company offered him a great job and a lot of money, but he won't believe it until he sees it in writing.

no charge – free; at no cost

* Normally it costs \$4 per hour to park here, but if you buy something at the store, there's no charge for parking.

no obligation – without a requirement to do something

* When you're shopping for a car, you can drive a new car with no obligation to buy it.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Robert at Abigail's house?
 - a) He is measuring the kitchen so that his company can begin the work.
 - b) He is explaining why the project cost more than expected.
 - c) He is looking at the kitchen so that he can give Abigail a price for the work she wants done.

2. According to Robert, why are projects sometimes delayed?
 - a) Because there isn't enough labor.
 - b) Because it takes time to get the materials.
 - c) Because it is difficult to make a breakdown of costs.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

quote

The word "quote," in this podcast, means an estimate or a guess about how much something will cost, without calculating it exactly: "The quote to install a swimming pool in the backyard was so high that we decided not to go ahead with it." The verb "to quote" can also mean to give someone a price for doing a project: "How much did he quote you for putting four new windows in the living room?" A "quote" is also short for "quotation," or the exact words that someone says: "Many people know George Washington's famous quote: 'I cannot tell a lie.'" As a verb, "to quote" means to repeat someone's exact words: "The university president quoted many famous people during his speech to the new students."

charge

In this podcast, the phrase "no charge" means free or at no cost: "At most grocery stores, someone will help you take your bags to your car at no charge." A "charge" is the money that something costs: "I started using a new bank because the old one had a small charge every time I withdrew money from my account." As a verb, "to charge" means to ask for money for a product or service: "How much are they charging for the new computers?" The verb "to charge" can also mean to pay for something with a credit card: "I didn't have enough cash, so I had to charge the books that I bought yesterday." When someone is "in charge of (something)," it means that he or she is responsible for something: "Who is in charge of this project?"



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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, “homeowners,” or people who own a home, often need “contractors,” or people who work in home “construction” (activities related to building homes). Homeowners need contractors when they want a new roof, another bedroom, or a better kitchen. These projects are expensive and difficult, so it is important to find a good contractor who does high-quality work for a low price.

Many Americans look for a “licensed contractor” who has a “license” (registration papers) from the state where he or she is working. To get a license, the contractor must show the state that he or she has experience and then pass an exam.

If a homeowner doesn’t use a licensed contractor, it is more difficult to know whether the contractor really knows how to do the work. Also, licensed contractors must have “insurance” that pays them money if they are “injured” or physically hurt while working on the home. If a homeowner doesn’t use a licensed contractor, and that contractor is injured while working on the home, the homeowner may have to pay for the contractor’s medical costs.

Normally there are fewer problems when homeowners use licensed contractors. However, if there is a problem with a licensed contractor, the homeowner can call the state “licensing board,” the part of the state government that gives licenses to contractors, to make a “complaint,” saying why he or she is unhappy with the licensed contractor’s work. The licensing board will read the complaint and, if it is serious, the board may decide to take the license away from the contractor.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – b



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 236: An On-Site Estimate.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 236. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California. Remember to visit our website at eslpod.com and download the Learning Guide for this podcast.

Our podcast in this episode is about “An On-Site Estimate.” This is when you have someone coming over to your house or to your office building and telling you how much they will charge you - how much you will have to pay to have changes or repairs on your building. Let's get started.

[Start of story]

I work for a building contractor and I spend most of my workday giving on-site estimates. I mainly go to people's homes, discuss the work they want done, inspect the site, and give them a quote.

Robert: You want to expand your kitchen, is that right?

Abigail: Yes, with our growing family, we need more room.

Robert: It looks like it's about 200 square feet right now. You want to double the size?

Abigail: That's the idea, but I want to get it done quickly, say within two months. Is that possible?

Robert: Well, we've finished jobs like this before in under three months, but that's without any delays. Sometimes getting the exact materials the client wants or finding structural problems that don't appear until we start work can set us back.

Abigail: That's my greatest fear. I'm afraid of delays and cost overruns.

Robert: Well, we try to be upfront with our clients by giving them a breakdown of the costs of the materials and labor involved in the project. We also give them a schedule of when the work will be completed. You'll get a detailed estimate in writing, at no charge and with no obligation.



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Abigail: How long does it take to get the estimate?

Robert: We usually mail or fax the estimate within two days.

Abigail: That's great. Let me tell you exactly what we have in mind...

[End of story]

The title of our episode is “An On-Site Estimate.” The word on, “on” (hyphen) site, “site,” means something taking place in a particular place or area - something happening in a particular place, usually your own home or your own office. For example, your computer stops working and you need to get it fixed. You can take it to someone and have them fix it - to a store or a repair shop - or you could call someone that would come to your house and fix it. If they come to your house, we would say that's an on-site repair or on-site visit.

An estimate, “estimate,” is a guess - an approximation of how much something will cost, usually something that you have to fix or something that you are changing or repairing. So, the title, “An On-Site Estimate,” refers to someone who comes to your home or office and gives you their guess - their estimate - of how much something will cost. Usually an estimate is more than just a guess; it's more exact. It's what you expect to pay when the work is completed.

In this dialogue, Robert says that he works for “a building contractor.” A building contractor is a person who - who builds new houses or office buildings, or who remodels or fixes houses and office buildings. A contractor is just another word for someone who works for you for a temporary time - for a short amount of time.

Robert is working for this building contractor, and he spends most of his day “giving on-site estimates.” He says he goes to people's homes, he discusses what kind of work they want; these are people who will want to change or remodel their house. When you remodel you add something, or you perhaps change the walls - move them in a different position, or you might add a new bathroom, something like that.

Robert starts the dialogue by saying that he inspects the site and he gives people a quote. To inspect, “inspect,” means to look at something very carefully - to examine something. Robert gives them a quote, “quote.” A quote is a more formal estimate - a more exact estimate of how much something will cost.

There are several different meanings of the word quote; take a look at the Learning Guide today for additional explanations on that word.



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So, Robert begins the dialogue by saying, “You want to expand your kitchen, is that right?” He's talking to a woman whose name is Abigail. To expand, “expand,” means to make something bigger. If someone says, “I'm going to expand my kitchen so I can buy a new refrigerator that will fit - that will have enough space,” that means they're going to make their kitchen bigger, either by making the whole house bigger or by taking away room from one of the other areas in the house.

Abigail says, “Yes,” they have a growing family - meaning their family is getting bigger or getting older, and they “need more room.” Usually growing, in this case, would mean getting bigger. So, they're having more children, I would guess, or more dogs, maybe!

Robert says, “It looks like it's about 200 square feet right now,” meaning the kitchen is about 200 square feet. We use feet in the United States as a way of measuring, you know, rather than a meter, and a square foot would be about .09 square meters. I had to figure that out, of course, I didn't know that without calculating it!

Abigail also says that she wants to double the size of the kitchen. To double, “double,” means to make it twice as big - two times as big. Abigail says that she wants to get all of this “done quickly” - everyone wants their work done quickly. That doesn't always happen with contractors. In fact, contractors in the United States have the reputation of never getting things done on time - always being late, and this has certainly been my experience - this is something that I have found in working with contractors.

Abigail uses an interesting expression here; she says, “I want to get it done quickly, say within two months.” The use of the word say, “say,” means for example or perhaps or maybe. It is not the same meaning as he said or she said or he says; it is a special use of this word to mean for example or about or perhaps.

Abigail asks if this is possible, and Robert says, “Well, we've finished jobs like this before in under,” or in less than, “three months, but that's without any delays.” A delay, “delay,” is a period of time that you have to wait because there's a problem. For example, if you are at the airport, your plane could be delayed - it could be late. It could be an hour or two hours late, that's a delay.

Robert says that “Sometimes getting the exact materials,” or the things that you use to build something, that can take a lot of time, and there are also problems that they might notice when they start working that can set them back. To be set



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back, or a setback, as a noun, means that you have a delay - something will take longer than expected.

Abigail says, "That's my greatest fear. I'm afraid of delays and cost overruns." A cost overrun, "overrun," is when something costs more than the estimate - something costs more than the original quote that the contractor gave you. So, instead of paying 5,000 dollars for your new kitchen, you have to pay 20,000 dollars. That would be a huge cost overrun, way more than you expected.

Robert says, "Well, we try to be upfront with our clients." To be upfront, "upfront," (one word) means to be honest - to be open - not to hide anything - not to lie to them. He says that they give their clients "a breakdown of the costs." A breakdown, "breakdown," (one word) is a detailed listing where you see each individual thing that you are going to pay for listed on a piece of paper, that's a breakdown. There's also a verb, to break down, which means something stops working. That's two words, however, break and down as two words. This is one word, it's a noun and it, in this case, means a detailed list of the costs that you are going to pay.

Robert says they include in their breakdown "the materials and the labor." The labor, "labor," is the actual work by the people - the time that it takes them to do the work. The materials are the physical things that they are using to fix or change your house.

Robert says, "We also give a schedule of when" everything "will be completed," and you get this "detailed estimate in writing." When we say you're going to get something in writing, we mean on a piece of paper. This is all done "at no charge and with no obligation." At no charge means that it doesn't cost any money - it's free. The audio files for ESL Podcast are available at no charge. That word charge, "charge," has other meanings in English as well; again, take a look at the Learning Guide for more information.

Robert says that there's "no obligation." An obligation is a requirement - it is something that you have to do. But if it's no obligation, or with no obligation, that means that Abigail doesn't have to buy these materials and pay for the labor, that she can just look at the list and say yes or no and it won't cost her any money.

Now let's take a look at the dialogue, this time at a native rate of speech.

[Start of story]



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[End of story]

The script for today's podcast was written by Dr. Lucy Tse. Do you have a comment or question about ESL Podcast? You can email us at eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you, as always, for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.



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