



ESL Podcast 317 – Setting the Table

GLOSSARY

It's not everyday that... – a phrase used to show that something happens only rarely and is not common or usual

* It's not everyday that my favorite singer visits my hometown to perform!

china – porcelain dishes; very nice ceramic plates and bowls used for eating

* We use the china only for special holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

to set the table – to put napkins, plates, bowls, glasses, and silverware on the table to prepare for a meal

* Chashka always sets the table while her father cooks dinner.

tablecloth – a large piece of fabric placed over a table where people eat

* Jackie accidentally spilled red wine on the white tablecloth.

linen – a type of cloth or fabric, usually used to make very nice clothes, sheets, and tablecloths

* Is that skirt made from linen or cotton?

table setting – all the plates, bowls, cups, silverware, and napkins that are placed in front of one person for a meal

* They need eight table settings for all of their guests, but they have room for only six, so the two children will have to eat at another table.

plate – a large, flat, round dish used to hold food for one person during a meal

* My mother always told me that if I eat everything on my plate, then I can have dessert.

saucer – a small, flat, round dish that is placed under a teacup

* Be careful when you serve the coffee that it doesn't spill all over the saucers.

dinnerware – all the plates, bowls, cups, silverware, and other items used during a meal

* Vicky and Vince asked for new dinnerware as a wedding gift.

silverware – forks, knives, and spoons; metal (usually silver-colored) or plastic objects that are used to eat food

* Ulysses forgot to bring silverware to the picnic and we all had to eat with our hands.



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fork – a metal or plastic object with a handle and three or four points (“tines”) at the end that are used to pick up food and bring it toward one’s mouth

* If you can’t pick up the peas with your fork, try using your spoon instead.

tine – one of the sharp points at the end of a fork

* Hal picked up the piece of meat by stabbing it with the tines of his fork.

knife – a long, metal or plastic object with a handle and a sharp side that is used to cut food

* Which knife is best for slicing bread?

spoon – a metal or plastic object with a handle and a small bowl-like end that is used to pick up liquids and round pieces of food

* Can you please give everyone spoons to eat their ice cream?

steak knife – a very sharp knife used to slice meat that is difficult to cut

* Even with a steak knife, it was difficult to cut the steak because it was overcooked.

wine glass – a clear cup for holding wine for one person, with a flat, round bottom and a long, thin handle

* Pauline doesn’t have wine glasses, so we had to drink wine out of plastic cups.

in bad shape – not ready to do something; in poor condition; unhealthy or unfit

* Although Vreneli wasn’t injured, she was in bad shape after the car accident, too scared to drive anywhere.

a ball of nerves – very nervous, worried, and anxious

* Steve was a ball of nerves before his presentation, but we all thought he did very well.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Martha take out the best china?
 - a) Because William’s bosses are Chinese.
 - b) Because she wants to use the dishes they bought in China.
 - c) Because she wants to use their nicest plates.

 2. Which of these are not silverware?
 - a) Tines.
 - b) Spoons.
 - c) Steak knives.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

plate

The word “plate,” in this podcast, means a large, flat, round dish used to hold food for one person during a meal: “Benny filled his plate with chicken and mashed potatoes.” A “license plate” is the rectangular piece of metal placed on the front or back of a car with that car’s registration number: “Her license plate is VBF592.” The word “plated” means covered with a metal, usually silver or gold: “Is that statue all gold, or is it only gold-plated?” The phrase “to have too much on (one’s) plate” means that one is extremely busy and involved in too many activities: “Now that Fred’s mother is ill and living with him, he has too much on his plate, given that he’s still working two jobs and taking care of his kids.”

knife

In this podcast, the word “knife” means a long, metal or plastic object with a handle and a sharp side that is used to cut food: “While Edith was cutting carrots, the knife slipped and she accidentally cut her finger.” A “knife” can also be a weapon, or something used to hurt another person: “The boy pulled a knife from his pocket and pointed it at the other boys who he thought wanted to hurt him.” A “pocketknife” is a small knife (possibly with more than one knife blade) that folds into the handle so that it can be put in one’s pocket: “Whenever we go hiking, we always take a pocketknife with us.” The informal phrase “to be under the knife” means to be having surgery: “Christy hurt her knee again, and tomorrow she’ll be going under the knife to get it fixed.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Many “dishes,” or ceramic pieces used to hold food, are placed on a dinner table in addition to the ones mentioned in this podcast. For example, a “gravy bowl” is a small bowl with a handle that is used to hold “gravy,” or a dark gray or brown sauce that is poured over meats. “Serving bowls” are large bowls that hold food so that people can use a “serving spoon” (a large spoon) to move food from the serving bowls to their own plates. Soup is served with a “ladle” (a large serving spoon especially for liquids). Salad is usually placed in a “salad bowl,” and people use “salad tongs” (a long tool with two parts that connect at one end and is used to pick things up) to move the salad from the salad bowl to their plates.

The center of the table usually has “salt and pepper shakers,” which are small bottles filled with salt and pepper that have holes in the “lids” (tops) so that they can be “shaken” (moved quickly up and down) “upside-down” (with the top facing down and the bottom facing up) to put salt and pepper on one’s food. Often there is a “creamer,” or a small bowl with a handle that holds “cream” (milk with a lot of fat in it) for one’s coffee.

On top of the tablecloth, there might be “placemats,” or rectangular pieces of plastic or cloth that are placed under each diner’s plate. Each person also has a “napkin” (a small piece of cloth or paper used to clean one’s mouth and hands). If the napkins are made from cloth, sometimes they are placed in a “napkin ring” (a round piece of metal or wood used to hold the napkin for decoration).

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



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 317: Setting the Table.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 317. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com, and take a look at our premium courses. We have additional business and daily English courses available in our ESL Podcast Store. You also will want to take a look at our ESL Podcast Blog, where we have additional information and help in learning English. And of course, you should download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you learn English even faster.

This episode is called "Setting the Table." It's a dialogue about what you put on a table – a dinner table – so you can eat. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

William: This is a very special dinner. It's not everyday that I have my bosses over for dinner. It has to be perfect.

Martha: I know. Why do you think I took out our best china? Instead of worrying, why don't you help me set the table?

William: Right. I should make myself useful. Is this the best tablecloth we have?

Martha: Yes, it is. It's very fine linen.

William: Oh, right, right. Okay, we need six table settings. That means we need dinner plates, salad plates, bread plates, coffee cups, and saucers. Where are the saucers?

Martha: All of the dinnerware is over there. Be careful!

William: I know, I know. Where's the silverware? We're missing the silverware!

Martha: No, we're not. All of the silverware is in this drawer. Put the dinner and salad forks on the left and the dessert fork above the plate, like this. The tines should be facing up. The knife and spoon go on the right.



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William: I know that. I was just looking for the steak knives.

Martha: We don't need those tonight. Here, take these wine glasses and put them on the table.

William: What else? What else?

Martha: Nothing. You need to take a deep breath and calm down, or you'll be in bad shape by the time the dinner starts.

William: It's too late. I'm already a ball of nerves!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue between William and Martha begins by William saying, "This is a very special dinner. It's not everyday that I have my bosses over for dinner." The expression "it's not everyday that..." is a phrase we use to show that something happens only rarely, that something is not very common, not very usual, that it's a special event. It's not everyday that someone says to me, "Jeff, you are the most handsome man in the world." In fact, that never happens!

"It's not everyday that I have my bosses over for dinner." To "have someone over for dinner" means to invite them to your house for dinner. Martha says to William, "I know. Why do you think I took out our best china?" "China" is not a country here; "china" refers to very nice ceramic plates and bowls that are used for eating. They are also called, or can be, "porcelain" dishes. It's a very fine, very delicate material. If you drop the plate, it will break easily, but it's very beautiful looking. People only use their china for very special occasions or holidays. When I was growing up, we would only have our china on the table for Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter – big holidays that we celebrated in my family. "China" is not capitalized; if you put a capital "C" then it's China, the country.

Martha says, "Instead of worrying, why don't you help me set the table?" To "set (set) the table" means to put the plates, the bowls, glasses, napkins, everything you need before you eat – all the things you need to be prepared to eat. In my house, growing up, it was my job every night to set the table.

William says, "Right," meaning okay, I agree. "I should make myself useful. Is this the best tablecloth we have?" A "tablecloth" (one word) is a large piece of fabric, a material that you put over a table where people are eating. It's used in formal restaurants, for example. Martha says, "Yes, it is (yes, it is the best table



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cloth we have). It's very fine linen" (linen). "Linen" is a type of cloth or fabric. It is usually used to make very nice clothing or tablecloths – things like that.

William says, "Oh, right, right. Okay, we need six table settings." A "table setting" is the complete set of things that one person needs; so one bowl, one plate, one cup, the fork, knife, spoon, etc. That's a table setting. If you have five people, you need five table settings. William says, "That means we need dinner plates, salad plates, bread plates, coffee cups, and saucers." A "plate" is a large, flat, round dish used to hold food for one person during a meal. A "saucer" (saucer) is a small, flat, round dish, but it's very small and it is used to put underneath a teacup or a small coffee cup. That would be a "saucer" – very small plate, put underneath a small cup. The word "plate" has several different meanings in English; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Martha says, "All of the dinnerware is over there. Be careful!" The "dinnerware" (one word) refers to all of the plates, bowls, cups, utensils like knives, spoons, forks, and other things you use during a meal. It's a general term for everything that would be on the table.

William says, "I know, I know," meaning I know I should be careful. "Where's the silverware? We're missing the silverware!" "Silverware" (silverware) means the forks, the knives, the spoons, things that you use, what we would call "utensils," for eating. "Silver" is a metal – an expensive metal that is used sometimes in making forks, knives, and spoons, especially for a very formal dinner table. However, many people now use the term or the word "silverware" for any kind of eating utensils. Any collection of forks, knives, and spoons, even if they are made from plastic, are sometimes called "silverware." So, the expression doesn't refer only to things that are made from silver.

Martha responds to William, "All of the silverware is in this drawer. Put the dinner and salad forks on the left and the dessert fork above the plate, like this." A "fork" is something that usually has three or four little points, what we call "tines" (tines), and these are used for picking up food. "The tines should be facing up," again, the "tines" are the sharp points at the end of the fork. "The knife and spoon," Martha says, "go on the right" side of the plate. The "knife" is a long, usually metal eating utensil used to cut things. We use the word "knife" in a couple of different ways; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations. A "spoon," you may know, is a round, almost like a bowl – small bowl – with a handle on it, something you use to grab it – and it's used for picking up liquids and round pieces of food.



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William says, “I was just looking for the steak knives.” A “steak knife” is a very sharp knife used to cut meat or other food that’s difficult to eat – difficult to cut. It’s a very sharp knife; it’s called a “steak knife” because you use it when you are eating steak – beefsteak. Martha says, “We don’t need (the steak knives) tonight. Here, take these wine glasses and put them on the table.” A “wine glass” is a clear glass for drinking wine, for one person. It usually has a flat, round bottom.

William says, “What else? What else?” meaning what else do we need to put on the table – are we missing anything? Martha says, “Nothing. You need to take a deep breath [Jeff takes a deep breath] and calm down, or you’ll be in bad shape by the time the dinner starts.” To “be in bad shape” means you’ll be in a poor condition, you will not be ready to do something. William says, “It’s too late. I’m already a ball of nerves!” The expression “to be a ball of nerves” is an idiom which means to be very nervous, to be worried, to be anxious. The first time I flew in an airplane, I was 23 years old, I was a ball of nerves – I was nervous about what would happen. Fortunately everything turned out okay; there were no problems.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Martha: No, we're not. All of the silverware is in this drawer. Put the dinner and salad forks on the left and the dessert fork above the plate, like this. The tines should be facing up. The knife and spoon go on the right.

William: I know that. I was just looking for the steak knives.

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[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you Lucy!

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

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