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**ESL Podcast 426 – Talking About Product Quality**

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**GLOSSARY**

**bare basics** – the simplest version of something; only the things that one needs and nothing more

\* His family didn't have very much money to buy new clothes for school, so he just got the bare basics: a few T-shirts and a pair of jeans.

**top-of-the-line** – the best possible or the best available; the highest quality; the fanciest and often the most expensive

\* Jeilan bought a top-of-the-line digital camera that cost thousands of dollars.

**cheap** – very inexpensive; poor quality

\* My mother asked me: "Why did you buy the expensive brand of cereal when you could have bought a cheap one for so much less?"

**flimsy** – having poor quality so that it breaks easily; easy to damage

\* Yoko's glasses were so flimsy that they broke when she accidentally put her book on top of them.

**to act up** – to have problems; to create problems; to stop working properly

\* Their car is acting up again, so they're going to ask the mechanic to look at it.

**quality** – how well made something is; how well or how poorly something does what it should do

\* Cecilia makes very high-quality cakes as birthday presents for her friends.

**top dollar** – a very high price; very expensive; the most expensive kind of something

\* Evy and Valdo paid top dollar for their big home that has a beautiful view of the mountains.

**bells and whistles** – the fancy things that a piece of technology or electronics can do, in addition to the basic things that it should do

\* This cell phone has lots of bells and whistles that a regular phone doesn't have, like an Internet browser, a nice camera, and more.

**sturdy** – strong and reliable; not likely to break; well-built

\* Jimena bought a chair that wasn't very sturdy, and it broke the first time she sat in it!



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**that is one (something)** – an expression that gives emphasis, used to show that the words that follow it are very true

\* That is one expensive hamburger! I've never heard of a hamburger that costs more than \$25.

**looks** – physical appearance; the way that something is viewed

\* As a teenager, Falia only cared about her looks, even though her parents told her that what's inside is more important.

**functional** – working; able to work; able to do what something is supposed to do

\* They built a beautiful website, but it isn't very functional, so visitors can't find what they're looking for.

**to fall apart** – to break; to break into many smaller pieces; to stop working properly

\* The children built a small house out of sticks, but it fell apart when the wind blew too hard.

**style over substance** – something that is very beautiful, but doesn't work well; something that was made by people who paid more attention to its appearance than to whether it would do what it was supposed to do

\* This new stove is an example of style over substance, because even though it looks great, it doesn't cook reliably.

**hideous** – very ugly; extremely unattractive

\* There is a hideous witch in that movie, with a green face and a huge nose.

**to get over (something)** – to be able to accept that something bad has happened and continue on with one's normal life, not worrying about it

\* I don't know how long it will be before she gets over the death of her father. They were very close.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of phone does Yoji want?
  - a) A hideous phone.
  - b) A top-of-the-line phone.
  - c) A simple phone.
  
2. Which of these phones would be an example of style over substance?
  - a) A phone with all the bells and whistles, but doesn't work well.
  - b) A phone that has good quality, but costs a lot.
  - c) A phone that costs top dollar, but doesn't look very nice.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### looks

The word “looks,” in this podcast, means physical appearance, or the way that something is seen: “My boss said that if I want to be seen as a professional, I need to pay more attention to my looks, making sure that I dress professionally.” If someone has “natural good looks,” he or she is very handsome or pretty: “She has such natural good looks that she doesn't need to wear makeup.” The phrase “to lose (one's) looks” means to become less beautiful or attractive, especially over time: “I hope I don't lose my looks by the age of 40.” Finally, the expression “to give (someone) a look” means to use one's face and eyes to send someone a message without saying anything: “Mila gave her husband a look that made him stop talking immediately.”

#### to fall apart

In this podcast, the phrase “to fall apart” means to break or to stop working properly: “His new sweater fell apart the first time he washed it.” Or, “All their plans for an outdoor basketball game fell apart when it started to rain.” The phrase “to fall to pieces” has the same meaning, but usually refers to more serious matters: “She felt as if her life were falling to pieces when she lost her job.” The phrase “to fall flat” is used to talk about a joke or story that the audience doesn't like, or that doesn't interest the people listening to it: “The comic's jokes fell flat and nobody laughed.” Finally, the phrase “to fall by the wayside” means to stop being used or done: “During the war, the country's spending on education fell by the wayside.”



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### CULTURE NOTE

In American “factories” (buildings that are owned by companies and used to make products) “quality control,” or the process of making sure that all the things being made have the same high quality, is very important.

Some quality control happens before a product is made and sold. For example, when a company designs a new computer, it uses “failure testing,” which is when they use the product as much as possible to see how long it will “last” (continue to work) before breaking. The company might turn the computer on and off many times, drop it from a roof, put it in an oven, or spill soda on it to find out how well the computer “resists” (doesn’t let something happen) breaking.

Other quality control efforts happen while the product is being made or once it is finished but before it is sold. Almost all factories have “inspectors,” or people whose job is to look at the products and make sure that they meet certain “standards” (requirements for how something should be). Some inspectors look at “intermediate products” (things that are made to be part of something else) and other inspectors look at the “final products” (things that are sold to consumers). Sometimes “robots” (machines that do work that humans used to do) do the inspection.

Many factories and organizations talk about “six sigma” quality, which refers to “statistics” (the science that studies how likely things are to happen) and the idea that the “probability” (or likelihood) of having a problem with the product should be less than four in one million. A six-sigma company has very high quality, but it is difficult to “achieve” (be able to get or do something) that level.

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



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 426: Talking About Product Quality.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast number 426. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com). Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is a dialogue between Brenda and Yoji talking about product quality, the quality of things that you buy. Are they good, are they bad; what are some of the specific words we use in describing different products – different things – we'll find out in this dialogue. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Brenda: It's fun shopping for a new cell phone, don't you think?

Yoji: Sure, but I just need one with the bare basics.

Brenda: Not me. I want one that's top-of-the-line. My old phone was cheap and flimsy, and it started acting up after only a few months.

Yoji: I want something that's good quality, but I don't think I should have to pay top dollar for it, especially since I don't need the bells and whistles.

Brenda: The bells and whistles are the best part!

Yoji: I like this one. It seems sturdy and it should last me for years.

Brenda: That is one ugly phone!

Yoji: I don't care about its looks. I just want something functional and that won't fall apart.

Brenda: I'm not arguing for style over substance, but that phone is hideous.

Yoji: I'll get over it.



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Brenda: Yes, but I'm not sure I will!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Brenda saying, "It's fun shopping for a new cell phone, don't you think?" Notice she says "don't you think," this implies that the other person will probably agree with her. Yoji says, "Sure, but I just need one with the bare basics" – I just need to buy a cell phone that has the bare basics. The "bare basics" would be the simplest version of something, something that only has the absolute necessities on it, things that you would need and nothing more.

Yoji says that he wants a cell phone with the bare basics. Brenda says, "Not me. I want one that's top-of-the-line." The expression "top-of-the-line" refers to the best possible or the best available thing – the one with the highest quality, the fanciest perhaps, often the most expensive one. Brenda says, "My old phone was cheap and flimsy." When we describe a product as "cheap," we mean it's poor quality. "Cheap" can also mean not very much money, not very expensive – "inexpensive," we would say. That's if you're using "cheap" to describe a thing. If you're using "cheap" to describe a person, then it's an insulting, negative way to describe someone who doesn't like to spend money: "He's cheap, he won't take me out to dinner," said my ex girlfriend!

Brenda says her old phone was cheap and flimsy (flimsy). Something that is "flimsy" is very poor quality. It's something that will break very easily, or something that is easy to damage. Brenda says her phone started acting up after only a few months. To "act up," is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to have problems or to create problems. Here, it means really to stop functioning properly, to stop working the way it should. If you have a watch and the watch stops because it's broken, you might say that it is acting up – it stopped working.

Yoji says, "I want something that's good quality (meaning I want something that is well made), but I don't think I should have to pay top dollar for it." The expression "top dollar" means a very high price, very expensive. Top dollar – the highest amount you could pay for something. He says that "I don't need the bells and whistles" in his new phone. The expression "bells and whistles" can be used for any product, anything you buy, usually a piece of technology or electronics that has many different features, many complicated, perhaps, or fancy things. It does a lot of things besides the bare basic functions. The cell phone, for example, that has a camera, an MP3 player, where you can surf the Internet – this would be a cell phone with a lot of bells and whistles. Literally, a "bell" is



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something that you ring [sound of a bell], that's what a bell is. A "whistle" is something that you would blow to make a very high pitched sound. In a American football game, for example, the referees (the people who make sure that players are following the rules) have whistles which they blow so that the players can hear them.

Brenda says, "The bells and whistles (the fancy stuff) are the best part!" Yoji says, "I like this one. It seems sturdy and it should last me for years." To describe something as "sturdy" (sturdy) means that it will not break, that it is strong and reliable. It's the opposite of "flimsy." Brenda says, "That is one ugly phone!" This is a common informal expression: "that is one (something)." It's an expression we use to give emphasis; it's used to show that the following statement or the following expression is true. For example, you go to a restaurant and you buy a hamburger, and the hamburger costs you 25 dollars. Your friend might say, "That's one expensive hamburger!" You're saying it's definitely true it's an expensive hamburger.

Well, Brenda is saying that's one ugly phone, meaning it's very ugly. Yoji says, "I don't care about its looks." "Looks" as a noun refers to the physical appearance of something, the way something is viewed by other people. We often use the word "looks" in talking about a person's physical appearance, but it can be used to talk about a thing – an object. There are a couple of different meanings of this word; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Yoji says, "I just want something functional and that won't fall apart." "Functional" means that it is working correctly; it is able to do what it is supposed to do. The phrasal verb "to fall apart" means to break, usually to break into many smaller pieces. It could also be used just to mean to stop working properly. "The children were building a house of cards (with playing cards – little pieces of paper), but then it fell apart" – it fell down; it broke into all the individual pieces.

Brenda says, "I'm not arguing for style over substance, but that phone is hideous." The expression "style over substance" refers to something that is very beautiful but it doesn't work well, something that was made by people who are more interested in the appearance (in the way it looks) than what it can actually do. So, you could have a beautiful watch for example, but if you can't read it (if you can't see what time it is) that's not very useful, not very functional. Brenda is saying she doesn't want something just because it looks good; it also has to work. "But," she says, "that phone (the one Yoji wants) is hideous." "Hideous" (hideous) means very ugly, extremely unattractive. It's a very negative way to



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describe something or, certainly, someone. Sometimes informally it also is used just to mean terrible or very bad, but usually it means very ugly.

Yoji says, “I’ll get over it.” To “get over” something is a phrasal verb meaning to accept something is bad – something bad has happened, but to continue on with your normal life, to keep living without worrying about this bad thing. If you had a car accident and you hurt your neck, eventually you will, we hope, get over it. You will recover, you will continue with your life as normal. This expression is sometimes used in a more negative way. If someone says to you, “Oh, get over it!” that expression means you need to stop worrying about that, something that the other person doesn’t think is very important. So for example if it’s raining and you are complaining to your friend, you are saying all the time “Oh, it’s raining. It’s so wet. I hate this,” your friend may say to you “Get over it!” Stop worrying about it; just go on with your life.

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

[start of dialogue]

Brenda: It’s fun shopping for a new cell phone, don’t you think?

Yoji: Sure, but I just need one with the bare basics.

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Brenda: Yes, but I'm not sure I will!

[end of dialogue]

Today's good quality episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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