



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 111

TOPICS

Famous Americans: Yo Yo Ma; popular books in the U.S., pronouncing contractions, to figure out versus it figures, there will be no versus there will not be, if you will

GLOSSARY

self-deprivation – self-denial; the act of not letting oneself have or do certain things that are enjoyable

* Albert is trying to lose weight and is practicing self-deprivation by not eating any sugar or dairy.

hip – fashionable; something that is very popular

* What kind of music is hip among teenagers these days?

label – a small piece of paper, plastic, or cloth that is attached to something that is sold, usually with information about the manufacturer, date, size, or material

* The label says that this shirt should be washed only in cold water.

sacrifice – something that is important and valuable, but that one decides not to have, do, or use because having, doing, or using something else seems more important

* Lorenzo made a huge sacrifice, working three jobs to earn enough money to send his children to college.

ethically – in an ethical manner; in a way that is moral, correct, and right; according to certain beliefs and principles

* Many of the executives at this company who did not behave ethically are now in jail.

to rubberneck – to slow down and turn to look at a car accident or something else while one is driving past it

* If these drivers would focus on driving instead of rubbernecking, we wouldn't have so many problems with slow traffic.

to take up – to decide to learn how to do something, often how to play a musical instrument

* I have too much free time, so I've decided to take up the tuba.



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prodigy – a genius; a child or teenager who is extremely intelligent or talented for his or her age

* Victoria was a prodigy who started studying in medical school when she was only eleven years old.

conductor – a person who stands in front of a group of singers or people playing musical instruments and gives them instructions during a performance

* The conductor led the choir through a very strange interpretation of Handel's Messiah.

overwhelming – overpowering; too strong, powerful, or big for one to understand, tolerate, or fight against

* The excitement of receiving the Nobel Prize was overwhelming, and the chemist began to cry with joy.

to figure out – to think about something until one understands it; to understand and be able to do something

* How long did it take you to figure out the answer to question #17 on last night's algebra homework?

It figures! – a phrase used to mean that something makes sense, or that something seems reasonable or logical, often when one is displeased with it

* Did you hear that Jerome called to say he isn't coming to work today because he has a bad headache? It figures! He was drinking at the bars until at least 3:00 a.m. last night.

if you will – a very formal, polite phrase used to ask someone to do something or to allow something; if you will allow or permit

* The new singer we just signed will no doubt become the King Kong, if you will, of the music industry.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

The Juilliard School

Many Americans who want to study the “performing arts” (music, dance, and drama) hope to go to The Juilliard School. The Juilliard School in New York City is one of the world’s most famous schools for the performing arts. It has only about 800 students each year. This makes it very “competitive” (difficult to get into, because many people want to go there) and many people who want to be professional performing artists apply for “admission” (permission to study at a particular school) each year.

The Juilliard School was “founded” (created) in 1905, because people thought that too many music students were going to Europe to study music, since the United States didn’t have a good music school at the time. A man named Augustus Juilliard gave a lot of money to the school, and now it “bears his name” (is named after him). The dance and drama divisions were added later. The school also has a large “collection” (a group of similar objects) of “music manuscripts” (original, hand-written pages with notes for music) by Mozart, Bach, Brahms, and other famous “composers” (people who write music).

The school has educated many famous performing artists. Some of the famous “graduates” (people who earned a degree from a particular school) include actors Christopher Reeve and Robin Williams. Well known musicians like Wynton Marsalis (trumpet) and Yo-Yo Ma (cellist) are Juilliard graduates. Lew Soloff, a band member in Blood Sweat and Tears, played Trumpet at Juilliard; David Bryan, the keyboardist for Bon Jovi studied piano there. Even Alan Greenspan, the former chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board (the U.S. central bank) studied the saxophone and clarinet at Juilliard.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast English Café number 111.

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

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In this Café we're going to talk about books and music in the United States, and specifically we're going to talk about some popular kinds of books in the last year or so in the U.S., and why they may be popular. We're also going to look at a famous America musician by the name of Yo Yo Ma. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our first topic today is popular books in the United States. Specifically, I want to talk about an article I read recently in the magazine Newsweek, which is a weekly newsmagazine here in the U.S. Newsweek had an article called "A Year of Selling Books." The article talks about a group of books that have become popular in the U.S. in the last year or two, where someone goes and does something for an entire year, usually goes without something, and then they write about their experiences of not having some modern convenience – some modern comfort. These are books about what we may describe as "self-deprivation." "Deprivation" comes from the verb "to deprive" (deprive). "To deprive" means to do without something – to not have something, often something that is considered important or even essential – necessary – for your life. "Self-deprivation" is when you don't do something or you don't have something on purpose. You say I'm not going to have this – "I'm not going to have chocolate," or "I'm not going to drink wine." That would be "self-deprivation" – I am depriving myself of something.

These books on self-deprivation are described in this article as being "strangely hip." To be "hip" (hip) means to be cool, to be fashionable, to be popular. "Strangely" because you would not think that books about people who spend a year without something would be popular, but they are!

The article gives some examples of these books that are popular now in the United States. One book, which will be published soon, is called The Year of



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Living Biblically. It's a book where a man decides to read the Bible and follow all of the rules that are in the Bible. And he follows these rules, including the rules about eating, about having a beard, and so forth, and he writes sort of a diary where he talks about the different experiences that he had. This book is actually going to be made into a movie!

There are other books like this; there's one book called A Year Without "Made in China". "Made in China" is the label that would be on something that was made in China and brought to the United States. The United States imports (or buys) many, many goods (many products) from China. She, in this book, goes a year without buying or using anything that was made in China, and shows how very difficult that is, because the American economy – the world economy is so closely connected.

There are a couple of other interesting books; one is called Not Buying It, where a woman goes for a year trying to buy as little as possible. Another book is called Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, by a novelist Barbara Kingslover. She goes a whole year by only eating things that she grows herself or that she buys from local farms – local markets. There's also a book called The Big Turnoff, where someone turns off their television for a year and describes what happens.

Some of these books are what we may call "ethically motivated," "ethically" meaning they're based on someone's beliefs about what is right. They usually involve some kind of "sacrifice" – something that you give up. Some people have wondered why these books are popular. One theory is that people like to what we would call "rubberneck" at some strange example of self-deprivation. The term "to rubberneck," the verb, comes from something that you will see on a freeway or a highway. When someone has an accident – when two cars have an accident, the cars around them all slow down to look at the accident. This, of course, causes even more problems; traffic becomes even slower – the cars begin to move even more slowly because people are stopping to look at the accident.

Another theory, I think one that is probably more correct, has to do with the way that Americans and those who live in modern, consumerist societies – societies where the consumer has many choices (many options) – is that we, perhaps, have too many options in our life, and these books allow us a chance to see what it is like without having so many choices.

I just finished reading a book myself, not about self-deprivation but a book about how people make decisions. It was a book by a psychologist, who looks at



psychological research – scientific investigations on how people make decisions and whether the decisions make them happy. One of the conclusions of the book is that having too many choices (too many options) can actually make people less happy, less satisfied.

The book is called The Paradox of Choice by Barry Schwartz. It was published two or three years ago, but I think it helps explain why these books are popular in modern American society, where people have, perhaps, too many options. They have hundreds of types of food items they can buy: different kinds of milk, different kinds of fruit, and so forth, different kinds of cars – all of these are, or can be, what we might say “overwhelming.” To be “overwhelmed” means to have too much information or too many options so that you can’t choose very intelligently. One person in the article says, “We are so overwhelmed by technology, we have so much access to so many choices, these books offer a way to deprive or limit ourselves,” and I think that’s one of the reasons why they are popular. So, if you’re interested in reading a book about a year of self-deprivation, now you have some examples.

Our second topic today is a famous American by the name of Yo Yo Ma. Yo Yo Ma is the son of two Chinese immigrants. He was actually born in France, but he is an American citizen. He came from a family of musicians; his father was a conductor. A “conductor” is the person who leads an orchestra (a group of musicians). His mother was a singer, and he moved to New York when he was seven years old.

Yo Yo Ma took up the cello at the age of four. The phrasal verb to “take up” something means to start doing something. You can take up the piano – you can start to play the piano. It’s often used when we talk about musical instruments.

So, Ma began playing the cello in 1960 when he was four years old, and he was considered, by the age of five, to be a child prodigy. A “prodigy” (prodigy) is a, usually, child who is very good at what they do at a very early age. So, a “child prodigy” is a very creative or intelligent young child, who is able to do amazing things for someone of their age.

By the time Yo Yo Ma was eight years old, he was already on American television with the famous American composer and conductor, Leonard Bernstein. He graduated from high school at the age of 15 and went to Harvard University, which, you may know, is considered one of the best universities in the United States. Ma studied at another famous school, in addition to Harvard; that is The Juilliard School of Music in New York. Most Americans are familiar with or



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have heard of The Juilliard School; it's considered the best school for young students – young musicians.

Yo Yo Ma was inspired by the great Spanish cellist, Pablo Casals, to continue his studies. He's recorded dozens of albums, and he has appeared on American television many times. He's probably one of the best known classical musicians in the United States; most people have heard of him. He graduated from Harvard in 1976, and he has also been well known for some of his recordings of the Cello Suites by Johann Sebastian Bach, the German composer.

One of the more interesting stories about Yo Yo Ma is that he has a very expensive cello; it is worth about 2.5 million dollars. It was built in 1733 in Venice. One day, in the fall of 1999, Ma was in a taxi – a taxicab – in New York City, and got out of the taxicab and he left his cello in the cab, and, of course, the cab drove away. Fortunately, the cab driver was able to return it to him unharmed, so he was a very lucky person to get his 2.5 million dollar cello back. Let's hope he gave the cab driver a big tip!

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Vitts (Vitts) in France. I'm probably mispronouncing that name; I apologize. He has a question about pronunciation, particularly of, what we call in English, "contracted forms," where two words are put together, words like "I'll" for "I will," or "they'll" for "they will." He's particularly interested in the verb forms of "should" and "would."

I don't think there's an easy rule for these contractions, but I can certainly pronounce some of the more common ones. With "should" and "could," the most common ones are contractions of "should have" and "would have." We say "should've" for "should have," and "would've" for "would have." These are often pronounced like the words "should of," and sometimes people will write "should of" or "could of" as two words, the second word being "O-F." This is a common mistake, but in fact, the correct form – the more accepted form, I should say – is "should've," with an apostrophe and then "V-E" at the end. I should say that some writers consider these contracted forms of "should've" and "would've" to be too informal for written communication, but people use them all the time.

There are many, many other contractions, for example, with question words such as "what." You can say, "What'll they think of next?" "What'll" is a contraction for "what will" – "What'll they think of next?" Again, many people think this is informal English, not to be used in a formal setting, but I think it's quite, quite



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common now to hear these contractions – certainly in conversation, you will hear these kinds of contractions. Of course, there are other common contractions, where we, for example, combine one of the subject pronouns – “I,” “you,” “he,” “she,” “it” – with the word “will.” “I will” becomes “I’ll,” “she will” becomes “she’ll,” “he will” becomes “he’ll,” “it will” becomes “it’ll,” and “you will” becomes “you’ll.”

So, those are some of the more common contractions that we use, but there are, of course, others as well.

Walter, who lives now in, I believe, Austin, Texas but is originally from the country of Columbia, wants to know about how to use the expression “figured out.”

To “figure out” something is another one of those many phrasal verbs – or two-word verbs in English; it means to understand something, usually something that is difficult to understand – something that is “complex,” the opposite of “simple.” “I’m trying to figure out the answer to this puzzle.” “I’m trying to figure out how I am going to get home tonight, since my car is broken” – I’m trying to find a solution.

The verb “to figure” can be used in a couple of different ways. We have a common expression, “it figures.” “It figures” means that it is something that you would expect to happen, something that is logical. Often it is a negative thing that happens. For example, someone comes to you at your work at the very end of the day and gives you a big task to complete – a lot of work. You may say, “It figures!” – I have to go home now, but I can’t because I have to do my work instead – “It figures!” It’s something that is usually used after a negative event, and you’re sort of saying that it’s unfortunate, but it’s not, in some ways, surprising.

Wellington (Wellington) in Brazil wants to know about the expression “there will be no movie this weekend” versus “there will not be a movie this weekend.”

These two expressions generally mean the same thing. However, we use the expression “there will be no...” (plus a noun) to announce something perhaps with more authority. A parent or a teacher for example, or your boss might say, “There will be no talking for the next half-hour.” It’s almost a command in that case, whereas if you say, “There will not be any talking in the next half-hour,” you’re more describing an action – describing a situation rather than making an announcement.



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Finally, Raj (Raj) in India wants to know when you use the expression “if you will.”

“If you will” is often used to mean “if you will allow,” or “if you will permit me this example or this situation.” We usually use it to be polite, often in a formal situation. It’s also used to ask for someone’s patience or acceptance when you use a word in a way that it is not normally used, or that is somehow different from the general use of the word. For example: “Celebrities (famous people) are becoming the gods, if you will, of young people” – they’re becoming the masters – the gods – what young people look up to, perhaps even worship. That’s using the expression “if you will” to say “allow me to use this expression in this way” – that’s another way of putting it – of explaining it.

If you have a question or comment, you can email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We’ll see you next time on the English Café.

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