



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 125

TOPICS

Celebrity chefs, Americans and personal space, generic versus general, expressing height in feet and meters, prophecy versus prediction

GLOSSARY

chef – a professional cook; a person who has studied cooking and whose job is to cook

* That restaurant just hired a new chef, and his desserts are incredible!

column – a newspaper article on a specific topic, sometimes written by the same author every day, week, or month

* I enjoy reading the travel column each Sunday.

to master – to become very good at doing something; to become an expert at doing something

* How long did it take you to master playing the piano?

recipe – written instructions for cooking or baking something; written instructions for making a certain type of food

* This recipe for bran muffins calls for one cup of raisins.

cookbook – a book that contains many recipes for cooking or baking foods

* Grandma's favorite cookbook has hundreds of recipes for cookies.

to spoof – to take something that is serious or important and make it seem silly; to make fun of or to mock something serious

* Spaceballs is a funny movie that spoofs Star Wars.

to kick (something) up a notch – to take something to the next level; to make something more intense, important, or interesting

* They often bet small coins while playing poker, but last weekend they kicked their game up a notch and started betting with five-dollar bills.

fusion – a combination of different types of food; a combination of different styles of food from different parts of the world

* A new restaurant that serves Cuban-Thai fusion just opened in downtown Springfield.



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anthropologist – a person who studies people and their cultures and societies

* The anthropologist spent more than six years living with a community in the Amazonian jungle.

intimate – very close and personal; with a close relationship

* Becky and Francine are very intimate friends. They tell each other everything.

generic – related to a large group of things, without being specific and without a brand name that shows something is made by a particular company

* “Digestion problems” is a generic term that can mean many different illnesses.

general – overall; not specific; not detailed

* The book is about the U.S. Civil War in general and it doesn’t have very many details about the battles.

prophecy – a statement about what will happen in the future, often related to religion or magic

* This book contains prophecies made by a man who lived in the 1600s.

prediction – a statement about what will probably happen in the future

* President Kennedy made a prediction that humans would be able to walk on the moon.



WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Classic Bestselling Cookbooks

Many Americans enjoy cooking and trying new recipes. They often buy cookbooks for “inspiration” (ideas and motivation for doing something). Some of these cookbooks are “fads” (things that are very popular for a short period of time), but other cookbooks have become “classic” (very popular and very well known) “bestsellers” (books that sell many copies).

One of the classic bestselling cookbooks is The Joy of Cooking. It has “been in print” (it continues to be published) since 1936, selling more than 18 million copies. The cookbook has a lot of basic information about the selection of fruits and vegetables, cooking “techniques” (specific ways to do something), and lists of “equipment” (small machines) and “utensils” (hand-held objects) that every kitchen needs, as well as many recipes for traditional American foods. A similar cookbook, The Joy of Baking, is all about baking cakes, pies, cookies, and more.

The Betty Crocker series is another classic bestselling cookbook. Betty Crocker is a “fictitious” (imaginary, not real) character who was created by a food company. When people wrote to the company asking for advice about baking, the company signed the letters with the name of Betty Crocker. Later, Betty Crocker had a radio cooking show, and now that name is on many food products, as well as a series of cookbooks.

Finally, The Frugal Gourmet has become another classic bestselling cookbook. A man named Jeff Smith “hosted” (was the main character) on a cooking show of the same name, and also published a series of cookbooks in the 1980s and 1990s. While The Joy of Cooking and Betty Crocker focus more on traditional home-style foods, The Frugal Gourmet has recipes for “gourmet” (very fancy) foods that can be prepared “frugally” (without spending very much money).



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 125.

This is the English Café episode 125. 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. You can find additional premium courses on our ESL Podcast Store, and download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you improve your English even faster.

On this Café, we're going to talk about celebrity chefs – famous chefs in the United States, who they are, and why they're famous. We're also going to talk about personal space for Americans. People have different ideas about how close you should be to other people, and what that means in terms of your relationship. We'll talk about how Americans see their own personal space. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our first topic is celebrity chefs. A "chef" (chef) is another name for a "cook," a person who cooks. Usually a chef is someone who works in a restaurant. The chef is usually the most important cook – the main cook. In some restaurants – big restaurants – they have different chefs that cook different kinds of meals, or different kinds of food. For example, some restaurants have what's called a "pastry chef." "Pastry" (pastry) is sweets, things like doughnuts and rolls and croissants; these are considered pastry.

In the United States, especially in the last 20 years or so, there have been a couple of famous chefs who have had television programs. For some reason, television shows about cooking became very popular in the 1990s. I want to start talking about, however, the most famous celebrity chef in the last 50 years, and that would be Julia Child.

Julia Child died in 2004. She was very famous in the 1960s and 70s. She actually became famous in the early 1960s, when she published a "cookbook," a collection of recipes. "Recipes" are instructions on how to cook something; a "cookbook" is a book of recipes. Julia Child published a book called Mastering the Art of French Cooking. To "master" something means to become an expert, to do very well at something.



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French cooking was not that popular in the United States before the 1960s. Julia Child helped popularize – helped make more popular – French cooking in the U.S. To “popularize” is to make more popular. She published cookbooks, then she had a television program called The French Chef. She was not French, but she tried to explain to people French cooking. She wrote articles in magazines; she had a column in The Boston Globe newspaper. A “column” is when a writer has a story at a regular schedule – every two days or every week. She had a cooking column in The Boston Globe.

She was so famous that in 1966 she was on the cover of Time magazine, the most popular news magazine in the United States. She also became famous in part because of a comedy program called Saturday Night Live. Back in the late 1970s, when I was in high school, there was someone on this comedy show who would spoof Julia Child’s television programs. To “spoof” (spoof) means to make fun of. So, he would act like he was Julia Child, and make fun of her. Julia Child continued to be popular in the 1980s and the 90s until her death in 2004. She is certainly the most famous celebrity chef in America that most Americans my age would remember.

In the last 15 years, there have been other chefs that have become famous and have their own television programs. In fact, in the United States there is an entire channel called “The Food Network” that shows cooking shows 24 hours a day, so you can watch and learn how to cook the entire day, if you’d like. Some of these celebrity chefs have become famous with their own television programs, almost all of them have published their own cookbooks, and most of them own restaurants in some place.

The most famous one, recently, has been Emeril Lagasse. People usually just call him by his first name, Emeril. Emeril had a very popular TV program on The Food Network. He became famous for his loud and very enthusiastic way that he would try to present the recipes to show people how to cook.

There were two expressions that he always used that became famous in pop culture in the 1990s. One of the expressions was “kick it up a notch” (notch). In general, the expression “to kick something up a notch” means to do something faster, at a higher level, with more energy, more excitement perhaps. In terms of Emeril’s television program, “to kick it up a notch” usually meant to make the food a little more spicy – to make the food a little more flavorful. The other expression that he made popular was “bam” (bam). “Bam” is something that you would say when you do something suddenly. He used it whenever he would put a certain “ingredient,” a certain kind of food into his meal – into the dish he was preparing.



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For example if he were putting in some more peppers or chiles to make a food hotter or more spicy, he would shout “Bam!”

Although Emeril was very famous in the 1990s, in the last few years a couple of other chefs have become more well known. Rachael Ray became popular a few years ago; she has her own television program on The Food Network. She has, actually, two television programs. She has cookbooks and other things that she sells.

Finally, Ming Tsai has become another celebrity chef that people know about. He first became popular for what we would call “fusion” cooking. He had a television show called East Meets West. Ming is a Chinese American, who talked about mixing the cooking styles and flavors from China and other Asian countries. There is something called “Asian fusion” food. To “fuse” (fuse) means to combine two things together. Ming now has his own television show called Simply Ming, where he teaches people how to cook different dishes. He has his own cookbooks and his own restaurant.

Unfortunately, I don’t know how to cook very well. I’ve watched some of these programs, but I’m not very smart, so I’ve never figured out how to cook anything very well. I prefer other people to do the cooking, and I’ll do the eating – I’m very good at eating!

Our second topic is Americans and personal space. I want to talk a little bit about how Americans see this space around them, and how it may be different from other countries and other cultures.

Generally speaking, Americans have a similar idea of personal space as you would find in Germany or northern Europe. They tend to want even more distance, however, than what is typically done in Europe, or Latin America, or Asia, or Africa. Americans like to have more space in between people when they are talking.

One anthropologist – a person who studies human behavior is called an “anthropologist,” “anthro” means man – the anthropologist Edward Hall (Hall) talked about different kinds of space that Americans like to have depending on who they are talking to – who they are interacting with.

The largest space is what he calls “personal space.” This is usually 10 or 12 feet, which would be about 3.7 meters, between you and the other people. For example, when the people who protect the president – the Secret Service – are



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in public, they like to keep at least 10 to 12 feet between the president and people around him. This is sort of a public space – it’s a large distance.

There’s also something called “social distance.” “Social distance” is four to six feet, maybe 1.2 to 1.4 meters. This is the distance you would keep from someone who you were meeting for a business reason – for some formal reason. It’s not a very close distance. If you know this person well, if it’s a friend of yours, then you might move a little closer, maybe one meter or so. This is more of what we might call a “personal distance.”

If you shake someone’s hand – the typical greeting in the United States when you meet someone is to shake their hand – that requires really, at least, three or four feet distance between you and the other person.

Finally, there’s something that you might call “intimate distance.” When we say something is “intimate” (intimate), we mean it’s very personal – very close. Intimate distance is for family members, for very close friends, for your dog or cat perhaps. This is 18 inches – 12 to 18 inches, about 45 centimeters. You would only get this close to someone if you were their family member or a very close friend. The exception might be a doctor or a nurse, who has to get very close to you to examine you.

In general, then, Americans like more space than is comfortable in other countries and other cultures. So if you meet an American, and you, for example, try to get close to them – within 60 or 70 centimeters – they might feel a little uncomfortable. They might, in fact, even “back away,” that is, move away from you because they are uncomfortable with that close distance.

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Akira (Akira) in Japan. Akira wants to know the difference between the words “generic” and “general.”

“Generic” (generic) means not specific, not belonging to a certain group, what we might call a certain class of things – a certain classification. To say something is “generic” means it’s not specific to any one particular item or thing. If you say, for example, “This food is very generic,” you would be saying it isn’t particularly good, it doesn’t taste like anything specific.

“Generic” is very commonly used now to talk about a product – something that you buy – that is not made by one of the large producers of that product,



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especially, for example, if you go to a drugstore – to a pharmacy – and you want to buy some aspirin, let's say. Well, there are some famous manufacturers of aspirin in the United States such as Bayer Aspirin. If you buy generic aspirin, you're buying aspirin that is not made by one of these big companies. Usually it is cheaper; it is made by a smaller company or it is made by the store where you are shopping. So "generic" means not one particular company – not associated with one particular, usually famous or well known, company.

The opposite of "generic" would be "brand name" (brand). "Brand" refers to the name of the company of the product; Coca-Cola, for example, is a brand. So, generic is usually cheaper. We now have generic medicine that you can buy at a pharmacy and drugstore, but there are also generic foods. You can buy cereal, for example, that is not one of the famous companies, but is made by a smaller company; it doesn't have a particular brand on it.

The word "general" has some similar meanings to "generic," they both come from the same root word. "General" means widespread; it can also mean what is typical of most cases, or of most things or people. You can also use it to mean typically or usually. So, you can say, "I like ice cream in general," or, "Generally, I like ice cream." That means typically, normally, usually I like ice cream.

Sometimes "general" is used like "generic." For example, if someone says, "The general meaning of this word is," they're saying the normal, typical, most common meaning of the word, perhaps not a meaning specific to the situation that you are talking about.

So, "generic" is much more commonly used when talking about products – things that you buy. "General" means widespread, typical of most cases. If a country has a "general strike," that means that almost everyone stops working.

Fabio (Fabio) in Brazil is confused when we use American English measurements. In most of the world, the metric system of meters and kilos are used; in the U.S., we still used inches, feet, and pounds. This, of course, can be confusing to people. Most Americans, as we've talked about before on the Café, do not know the metric system, and it is confusing for them, just as it is for you when you hear American English measurement units.

One way to think about it is that one meter is approximately three feet – it's a little more than three feet. So, if someone says they're six feet tall, you can say that they're approximately two meters – a little less than two meters. A "foot" is one



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third of a meter, so if I say I'm five feet tall that would mean that I would be approximately 1.6 meters. Again, that's not an exact conversion.

To try to convert pounds to kilos, one pound is approximately .45 kilos, sort of a half, if you want an approximation. So, something that would be one pound is about a half a kilo. Somebody who weighs 100 pounds would weigh 45 or so kilos. Again, Americans are not familiar with expressing their own weight as kilos. I actually like giving people my weight in kilos instead of pounds because it is so much less. I weigh 140 pounds, which is only 63 kilos – sounds better than 140!

Our final question comes from Ann (Ann) in China. Ann wants to know the difference between “prophecy” (prophecy) and “prediction.”

A “prediction” is something that you believe will happen in the future: “I predict a woman will win the presidency of the United States.” Or, “I predict that my brother will not call me today as he has promised.” That's a “prediction,” that's a belief about what will happen in the future.

“Prophecy” is also like a prediction – a belief about something that will happen in the future, but usually it's a word we only use in talking about some sort of religious or spiritual person. “To make a prophecy” is something you may read about in a book, where a great religious figure or a great spiritual figure made some sort of prediction about the future. In the famous Shakespeare play Macbeth there are three “witches,” three supernatural beings that make a prophecy about what will happen to the man, Macbeth. We don't normally use the word “prophecy” in talking about things that we believe will happen in the future; it's something you would only see in a story, for the most part, of some religious, or spiritual, or magical creature or being.

I predict that if you email us at eslpod@eslpod.com, we will certainly make a good attempt to try to answer your questions here on the podcast. We don't have time to answer everyone's questions, but we'll certainly try.

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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