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**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 127**

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**TOPICS**

Topics: Ask an American: Starving Artist; as a matter of fact, process versus procedure, to haggle

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**GLOSSARY**

**to make a living** – to have a job or jobs to earn enough money to pay for your daily needs, such as housing, food and clothing

\* Joseph wanted to quit his bank job and be a musician, but he knew that he couldn't make a living playing music.

**diversity** – variety within a particular group of things or people

\* There was great diversity among the students at the college who were from all over the world and from many different backgrounds

**stimulus** – something that causes change or a reaction in something else

\* My car breaking down on the highway was the stimulus for me to buy a new car.

**hard to beat** – difficult to conquer or to do better than someone or something

\* This store has prices that are hard to beat, so many people do a lot of their shopping here.

**to make it** – to succeed in a particular situation or to get somewhere successfully

\* The sailors wanted to make it to the dock before sunset.

**to collaborate** – to work together with others and to combine the good ideas of more than one person

\* Joachim and Sam decided to collaborate on a project that they thought would impress their boss.

**to interact** – to act together or affect each other

\* His parents wished that Nathan would interact more with children his own age.

**gatekeepers** – people who guard or control access to something, deciding who is allowed access to that thing and who is not

\* My uncle was the gatekeeper of our family's history; he had all the photographs, stories, and records neatly filed away, and we had to ask him for permission to look through everything.



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**density** – the concentration or compactness (how close together) of a substance

\* The density of this dish makes it much more filling than regular pasta.

**dynamism** – strength or activeness of the mind, body, or personality

\* The professor's dynamism made his lectures on normally boring topics incredibly exciting to his students

**to cease to exist** – to die or to stop being

\* The low prices at our local grocery store ceased to exist when the new owners took over.

**to push (someone) out** – to make someone leave an area or a group

\*Eric tried to push Dana out of the out of the street as the big truck came around the corner.

**as a matter of fact** – expression meaning “yes, actually” or “in fact”

\*As a matter of fact, I *did* eat lunch today, even though I am very hungry now.

**process** – the series of actions or steps that lead to a result one wants

\*The process of applying to college is often long and difficult.

**procedure** – the way of making something happen or doing something

\*Most large buildings have a procedure to follow in case there is a fire, so that everybody will be able to get out of the building quickly and safely.

**to haggle** – to argue over the price of something; to bargain

\*Some people enjoy haggling over prices in flea markets, while others think you shouldn't need to haggle to get a fair price.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **National Endowment for the Arts**

The National Endowment for the Arts (also called the NEA) is a “federally funded” (given money by the U.S. government) organization that supports works in the “arts”. The NEA supports arts by giving “grants” (money for specific projects) to organizations and some independent artists. While the NEA is funded by the federal government, it is run independently, so its leaders are normally able to make decisions about who and what to give money to.

The NEA was created in 1965 by an act of Congress, meaning the U.S. Congress decided to create it as a part of the U.S. government. Its “budget” (the amount of money it has to spend) has changed many times since 1965. At one point, its budget was nearly 200 million dollars. Many “conservatives” (people who usually vote for a Republican and have values very different from “liberals,” people who usually vote for a Democrat) in the country were “opposed to” (against) the way the NEA spent this money, however, and they “lobbied for” (put pressure on Congress for) a “reduction” (lowering) in the NEA’s budget. In particular, some conservative groups were opposed to the fact that the NEA supported some very “controversial” (often argued about) artists whose art they felt should not be supported by “tax dollars” (money from the federal government, which comes from taxes that U.S. citizens pay). Thus, in 1996, Congress “cut” (lowered) the NEA’s budget nearly in half. While the budget has increased in recent years, many arts programs that were “funded by” (given money by) the NEA have “gone by the wayside” (been forgotten about, or stopped happening).

If you go to plays, listen to certain radio shows, or go to museums in the U.S., you will often hear the phrase “funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.” The NEA has been one of the most important organizations supporting all kinds of creative work.



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 127.

This is ESL Podcast's English Café episode 127. 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). On it, you can visit our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional premium courses in business and daily English that you will enjoy, I think. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and every episode. The Learning Guide contains lots of additional information, including a complete transcript of this episode, vocabulary words, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, and a comprehension quiz on what you're listening to now.

On this Café, we're going to have another one of our Ask an American segments, where we listen to other native speakers talking at a normal rate of speech – a normal speed. We're going to listen to them and explain what they are talking about. Today we're going to talk about art and artists, especially artists living in big cities like New York City and Los Angeles. As always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

Our topic on this Café's Ask an American segment is the life – the difficult life of being an artist. If you are a singer or an actor or a dancer or a painter or a musician, it's difficult to make a living in most places. "To make a living" means to get enough money for you to eat and live. Many artists have to work other jobs while they try to make more money doing what they want to do – singing or dancing or whatever their art form is.

In the United States, the two places that most artists often go are New York City and Los Angeles, California. Both of these places are what we would call "entertainment capitals," places where there are many artistic opportunities. We're going to listen to some people talking about the difficult life of trying to be an artist in New York City. We'll listen first to a man talking about why artists like to come to big cities like New York – the reasons they want to go there. We'll listen first, try to understand as much as you can, then we'll go back and explain what he said. Let's listen:

[recording]



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Artists like to gather in communities, and they like big cities. Not because the rent is cheap, because it's not cheap, but because the diversity of experience and the diversity of mankind is so great here, and the stimulus is hard to beat.

[end of recording]

He talks rather fast, but we'll go back and explain what he said. You also hear a piano playing in the background. The people we are listening to were interviewed for a radio program on Voice of America.

He begins by saying, "Artists like to gather in communities." "To gather" means to come together. They "like to gather in communities (in groups), they like big cities. Not because the rent is cheap, because it's not cheap." So, artists don't come to big cities like New York and LA because they are inexpensive – because it doesn't require a lot of money. As a matter of fact, it requires a lot of money. However, they come to these cities because of "the diversity of experience." "Diversity" (diversity) means there is a variety of options, there are many different possibilities, many different groups, many different kinds of experiences. He says they want a "diversity of experience and the diversity of mankind is so great here." "Mankind" just refers to all human beings, not just men and women. Some people don't like the term "mankind," and so they may say "humanity"; it's the same idea.

Finally he says that artists like big cities because "the stimulus is hard to beat." The "stimulus" (stimulus) means the intellectual or artistic opportunities that allow you to become more creative. A stimulus is something that you receive – something that you get that causes a reaction. In psychology, we talk about "stimulus and response." The stimulus is what provokes – what causes – the response. So, many of the artists like the stimulus – all the different opportunities – that they can experience. He says this "stimulus is hard to beat." When you say something is "hard to beat" (beat), you mean it's difficult to find a better situation. If you went to a restaurant and said "the food is hard to beat," you would mean it is very difficult to find better food at another restaurant.

Let's listen again to this quote:

[recording]

Artists like to gather in communities, and they like big cities. Not because the rent is cheap, because it's not cheap, but because the diversity of experience and the diversity of mankind is so great here, and the stimulus is hard to beat.



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[end of recording]

Big cities are popular with artists, but it is very difficult for them to make a living. Let's listen to this second quote about this problem:

[recording]

They really are finding it difficult, and the thing is is that artists know they have to be here. So, they still come here because they kind of have to to make it.

[end of recording]

The woman says that artists are really “finding it difficult.” “To find something difficult” means that you are discovering that it is difficult, that you are experiencing difficulties. You’ll sometimes hear the expression “I find it difficult to believe that...” followed by something that you think is not true. “I find it difficult to believe that my girlfriend forgot my birthday” – how sad!

Artists are finding it difficult to make a living. She says, “the thing is” – when you want to get someone’s attention, when you want to say “I’m about to say something important,” we sometimes use this expression “the thing is.” It’s an informal way of getting someone’s attention. She says, “and the thing is artists know they have to be here. So, they still come here because they kind of have to to make it.” What she’s saying is that artists continue to go to places like New York and Los Angeles “because they kind of (they sort of) have to” – they have to come there. Why do they have to come there? In order “to make it.” The expression “to make it” means to be successful, to finally be famous for example.

There is a famous song, made popular by the American singer Frank Sinatra, called New York, New York, and one of the lines in the song is “If I can make it there, I’ll make it anywhere,” meaning if I can be successful in New York City, I can be successful anywhere else, because it’s most difficult to be successful in a place like New York. [Jeff sings]

If I can make it there,  
I’ll make it anywhere.  
It’s up to you  
New York, New York.



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Well, that's my interpretation of Frank Sinatra. The expression "it's up to you" means you will decide – you will determine. It's up to you to determine if I am a terrible singer or not!

Let's listen to this quote again:

[recording]

They really are finding it difficult, and the thing is is that artists know they have to be here. So, they still come here because they kind of have to to make it.

[end of recording]

Some people think that the government should help artists to survive in places like New York because artists are also helping the economy – they also help businesses. The fact that these artists come together and "socialize," that is, talk to each other – exchange ideas – helps businesses as well. Let's listen to an explanation of this:

[recording]

That socializing also translates into real economic output. In their social and artistic communities is often where they do business, where they collaborate with one another, where they interact with the gatekeepers who make decisions about what good art or good fashion is.

[end of recording]

Once again, this speaker talks very fast. It's sometimes said that those who live in New York, who we would call "New Yorkers," talk very fast and it is difficult to understand them. She begins by saying, "That socializing translates into real economic output." "Socializing," we said earlier, is when people get together and talk; they "interact" with each other. "Translates," here, doesn't refer to languages; it means it becomes – it turns into; it goes from one form of existence to another. In this case, the socializing turns into, or becomes, "real economic output." "Output," here, is what is produced. So, she's saying that when the artists get together, they actually produce something that is worth money – that has economic value. So these aren't just artists who are painting and drawing for fun, these things have economic consequences as well for the city.



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She says that it is “In their social and artistic communities (the artists living in these communities) where they do business, where they collaborate with one another (“to collaborate” means to work together with someone else), where they interact (where they communicate) with the gatekeepers who make decisions about what good art or good fashion is.” A “gatekeeper” is someone who allows you in or out of a door. In this case, a person who determines, or makes the decision, about whether you are going to be allowed in or out, whether you are going to be successful or not. In the university, there are a group of people who decide who will get admitted to the university – who will be able to come to the university, and who will not. These are “gatekeepers,” the people responsible for making decisions about other people and their success.

So, these artists are talking with – interacting “with the gatekeepers who make decisions about what good art or good fashion is.” She’s saying here that these artists have significant influence on the economic side of art and of fashion, things like clothing design for example. Let’s listen one more time:

[recording]

That socializing also translates into real economic output. In their social and artistic communities is often where they do business, where they collaborate with one another, where they interact with the gatekeepers who make decisions about what good art or good fashion is.

[end of recording]

Finally, we hear what might happen if these artists are not helped economically, if they are not given a chance live in big cities like New York. Let’s listen:

[recording]

And that density and dynamism that occurs when you have all these artists living and working in the same place ceases to exist, because they’re pushed out.

[end of recording]

She says, “that density and dynamism that occurs....” “Density” is when you have many things in a small space; in this case, many artists living in a community – there are many of them close together. “Dynamism” means energy, in this case. So, you have this energy “that occurs when you have all these artists living and working in the same place.” However, that “ceases to exist.”





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“To cease” means to stop, to end; “to cease to exist” means something no longer exists, it disappears. Unless you have artists living together in these communities, you won’t have that dynamism – that energy. They will leave because they are “pushed out.” “To push out” is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to remove – to get rid of someone from a situation. It can be, for example, at a job where you have a new employee, and the company decides to get rid of you in order to hire the new employee. You are “pushed out,” you lose your job; you lose your position or situation. In cities like New York, the high expense of living there is pushing out artists – it’s causing them to leave, it’s forcing them to leave. “To push someone out” means to force them out of a situation.

Let’s listen one more time:

[recording]

And that density and dynamism that occurs when you have all these artists living and working in the same place ceases to exist, because they’re pushed out.

[end of recording]

We sometimes talk about the “starving artist.” “To starve” (starve) means to die because you don’t have enough food. We sometimes say “the starving artist,” meaning the artist who doesn’t have very much money. This is sort of a somewhat romantic, but often realistic, portrait or portrayal of the artist in our modern societies. It is very difficult for them, many times, to make a living. I know I find it very difficult to live on my singing!

Now let’s answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Wislei (Wislei) in Brazil. The question has to do with the meaning of the expression “as a matter of fact.”

“As a matter of fact” is an expression we use to mean the same as “actually,” or “in reality,” or perhaps “in fact.” Usually, we use this when we’re speaking about something that is not as you expected, or is different from what you thought was going to happen. For example: “I hadn’t seen my nephew for many years. At our family Christmas celebration this year, I expected to see a little child. But as a matter of fact, he’s now taller than I am.”



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Sometimes this expression is used just to add some additional information. For example: “I’m not going to the movie tonight. As a matter of fact, I’m not even going to leave the house.” Sometimes it’s just used for additional emphasis: your wife says to you, “Are you going to the bar with your friends?” and you say, “As a matter of fact, I am.” Of course, you might not want to come back too late from the bar; as a matter of fact, I recommend coming home before 10:00!

Jaehong (Jaehong) in Japan wants to know the difference between “process” and “procedure.”

“Process” is a series of steps or actions that you take to achieve a specific goal – a specific result. It’s also used to describe a natural series of changes. For example: “The process of becoming an adult can be difficult and challenging.” Children – teenagers go through a certain process – a certain series of steps or phases. You could also say, “I’m writing a book about the process of learning how to play the violin as an adult.” That’s because I’m actually trying to learn the violin, although I’m not really writing a book about it!

“Procedure” (procedure) is the established or official way of doing something. So, “procedure” and “process” are related; we usually use the word “procedure” when we are talking about a business or an organization that has an official policy – an official set of steps that you have to take. For example: “Do you know what the procedure is at your company for requesting a vacation?” First, you have to talk to your boss, then you have to, perhaps, fill out a piece of paper with information about your vacation, then you have to give it to your boss, then your boss has to talk to someone else, and so on and so on. That would be a “procedure.”

A “procedure” can also be something that is done by the doctor to your body, something that is related to improving your health some way.

Finally, Vera (Vera), also from Brazil, wants to know the meaning of the verb “to haggle” (haggle). “To haggle” is a good word; it means to bargain, to negotiate the price of something. If I am selling my car and I tell you the price is \$10,000, you say, “Well, I’ll give you \$8,000.” That’s bargaining – that’s “haggling.” I’m trying to get a better price for me, so we go back and forth until we find a price that we both agree on.

There is no haggling in the big department stores in the United States. That is, you can’t walk into one of the larger stores where the things already have prices on them and try to bargain; they won’t haggle with you. But if you go to an



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informal sale – if you go to a yard sale or a garage sale where someone is selling their own things, then you can probably haggle – you can get a lower price by bargaining. As a matter of fact, I recommend haggling; it's part of the process of buying something.

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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