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**ENGLISH CAFÉ – 170**

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**TOPICS**

Famous Americans: Weird Al Yankovic; Alcoholics Anonymous; figure out versus realize; kind of; noun + --ee and --er

**GLOSSARY**

**weird** – strange; odd; not normal or usual

\* I think it's weird that Franco loves to eat peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwiches. I think it would taste horrible!

**parody** – something that follows or copies something else, but changes it to make it funny

\* Jonas wrote a parody for Romeo and Juliet for our school play. In Jonas' story, however, Romeo and Juliet were not a good-looking, romantic couple. Instead, they were very ugly.

**to make light of** – to take something that is usually serious and make it less serious; to make fun of something

\* Although Lim had just lost his job, he made light of the situation by telling everyone that he had been given a month-long vacation.

**relevant** – something that is connected to something else; something that is important for a certain reason

\* What a person studies in university is relevant to the kind of job he or she will get after he or she graduates.

**alcoholic** – a person who drinks too much alcohol; a person who cannot control his or her need for alcohol

\* Children who live with an alcoholic father or mother often have an unhappy childhood.

**addicted** – the need to have something in order to feel good; unable to control the desire for something

\* Zhang is addicted to computer games. He plays computer games for 10 hours a day and he forgets to eat or to do his schoolwork.

**anonymous** – an unknown person; not knowing the name or identity of a person

\* The millionaire gave \$3 million to the school, but he wanted to remain anonymous.



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**to break an addiction** – to stop being addicted to something; to stop needing something in order to feel good

\* After ten years of smoking three packs of cigarettes a day, Georgio decided to get help to break his addiction and not smoke anymore.

**sober** – to not be controlled or influenced by alcohol

\* When Harry is sober, he is a very nice person, but when he is drunk, he becomes rude and bad-tempered.

**support group** – a group of people that share the same problem and try to help each other get over the problem

\* Ling was divorced and lonely, so she joined a support group for single mothers.

**to abstain** – to stay away from something; to not eat, drink, or do something, especially alcohol

\* The doctor said that pregnant women should abstain.

**mentor** – an older or more experienced person who provides information, advice, or support to someone else

\* When Singh was learning to become a writer, a famous writer agreed to be his mentor and help him learn how to write successful stories.

**to figure out** – to understand a problem; to find the answer to a problem, usually after much thinking

\* After five hours, Jan finally figured out the answer to the puzzle.

**kind of** – somewhat; to some extent

\* After teaching three classes, the teacher was feeling kind of tired, so she decided to get a cup of coffee.



## **WHAT INSIDERS KNOW**

### **Overeaters Anonymous**

Alcoholics Anonymous, commonly known as AA, is a group that helps people who have a problem with drinking too much alcohol. To help people get over their problem with drinking, AA came up with the twelve-step “recovery” (getting well) program. Since then, many other groups have used the twelve-step program to help people with problems. One of these groups is called Overeaters Anonymous. This group helps people who “overeat” (eat too much) or who have other eating problems.

Overeaters Anonymous, sometimes called OA, helps people with different eating problems. Some people “binge” or cannot stop themselves from eating. Other people are “anorexic.” These people are very skinny, but they think they are fat, and therefore, they don’t allow themselves to eat. And another group of people are “bulimic.” These people eat and then they force themselves to throw up the food that they just ate.

To help people recover from their eating problems, OA encourages its members to make a “food plan” (a schedule of what to eat and when to eat it), attend OA meetings, read about eating problems, write down thoughts and feelings, and help others. By doing these things, people with eating problems can improve their body and mind.

OA not only helps people lose weight (the average person loses twenty-one pounds), but it also helps people change their ideas about food. Instead of using food to solve their problems, people start to understand that food is just a way to live, and that relationships with people are more important to happiness than food.

OA started in 1960 with just three women. Today, OA is in more than 70 countries, with more than 70,000 members.



## **COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 170.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 170. 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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On this Café, we're going to continue our series of famous Americans, focusing on an entertainer called Weird Al Yancovic. We're also going to talk about an organization named Alcoholics Anonymous that helps people stop drinking. And as always, we'll answer a few of your questions. Let's get started.

We begin this Café with a continuation of our series on famous Americans. Today we're going to talk about Weird Al, or Weird Al Yancovic. The word "weird" means strange or odd or unusual. Children might think it's weird to like broccoli, the vegetable, or you might think that someone dresses weirdly. Normally it would be rude or not polite to call someone weird, but the man whose real name is Alfred Matthew Yankovic actually likes to be called Weird Al.

The best way to describe Weird Al is as an "entertainer," someone who makes people laugh, someone who says things that are funny or that people find interesting. He has done a lot of different things. He is a singer, an actor, a musician, a songwriter, a television producer, and more. But he is most famous for his songs.

Weird Al has "composed," or written music, especially parodies of popular songs. He actually doesn't write the music so much as the words for the music – the lyrics. A "parody" (parody) is a song, movie, or book that copies something else, but changes it so that it is very funny. For example, one of the most famous songs by Weird Al is called Eat It – Eat It. It's a parody of one of Michael Jackson's most famous songs, Beat It. Weird Al used the same "melody," the same notes or sounds of the song, but he changed the words to make it about food and people who are fat or overweight because they eat too much.



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Many of Weird Al's songs make light of American culture. The phrase "to make light of something" means to take something that other people are very serious about and take it less seriously or even make it seem funny. Weird Al's song Eat It makes fun, or makes light of American culture and its problems with "obesity," or people eating too much and becoming overweight. In the song and the music video, which is, you probably know, a short movie that goes with a song, there are many fat people who are pressured to eat fast food like hamburgers, and most people think it is funny to watch.

One of my favorite Weird Al songs was called What I Bought on eBay, and it is a parody of a song that was popular several years ago, or a few years ago, called I Want it That Way by a group called the Backstreet Boys. So instead of singing, as in the original, "I want it that way," Weird Al says, "bought it on eBay." That's the general idea; that's what Weird Al's songs are about, taking the music and changing the lyrics.

Some other Weird Al songs include Girls Just Want to Have Lunch, which is a parody of a song by Cyndi Lauper called Girls Just Want to Have Fun. He also did a parody of the MC Hammer song I Can't Touch This, which was called I Can't Watch This. There was a famous song by Madonna called Like a Virgin, Weird Al's song was called Like a Surgeon. You get the idea; these are songs that make fun of the originals by giving them different words.

Weird Al has won three Grammy Awards, which are given to the best or most talented musicians here in the United States. Weird Al also made a movie called UHF and he has his own TV program, called The Weird Al Show. He also makes a lot of music videos to the songs that he parodies. Many of these videos are found on some of the popular cable channels, as well as, nowadays, on the Internet, on YouTube and so forth. The interesting thing about Weird Al's songs is even though they are funny, they're also, many times, "relevant," meaning they're related to a more important topic like, for example, the idea of obesity.

So, if you want to know a little bit about some popular American culture and someone making fun of popular American culture, you might want to listen to Weird Al Yancovic.

Now let's turn to our next topic, which is an organization that's famous throughout the world really, called Alcoholics Anonymous, or sometimes in English we just call it AA. An "alcoholic" is a person who is addicted to alcohol. When you are



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“addicted” to something, your body needs more and more of that thing to feel good. Some people are addicted to drugs. Others are addicted to alcohol, and those people, alcoholics, have a group they can join if they want to stop drinking called Alcoholics Anonymous.

“Anonymous,” means that no one knows your name, or that the name is unknown. Sometimes you will see things that are written by anonymous, meaning that nobody knows who wrote it. Because alcoholism is something that many people are embarrassed about and want to keep a secret, Alcoholics Anonymous does everything it can to let people “remain,” or stay anonymous while they are trying to “break their addiction,” or stop being addicted to alcohol.

The “mission” of Alcoholics Anonymous, or the reason for existing, is to help alcoholics get sober and stay sober. “Sober” means that you are not under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. The opposite of sober is “drunk,” which means that you have had too much alcohol to drink. This can be a very long and difficult process for people to go through, and Alcoholics Anonymous serves as a “support group,” which is a group of people who have the same problem and try to help each other. In the United States, there are support groups for many different groups of people: people who have had their wife or husband die, people who eat too much, people with diseases such as cancer, and, as we said, alcoholics.

Alcoholics Anonymous allows anyone of any religious belief, or no religious belief, to become a member. The purpose of AA is to help people abstain from alcohol one day at a time. To “abstain” means to not do something. To abstain from having sex would mean not to have sex – it’s called marriage! Alcoholics Anonymous helps people abstain one day at a time. In fact, that’s a common expression in the AA movement. The people who are in AA talk about “one day at a time,” meaning you should just try to get through today; don’t worry about tomorrow or the next day.

Alcoholics Anonymous is famous for its 12-step program. In other words, AA has certain phases or steps that it asks you to take, beginning with step one and ending up with step 12. The first step is admitting that you have a problem. To “admit” something means to say that it is true, even though you don’t like saying it, even though you don’t like telling the truth about it. Someone says, “I admit I cheated on the test.” They’re not proud of it, they’re not happy about it, but they are telling the truth. So, the first step in Alcoholics Anonymous is admitting you have a problem. There are many other programs that use this similar 12-step



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program. In fact, people talk about groups that help people over various kinds of addiction – eating addictions or gambling addictions – as being “12-step programs,” meaning they use these same steps – these same phrases that Alcoholics Anonymous uses for other groups, for people are addicted to other things.

One of the things that many AA groups ask people who join them is that they go to a lot of meetings, maybe even one meeting a day for a month or two months, and then going to meetings every week or twice a week, as many times as necessary. What happens at these meetings, which are often held in churches or other public places, is people come together and they talk about their problems. They stand up and, although it’s called Alcoholics Anonymous, you actually give your name – your first name: “Hi, my name is Jeff.” And then, everyone in the group says, “Hi, Jeff,” and then you give your story. And so basically, the groups, for the most part, are listening to stories of other people, and they all last a very definite amount of time, they don’t go long. There’s someone who runs the meeting. The meeting could have five people, there could be 50 people there, and the meetings are held in many, many different locations in probably every city or almost every city in the United States.

Many alcoholics who are trying to get over their addiction, we would call them “recovering alcoholics,” continue to attend these AA meetings for their entire life. Some people in the AA group are sponsors, and these people work as mentors for newer members. A “mentor” is someone who gives you information and supports you, someone who you can call, for example, if you are having a bad day and you feel like taking a drink. Some people will call their sponsor in order to get through the problem, whatever it is. These mentors, or “sponsors,” as they’re called, help people break their addiction because they have experience with the same sorts of problems.

When people complete or finish the 12-steps in the AA program, they often get an AA “keychain,” something you put, normally, your keys on. It’s a small metal ring. This way, whenever they have an urge – whenever they feel like drinking again, they can look at the keychain and remind themselves about how they have worked to break their addiction. Many people in AA can tell you exactly how many years, months, and days they have been sober – they have been without a drink. Some of the people who complete AA’s 12-steps are able to abstain from alcohol for the rest of their life. Unfortunately, some people “relapse,” or begin doing negative behaviors again. But they are always welcome back to the AA meeting. You don’t have to make an appointment to go



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to an AA meeting; you don't have to be invited. As long as you know where it is, you can simply go to the meeting.

AA was started by a man named Bill Wilson, and sometimes people in AA, when they meet someone and they think the other person might also be a recovering alcoholic, they'll say things like: "Are you a friend of Bill W.?" This is sort of a code – a way of communicating to that person – asking that person if they're also in an AA program.

Because the people who are married to or who are friends with alcoholics also have the same sort of difficulties often, having to live with someone who has this problem, there are separate support groups for friends and parents and spouses called Al-Anon, and they have a similar structure to them.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.

Our first question comes from Comar (Comar), originally from Brazil now living in New York. Comar's question has to do with the difference between "to figure out" and "to realize."

"To figure out" is a two-word phrasal verb that means to understand a problem, to solve a problem, to find the answer to some problem. "To realize" means to understand the importance of something, usually this happens very quickly. Here are a couple of sentences to illustrate this difference: "After three hours of working, Ling finally figured out the answer to the math problem." That's to solve or understand a problem. "After he figured out the problem, he realized that he was doing the wrong page for his homework." "To realize" means to suddenly understand something that is important, in this case, that Ling was doing the wrong homework problem.

Our next question comes from Chuy (Chuy) in Mexico. Chuy wants to know how we use the expression "kind of" plus an adjective. For example: "I'm kind of tired." Or, "I'm kind of thirsty." "Kind of" plus the adjective means I am somewhat, I am rather. I'm not completely this thing, but I am somewhat this thing. For example, "I'm kind of tired" means that you're tired but not exhausted, not necessarily ready to go to sleep. It's an informal expression used mostly in speaking.

You can also use "kind of" with a noun. For example: "Hamburgers are a kind of fast food that Americans like to eat." When we use it in that way, with a noun,





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“kind of” means an example of or a type of. Another example would be: “Whiskey is a kind of alcohol.” It’s an example of alcohol.

Finally, Mahdi (Mahdi) in Afghanistan wants to know how we use the suffixes, things that come at the end of a word, --ee and --er. For example, someone who trains is called a “trainer,” and someone who is trained is called a “trainee”; --er is the person that does something. For example, if you teach you’re called a “teacher.” Now, this doesn’t work with every verb, but for many verbs in English it does; --ee at the end would mean that you are someone who is receiving that action. A “trainee” is someone who is being trained by someone else; they’re learning. Now, this doesn’t always work; we don’t, for example say a “teachee,” we say a “student.” So you have to be careful, it doesn’t always necessarily fit every verb.

Of the two suffixes – of the two endings, the --er ending is probably much more common. Someone who banks is called a “banker”; someone who bakes is called a “baker”; someone who learns is called a “learner”; someone who writes is called a “writer” – you get the idea. On the other hand, there are not that many words, necessarily, that end in --ee: “employee” is someone who is employed; an “interviewee” is someone who is interviewed; and “addressee” is someone to whom something is addressed. But, we don’t say a “learnee,” a “winee,” a “bankee,” a “workee” -- these are not common, in fact they are not words that we would use in English. So, of the two suffixes, the --er one is probably most useful. If you are a broadcast person, we say you’re a “broadcaster”; if you make podcasts, we say you’re a “podcaster.”

If you have questions or comments for us, you can email us. Our email address is [eslpod@eslpod.com](mailto:eslpod@eslpod.com).

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on the English Café.

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