



ENGLISH CAFÉ – 172

TOPICS

Ask an American: forecasting the future; offhand; off the top of one's head; out with the old, in with the new; using "more" versus "-er" to form the comparative

GLOSSARY

desalination – the process of removing salt from water to make it safe to drink

* If scientists can find a way to make desalination less expensive, people will be able to live in areas where it never rains.

shortage – a lack of something, or a situation where there isn't enough of something

* When there is a shortage of oil, gasoline becomes more expensive.

nanotechnology – the science of making very small machines

* The doctors are using nanotechnology to make small machines that can clean the cholesterol from a person's blood vessels.

to associate (something) with (something) – to connect two things or to think about two things as being similar or related

* Many Americans associate Texans with cowboy hats and boots.

water-stressed – related to a desert or another area where it doesn't rain very much and there isn't enough water for the people who live there

* In some water-stressed states, it is illegal to wash your car or water the grass.

to thrive – to do very well, being healthy and strong and continuing to grow

* The plants will thrive if we water them once a week and give them enough sunshine.

ideally – optimally; in the best possible situation

* Ideally, he'd like to become a vice-president in four years.

leisure – referring to activities for fun or relaxation when one doesn't have to work or study

* She likes to go skiing in her leisure time.

ironic – something that seems strange because it is the opposite of what one would expect



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* It's ironic that we want to buy things that will help us save time, but then we have to spend more time working in order to have enough money to buy them.

perceived – thought about or understood in a particular way

* The company spends only \$28 to make each camera, but because the customers' perceived value is much higher, it can sell each camera for almost \$200.

roughly – about; approximately; not exactly

* Roughly 590,000 people live in that city.

bright – good, important, and impressive

* The conference was pretty boring, but there was one bright moment when everyone learned something new.

spot – a place or an area that is different than the things around it

* Central Park is a nice, quiet spot in the middle of busy, noisy New York City.

informed – with all the information that one would like to have before making a decision

* People cannot make informed decisions about their healthcare if their doctors don't have time to discuss all the options with them.

to fit with (something) – to match; to be appropriate for something

* Ahmed is very quiet and shy, and doesn't fit with the typical image of a rock-n-roll musician.

offhand – being unprepared and not knowing the answer to something, or being done spontaneously and without planning

* I don't have that information offhand, but if you give me your email address, I'll send you what you want to know within a few hours.

off the top of one's head – not being prepared or not having done research, and therefore unable to give a completely accurate answer; often, the answer given is only a guess or an estimate

* I don't have my calendar with me, but off the top of my head, I think we're free any evening next week except for Thursday.

out with the old, in with the new – a phrase that means to change what is old or traditional for what is new or modern; to forget what is past and to look forward to the future



* Tomas decorated his new home, saying “out with the old, in with the new,” when he bought all new furniture.

WHAT INSIDERS KNOW

Astrology and Horoscopes

“Astrology” is the study of how the movement of planets and stars affects people’s behavior and personality. Although most scientists say that astrology is “unfounded” (not based on facts), many people enjoy reading their astrological “horoscopes” (predictions of what will happen to a person that day based on when one was born and the current position of the planets and stars).

Most newspapers and many magazines “publish” (print) daily horoscopes for each of the “zodiac signs” (symbols representing when one was born: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces).

Horoscopes typically give advice for one’s relationships and professional life. A horoscope might tell you to “accept all offers and advice,” meaning that you should trust other people that day and believe what other people say to you. Another horoscope might say, “you will succeed with a new project,” or “don’t become overconfident in a situation.” Horoscopes might tell you whether or not it is a good day to make important decisions or new friendships.

Many horoscopes also list a sign’s “lucky numbers” for that day, or the numbers that will bring good fortune to someone who has that sign. People who believe in horoscopes might use those lucky numbers to play the “lottery” (a game of chance, played for money, by guessing which numbers will be chosen at random).

Horoscopes also show which other signs one will be “compatible” (getting along well with) with for love and friendship. People who believe in the power of astrology and horoscopes might ask someone “What’s your sign?” before beginning a romantic relationship with that person.



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

You're listening to ESL Podcast's English Café number 172.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast's English Café episode 172. 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. On it, you can visit our ESL Podcast Store, which has some additional courses in business and daily English that you will enjoy, I think. You can also download the Learning Guide for this episode, and all of our current episodes. The Learning Guide contains a lot of additional information, including a complete transcript of this episode, vocabulary words, definitions, sample sentences, cultural notes, and a short 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 – at a normal speed. We're going to listen to them and explain what they are talking about. Today we're going to talk about “forecasts,” or predictions for the future. We're going to learn about what members of an organization called the World Future Society think will happen in the future. I thought that would be kind of interesting. And 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 future. An organization called the World Future Society tries to look ahead or see into the future and “forecast,” or make predictions about what will happen in the future. The organization has a magazine; it's called The Futurist (someone who is interested in the future, I guess). It publishes its most popular or top forecasts in this magazine.

We're going to listen to someone who works for magazine as he talks about some of these forecasts. We'll listen first. Try to understand as much as you can, and then we'll go back and explain what he said. Let's listen to his ideas about what will happen in areas that do not have a lot of water (in dry areas in the world):

[recording]



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You're going to be hearing a lot more about desalination as a means to fight against these water shortages, and nanotechnology is actually a factor in that. So that's just an example of a technology that you wouldn't normally associate with the environment actually will help us survive in an environment that's water-stressed and help civilization continue to thrive in that situation.

[end of recording]

He talks very quickly, let's go back and explain what he said. He begins by saying, "You're going to be hearing (you're going to be reading about and listening to things) about desalination." "Desalination" is the process of removing salt from water. In parts of the world where there isn't very much freshwater, or water that you can drink safely, scientists are trying to find ways to take water from the ocean and remove the salt so that people can drink it. That process is called desalination.

This writer, whose last name is Tucker, says that we'll be hearing a lot more about desalination. Next he says that nanotechnology is a "factor," or something that is important in desalination. "Nanotechnology" is the science of making very, very small machines – small pieces of technology. Some of the machines are so small that they can be put into our body – into our blood vessels and travel throughout the body. Apparently similar small machines are also part of this desalination process. We don't hear the details – the specifics about the type of nanotechnology that is use, but he does say that you wouldn't normally associate nanotechnology with the environment.

The phrase "to associate (something) with (something else)" means to connect two things or to think about two things as being similar or related. If, for example, your parents – your mother or father – often baked apple pies when you were a child, you might associate the smell of apples with your early childhood. You have that association – that connection – that link. Normally we wouldn't associate tiny pieces of nanotechnology with really big environmental problems, but when nanotechnology is used in this desalination process, it can help solve our environmental problems in what the person in this interview calls "water-stressed" areas. The expression "water-stressed" would include areas like deserts or other places where it doesn't rain very much, places that don't have enough water for people to live there.

Tucker says that if nanotechnology and desalination can help with the water shortages in water-stressed areas, then it will help civilization. A "shortage" is when you don't have enough of something; you don't have enough of what you



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need. Usually, we talk about that when we are referring to things like food, water, gasoline, and we're talking about it in a broader or more general sense – not usually just about you, personally, in your house. If you don't have any milk you wouldn't say, "Oh, we have a shortage of milk – we have a milk shortage." But, if you went to the grocery store and there was no milk anywhere and no one could find milk, well then, you would have a shortage. So a shortage refers to what affects a large group of people. In this case, the shortage is water; they don't have enough of the water.

Tucker says that nanotechnology can help "civilization," which is to say all of the people and all of the societies in the world as a whole, or in a certain area. He believes that this technology will help them continue to thrive. "To thrive" (thrive) means to do very well, to continue into the future successfully. We often talk about plants thriving when they are very healthy and well taken care of. Tucker is saying that solving water shortages in water-stressed areas will help civilization thrive, or continue to grow and be strong.

Let's listen again to what Tucker has to say:

[recording]

You're going to be hearing a lot more about desalination as a means to fight against these water shortages, and nanotechnology is actually a factor in that. So that's just an example of a technology that you wouldn't normally associate with the environment actually will help us survive in an environment that's water-stressed and help civilization continue to thrive in that situation.

[end of recording]

Next we're going to hear about some other forecasts (or predictions) for the future; these are specifically related to our economy, how people make money and spend money. He's actually going to talk about the time that people have to relax, what he calls "leisure time." Let's listen:

[recording]

Ideally, when you have a working economy, you have more people with leisure time, and it may not seem like this is something that's likely at the moment, but, you know, ironically, despite perceived loss of time over the past 10 years, the amount of leisure time people have has stayed roughly the same; we have about



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40 hours of leisure time per week. And that's one of the reasons why travel may be a real bright economic spot in the future.

[end of recording]

He begins with the word “ideally” (ideally), which means in the best possible situation, what we may call “optimally.” Ideally, ESL Podcast would have millions and millions of listeners. We don't quite have millions of listeners yet, but we're pretty happy with what we have. Ideally, we'd all exercise 40 minutes each day. Most people don't spend that much time exercising, but in a perfect world – in a better situation that would be the ideal, or the ideal situation.

Tucker says that ideally, in a working economy, or an economy that is strong and growing, people have a lot of “leisure time,” or free time. The word leisure usually refers to things that we can do when we want to have fun or relax, when we don't have to work or, if you're a student, study. Some of my favorite leisure or leisure time activities are reading, definitely. I also like to study languages – other languages that I don't know, and, of course, talking with my wife and family. Other people spend their leisure time playing sports, listening to music, dancing, cooking perhaps; there are many things that you can do.

Tucker says that when the economy is doing well, people should have more leisure time, even though it doesn't seem that way right now. Then he points out or he talks about something that is ironic (ironic). Something that is “ironic” is something that seems strange because it is the opposite of what you would expect. For example, it would be ironic if a company's sales (the amount of things they sold) would decrease (or go down) after it started to spend more money on advertising. That would be ironic, it would be opposite of what you would expect.

So, Tucker says, “Ideally, when you have a working economy, you have more people with leisure time, and it may not seem like this is something that's likely at the moment,” that is, that is happening right now. “But,” he says, “you know, ironically, despite perceived loss of time over the past 10 years, the amount of leisure time people have has stayed roughly the same.” So, what is the irony, what is ironic? Well, what is ironic is that there is a perceived loss of time. When we say something is “perceived,” we mean that is thought about in a certain way or understood in a certain way. The verb is “to perceive.” You might perceive great beauty in a painting, while all your friends think it is ugly. A noun that comes from this verb is “perception” – my perception, my view, my (sometimes we use this word for) opinion is such and such. So people perceive that over the



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past 10 years we have lost time, we don't have as much time anymore for leisure activities; we have to work more. But, perception is not the same as reality (as the truth). What Tucker is saying here is that although people think that they have lost time every day in the last 10 years or so, the amount of leisure time people have now has stayed roughly the same in that 10-year period. The word "roughly," here (roughly), means approximately. So the amount of time people have is approximately or about the same as they did 10 years ago. He says we have roughly 40 hours of free time – of leisure time per week, meaning each week.

Finally he says, "And one of the reasons why travel may be a bright economic spot in the future," that is to say one of the reasons why he thinks that people will travel more will be because this continued amount of leisure time that people will have. He says, "travel might be a bright spot." Normally something that is "bright" has a lot of light; in fact it might be difficult to look at it, like the sun. The sun is very bright, you don't want to look at it directly. We also use the word "bright" to talk about things that are very good, or very important. A "spot" can be a place or an area that is different from the things around it, but we also use this to refer to an area or a particular event. If the economy is doing poorly, but travel is a bright spot in the economy, we mean that people will continue to spend money on travel. So, it's a good thing that will happen in the economy, at least that's what his prediction is.

Let's listen one more time to him describing this idea about leisure time:

[recording]

Ideally, when you have a working economy, you have more people with leisure time, and it may not seem like this is something that's likely at the moment, but, you know, ironically, despite perceived loss of time over the past 10 years, the amount of leisure time people have has stayed roughly the same; we have about 40 hours of leisure time per week. And that's one of the reasons why travel may be a real bright economic spot in the future.

[end of recording]

Another prediction that this magazine makes about the future is that people will make their purchasing decisions, or decisions about what they want to buy, based on "ethical" considerations, what they think is good or bad. Let's listen to one last quote from Tucker about this prediction:



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[recording]

You'll be able to make a much more informed choice about whether consuming that product in that way really fits with your values.

[end of recording]

Tucker says that we, in the future, will be able to make much more informed choices. Choices that are "informed" are ones where we have all of the information we need before we have to make the decision. A student who is deciding, for example, which university to go to will probably do a lot of research, learning about the programs offered, the costs of the university, and so forth. He takes all this information in order to make an informed decision. The verb "to inform" means to tell someone, usually to tell them something they don't know.

Tucker thinks that we will be able to make more informed choices about whether "consuming" a product – that is, using something, buying something that we are going to use – we will make a choice about whether consuming that product in a certain way fits with our values. When we say something "fits with our values," we mean that it matches, it seems appropriate – it's a good match, it's a good pairing. If you think that protecting the natural environment is important, you probably will not buy a big car that uses a lot of gas and pollutes, because that doesn't fit with your "values," the things that you believe and think are important.

Let's listen one more time:

[recording]

You'll be able to make a much more informed choice about whether consuming that product in that way really fits with your values.

[end of recording]

So, those are some of the predictions of some people about what will happen in the future. We take this interview – these quotes from a story that appeared on the Voice of America website.

Now let's answer a few of your questions.



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Our first question comes from Hitoshi (Hitoshi) in Japan. Hitoshi wants to know the meaning of the expressions “off the top of one’s head” and a related expression “offhand” (offhand).

Well, both “offhand” and “off the top of one’s head” can be referred to being unprepared, without previous planning for something and not being able to give the exact answer to a question. If someone asked me what is the population of the United States I might say, “Well, offhand I would say it’s more than 300 million.” Or, I could also say, “Off the top of my head, I would say it’s more than 300 million.” There, the two expressions mean the same thing.

“Offhand” can also refer to something that you do spontaneously, that you do without planning. You might say, “She is not prepared to give a speech offhand.” She can’t do that without planning.

There’s a related expression, “offhanded,” with an “-ed” at the end, that can refer to a comment that someone makes that is perhaps considered inconsiderate, a negative thing, something that would be, we may say, thoughtless; someone who wasn’t thinking very clearly and perhaps hurt someone else’s feelings. “He made an offhanded comment that made his wife upset.” It was a comment he didn’t think about very carefully before he said it and, therefore, got himself into a bit of trouble. This happens all the time, of course, if you’re a husband!

Charles (Charles) from a mystery country – we’re not sure where Charles he is or why he doesn’t want to tell us where he is – but his question has to do with another popular expression in English: “out with the old, in with the new.”

“Out with the old, in with the new” is a saying that means to change what is old or traditional for something that is new or modern; to forget about the past, or the way we use to do things, and look forward to the future. When the U.S. elects a new president we could use this expression: “out with the old, in with the new,” meaning let’s forget about the old president and all the mistakes he made and look forward to the new president and what we hope will be a much better future.

Our final question comes from Charlie (Charlie), which interestingly enough is another way (or variant) of the name Charles – I don’t think it’s the same person, though. Charlie is from France. He wants to know why he sometimes hears native speakers of English use the word “more” and sometimes they use what’s called the comparative form, a word that would end in “-er.” For example: “it’s



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more quick,” or, “it’s quicker.” Which of these is correct, or which of these is common?

There are some general rules in English when you should use the word “more” and when you should use the “-er” at the end of the word with one syllable words: words like “big,” “small,” “quick.” “My pizza is bigger than yours.” Or, “That runner is faster than the other one.” “-er” is also used when you have words with two syllables but that ended in a “y” such as “happy” or “easy”: “I am happier than you are.” “She is happier than he is.” “It is easier to travel by car than by bus in Los Angeles.” “Easy” and “happy” end in an “y” and so you can add the “-er.” You actually have to change the “y” to an “i” so that it’s “-ier” in both of those words.

For all other words – all other words that have two or more syllables and that do not end in a “y” we typically use “more”: “This actor is more beautiful (or more handsome) than the other actor.” “Compared to her sisters, Leah is not more intelligent, but she is more beautiful.”

Now, even though we have these rules native English speakers sometimes don’t always follow them, especially when they’re speaking in informal situations. So, you will hear, and perhaps even read, someone say “more deep” instead of “deeper,” or “more quick” instead of “quicker.”

If you have more questions you would like to ask us, email us. Our email address is eslpod@eslpod.com. I’ll try to answer them, but not off the top of my head!

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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