



## ESL Podcast 42 – Talking to the Professor

### GLOSSARY

**class** – a formal setting with a group of students to learn from a teacher or professor

\* Mr. Scheer taught history to a class of 18 students.

**office hours** – the hours in which a professor is in his or her office and available to meet with students

\* Dr. Rezendes has office hours between 1:00 PM and 5:00 PM on Thursdays, so students who need her help can find her at her office then.

**family emergency** – an unexpected and urgent situation involving one's relative, which causes one to miss an event

\* Jamel's brother was in a car accident, so he left work early because of the family emergency.

**material** – information about a specific topic; facts, information, and ideas, usually found in a book

\* The material discussed that day included information about Issac Newton's Laws of Motion.

**notes** – a brief written record of information one learns, containing enough detail to allow one to remember the most important parts of the information later

\* Catalina wrote detailed notes during math class because she wanted to remember everything the teacher taught.

**assignment** – work one must complete and give to a teacher or professor for review

\* The assignment needed to be finished and turned in to the professor by Tuesday.

**essay** – a narrative one writes about a specific topic; a written explanation of one's thoughts and ideas about a certain topic

\* The students were told to write an essay about their opinion of the school's new set of rules.

**textbook** – a book one uses in a class at school; an informational book used by students

\* The exam included information that was in the textbook but never mentioned by the teacher.



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**guideline** – rules or suggestions that guide the way one does something

\* The guidelines for the paper were very specific and let the students know exactly how long the paper needed to be.

**due** – at date and/or time by which something is required to be complete

\* The work was due on Wednesday, and any work given to the teacher after that day would be considered late.

**syllabus** – a list of rules and information about a class prepared by the teacher/professor

\* The syllabus included information about the professor's classroom rules as well as how many exams the students would have and how many papers they would need to write.

**to keep up** – to do something at a rate that is expected; to progress at the speed at which one is expected

\* Kevin did not understand chemistry well, so it was hard for him to keep up with the teacher's lessons.

**lecture** – a speech given by a professor intended to teach; a speech in which the speaker tells the listener important information about a specific topic

\* During class on Friday, Dr. Huffman gave a lecture about traveling to the moon.

**extra credit** – extra work that is not required, but that can be completed to improve one's grades

\* Delores had a low grade in class, so she completed extra credit work to improve it.

**to pass** – to succeed; to get a high enough grade or score in a class to have successfully completed it

\* If Arturo could not pass literature class, he would need to take the class again next year.

**to pull up (one's) grade** – to improve one's grade; to earn higher marks on tests and class work so that the final score one earns for the class improves

\* Tawanda didn't do well in English class at beginning of the year, but she pulled up her grade by getting her roommate to tutor her.

**professor** – a teacher at a college or university; a title given to a teacher at a college or university

\* Professor Abdul teaches psychology at the local university.



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### CULTURE NOTE

#### The Power of Punctuation

“Punctuation”—the marks we use in writing, such as , : “ . – are very important to “convey” (communicate) meaning. Here is perhaps one of the most well known, stories that “illustrate” (shows) the importance of punctuation.

A “panda” (animal that looks like a bear and is typically black and white) walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then takes out a gun and “fires it” (shoots it) at the other “patrons” (customers).

“Why?” asks the confused, surviving waiter, as the panda “makes towards” (walks towards) the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated “wildlife manual” (information book about animals living in nature) and gives it to the waiter.

“Well, I’m a panda,” he says, at the door. “Look it up” (look for the information in the book).

The waiter turns to the information on pandas in the manual and finds an explanation. “Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like animal, “native to” (comes originally from) China. Eats, shoots, and leaves.” The correct punctuation is: “Eats shoots and leaves.”

“shoots” =

- 1) (verb) to fire a gun; to cause a bullet to leave a gun
- 2) (noun) bamboo shoots; the young part of a bamboo plant, eaten as a vegetable, especially in Asian food

“leaves” =

- 1) (verb) to depart; to remove oneself from a place
- 2) (noun) plural of leaf, the smaller green things that grow off of largest part of on a tree or plant



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 42 – Talking to a Professor.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 42. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

In this episode we're going to discuss speaking to your teacher or professor. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

[A knock on the door.]

Jeff: Come in.

Julie: Hi, Dr. McQuillan, I'm Julie Taylor. I'm in your two o'clock class on Thursdays.

Jeff: Hi, Julie. Have a seat. What can I do for you?

Julie: I wanted to come see you during your office hours because I missed class last week. I had a family emergency.

Jeff: I'm sorry to hear that. We went over a lot of material, so make sure you get the notes from another student in class.

Julie: Thanks, I will. Did you give any assignments?

Jeff: Yes, I assigned an essay on the topics in chapter three of your textbook.

Julie: Oh, I see. Are there guidelines for the essay?

Jeff: Yes, it should be 8 to 10 pages, and it's due in two weeks. Take a look at your syllabus. It has more details.

Julie: I will. Thanks a lot. I've also been meaning to talk to you about the trouble I'm having keeping up in class. I'm having trouble understanding the lectures. Is there anything you would suggest?

Jeff: Some students tape-record the lectures and listen to them afterwards. That seems to help.

Julie: That's a great idea. I'll definitely try that. I'm wondering if you give extra credit in your class.



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Jeff: No, I don't give extra credit assignments. But if you're worried about passing, there are still two more tests to pull up your grade.

Julie: Yes, I'll study hard for those. Thanks a lot for your time.

Jeff: No problem. See you in class.

Julie: Okay, Professor McQuillan. See you Thursday.

[end of dialogue]

We just listened to a conversation between a professor and a student. The conversation began with the student knocking on the door of the office and the professor saying, "Come in." That's the expression we use when we want someone to enter into a room, especially if they are knocking on our door. We say, "Come in." The student, named Julie, introduces herself and tells me (since I'm the professor in the dialogue) which class she's in. She says, "I'm in your two o'clock class," meaning "I am a student in your class that begins at two o'clock in the afternoon."

I then tell her to "have a seat." "To have a seat" means please sit down. Please take a seat. "Have a seat" is perhaps a little more informal than "Please sit down." Julie then says that she wanted to come and talk to me during my "office hours." At the university, a professor teaches his or her classes and then has to be available to talk to students.

Most universities have their professors keep regular "office hours," meaning they are in their office a certain number of hours every week. It depends on the university. Different universities have different requirements. The universities that I've taught in usually required five or six hours every week. Those were hours where you had to be in your office at a scheduled time so that students could come by and talk to you if they wanted to. Of course, the professor doesn't want to talk to the student, typically.

Julie said that she had "missed class last week." "To miss (miss) class" means not to go to class, not to be in the classroom. We use that expression for anything that we are supposed to go to, or were going to go to and didn't because, typically, we had some problem. For example, I missed that movie last night I wanted to see. It was on television, but I forgot to watch it. The student says that she "had a family emergency." The expression "family emergency," or perhaps "personal emergency," means that she had some serious problem related to someone in her family.

It's a very general expression that students sometimes use with their professors as a reason for not being in class. Of course, sometimes students really do have family emergencies – perhaps their sister is sick or their father had an accident or something along those lines. It could also even be a death in the family. However, many students, I suspect . . . I think some people use that expression "family emergency" knowing that you won't ask too many questions because it's considered personal.



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I said to Julie that she missed a lot of material for the class. I said, “We went over a lot of material.” “To go over something” means to talk about it, to discuss it. In this case, from the professor's point of view, to teach it. We use this expression in a classroom, but you can use it for any situation where you're giving someone information or where you are explaining something to someone. “Let me go over the instructions for using this computer.” That means let me talk about it; let me teach you or show you.

I said I “went over a lot of material.” The word “material” (material) has several different meanings. It could be something physical. We could talk about the material that your clothes are made of or the material that a desk is made of. It could be made of wood. It could be made of metal. It could be made of plastic. Those are “materials.” When we talk about school, however, “material” refers to information, the content of the actual class. That could include lectures, that could include readings, and so forth. All of that is considered “material” that you go over and explain.

I suggested to Julie – the student – that she “get the notes from another student.” In other words, she should talk to another student who was in the class who took notes, who wrote down the information that I was presenting or discussing in the class. Julie then asked if I had given any assignments in class. An “assignment” is basically homework – things that students have to do or prepare either to talk about at the next class session or to give to the teacher or professor.

I said I had given an assignment. I said I had “assigned an essay on the topics in chapter three” of the textbook. An “essay” is usually a long piece of writing that students do in school that demonstrates that they understand the topic. A “textbook” in a school is a book with the information, or some information, about the topic of the class. Sometimes instead of “textbook” we simply say “text.” “What text are you using in this class?” That means, “What textbook are you using in this class? What's the title of it?”

Julie asked if there were any “guidelines for the essay.” “Guidelines” means instructions or rules for something. The “guidelines” are the basic way in which the professor wants you to do something. The professor may say, “You need to talk about three different sources of information.” That would be a guideline for writing an essay. “Guidelines” are not just for school, of course. You can have guidelines in business, in government. Basically, it's another word for rules that you have to follow.

I told Julie that the essay was “due in two weeks.” That means she had two weeks to give it to me. We would probably use the expression “to hand in.” “To hand in” is a two-word phrasal verb that means to give, usually to a teacher, your assignment. When we say it's “due” (due), we mean that's when you have to hand it in. That's the date that you have to give it to your professor.

I suggested that Julie look at her syllabus. A “syllabus” (syllabus) is a piece of paper, usually several pieces of paper that describe what the course or the class is, including



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the assignments, the readings, and when the examinations or tests are. Most American universities require that professors give their students a “syllabus” – an outline of everything they're going to talk about in class and a list of all the assignments that they will be giving students.

Julie says that she had “been meaning to talk to” me. The expression “to be meaning to” means you were planning on it. You were expecting to do something, but you haven't actually gotten to it yet. You didn't actually do it. You can say, “I've been meaning to see that movie.” That means I have been hoping to see it, I have been planning to see it, but I haven't actually gone to see it yet. Julie said she had been meaning to talk to me about some trouble that she was having in “keeping up in class.” “To keep up” is another one of those wonderful phrasal verbs that means to be able to do the work that is required – in this case, for the class.

We use the expression “to keep up” in general to mean the opposite of “to fall behind.” “To fall behind” means that you are late for many things. You are not on schedule. You are not moving as fast as the other students. If you are keeping up, you are getting all of your assignments done, all of your readings done, just like everyone else in the class. If you're “falling behind,” that means that you are not getting the things done like everyone else is getting them done in the class.

Julie says she was “having trouble understanding the lectures.” “To have trouble” means to have problems. “I'm having trouble” means I'm having problems, I'm having difficulties. The “lecture” (lecture) is when the professor stands up in front of the class and gives them information, explains things to them. I suggested that Julie “tape-record the lectures” and that she “listen to them afterwards.” “Afterwards” is the same as later – at a later time.

Julie asked me if I gave “extra credit” in the class. “Extra credit” in American schools and universities is when the teacher gives an extra assignment that students can do so that they can perhaps make up points for other assignments, regular assignments on which they didn't do very well. “Extra credit” is a way of helping students who perhaps did very poorly on one of the examinations still get good grade in the class. It's extra work. Some professors give extra credit, other professors do not. When I was working as a professor, I never gave extra credit. Extra credit is just another word for extra work for the professor. I was a mean professor, you know.

I told Julie that if she was worried about passing the class, about getting a good grade, there would be two more tests to pull up her grade. “To pass a class” or “to pass a test” means to be successful, to get a good grade. “To pull up your grade” means to improve your grade, to increase your grade. It's a very common expression in schools. At the end of the conversation, Julie says, “Okay Professor McQuillan, see you Thursday,” meaning I will see you on Thursday. In class, I hope.



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Notice that Julie calls me “Dr. McQuillan” and “Professor McQuillan.” At universities in the United States, anyone who has a PhD or a doctorate degree can be called “Doctor.” That doesn't mean they're medical doctors. Someone teaching at a university can also be called a “professor,” especially if they work there full-time.

Now let's listen to our dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

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Jeff: No problem. See you in class.

Julie: Okay, Professor McQuillan. See you Thursday.

[end of dialogue]

Thanks to our amazing scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse, for all of her hard work, and thanks to you for listening.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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